

THE HILL'S CAMPFIRE GAMES ON INTELLIGENCE BRIEFINGS

The Hill has a childish article out—one that encourages our Congress to function like a child's playroom, and one that manufactures "news" at the whim of its sources. The "story," as told by the Hill, is that Republicans attended a closed briefing (the article doesn't really explain that "closed" means "classified"), and then came out and made claims about what they heard in the briefing.

Republicans ignited a firestorm of controversy on Thursday by revealing some of what they had been told at a closed-door Intelligence Committee hearing on the interrogation of terrorism suspects.

Democrats immediately blasted the GOP lawmakers for publicly discussing classified information, while Republicans said Democrats are trying to hide the truth that enhanced interrogation of detainees is effective.

GOP members on the Intelligence Committee on Thursday told The Hill in on-the-record interviews that they were informed that the controversial methods have led to information that prevented terrorist attacks.

When told of the GOP claims, Democrats strongly criticized the members who revealed information that was provided at the closed House Intelligence Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing. Democrats on the panel said they could not respond substantively, pointing out that the hearing was closed.

Now, reading those first few paragraphs, you'd think you'd find a series of quotes from Republicans in the article that supported the claim that torture "had led to information that prevented terrorist attacks," right? The Hill promised "on the record interviews."

As it turns out, the Hill gives us just one on-the-record quote from a Republican who attended the briefing, and it doesn't quite live up to billing:

Rep. John Kline (R-Minn.), a member of the subcommittee who attended the hearing, concurred with Hoekstra [who was not at the briefing, that they told him interrogation worked].

"The hearing did address the enhanced interrogation techniques that have been much in the news lately," Kline said, noting that he was intentionally choosing his words carefully in observance of the committee rules and the nature of the information presented.

"Based on what I heard and the documents I have seen, I came away with a very clear impression that we did gather information that did disrupt terrorist plots," Kline said.

Kline makes two claims:

1. The hearing did "address" techniques that have been in the news lately
2. We did gather information that did disrupt terrorist plots

And from this, the apparently English-challenged Hill writer, Jared Allen, claims that GOP members—plural—said they "were informed that the controversial methods have led to information that prevented terrorist attacks."

In the bits Allen quotes, after all, Kline makes no claims they were even briefed about what information they got from torture, and he certainly makes no claim that the information that disrupted terrorist plots came from torture. Maybe Kline said it, but if so, Allen forgot to report it. Just like he forgot to report the other on-the-record interviews proving this case.

Now what Allen does give us, in abundance, is on-the-record quotes from Republicans who didn't attend the briefing. There's Crazy Pete Hoekstra, who wasn't at the briefing:

"Democrats weren't sure what they were going to get," said Rep. Pete Hoekstra (Mich.), ranking Republican on the Intelligence panel, referring to information on the merits of enhanced interrogation techniques. "Now that they know what they've got, they don't want to talk about it."

[snip]

Hoekstra did not attend the hearing, but said he later spoke with Republicans on the subcommittee who did. He said he came away with even more proof that the enhanced interrogation techniques employed by the CIA proved effective.

"I think the people who were at the hearing, in my opinion, clearly indicated that the enhanced interrogation techniques worked," Hoekstra said.

It seems to me the story from these quotes ought to be:

- The Ranking Member of HPSCI thinks people should immediately talk about the content of classified

briefings

- The Ranking Member of HPSCI treats hearsay—the comments of his members who attended a briefing—as proof
- The Ranking Member of HPSCI is politicizing intelligence

But instead, Allen seems to have followed Hoekstra down the road of taking hearsay evidence as clear proof (it's not even clear that Allen asked Hoekstra who he had talked to about the briefing).

And then, Allen relies on a quote from John Boehner that doesn't even pertain to this briefing

"It's been three weeks since I asked Speaker Pelosi to back up her allegations that the CIA lied to her or purposely misled her," Boehner said at his weekly press conference. "Allowing this to hang out there is unconscionable. And I just think the silence from Speaker Pelosi is deafening."

That's it. That's what the Hill's Jared Allen gave us to back up his claim that Republicans, in on-the-record interviews, made claims about those briefings.

I don't know whether Jared Allen is this dumb or what, but congratulations to Crazy Pete—you sure found your mark, a reporter so gullible he'd print your story, absent any proof, and with it declare "a firestorm" that serves your political spin.

Me, I think the Hill's marshmallow just went up in flames.