

THE UN-PATRIOT ACTS OF HARRY REID

As you undoubtedly know by now, the furious rush to extend the Patriot Act is once again in full swing. The Patriot Act is an odious piece of legislation that was birthed by fearmongering and the imposition of artificial drop dead, if we don't pass this today the terrorists are gonna OWN us, artificial time emergencies. Then it was extended the same way. That is not a bug, it is indeed a feature.

When the government, through its executive and compliant Congress, wants to cut surveillance and privacy corners out of laziness and control greed, and otherwise crush the soul of the Constitution and the 4th Amendment, demagoguery and fake exigencies are the order of the day. And so they are again. Oh, and of course they want to get out of town on their vacation. And that is what has happened today.

Senators Wyden and Mark Udall had a superb amendment proposed to narrow the Patriots core provisions ever so slightly so as to maintain some Constitutional integrity. Marcy explained the details here. But, because that would engender real and meaningful debate on the efficacy of Patriot, it had to be quashed, and that is exactly what has occurred. Harry Reid and Diane Feinstein gave a couple of hollow and meaningless "promises", of unknown content, to Wyden and Udall and strongarmed them into withdrawing their amendment. The citizens are simply not entitled to meaningful debate on their Constitution.

Spencer Ackerman, over at Wired's Danger Room, shredded Reid for his unPatriotic act. Gloriously:

Remember back when a Republican was in the White House and demanded broad surveillance authority? Here's Reid back then. "Whether out of convenience,

incompetence, or outright disdain for the rule of law, the administration chose to ignore Congress and ignore the Constitution," Reid said about Bush's warrantless surveillance program. When Bush insisted Congress entrench that surveillance with legislation in 2008, Reid turned around and demanded Bush "stop fear-mongering and start being honest with the American people about national security." Any claim about the detrimental impact about a lapse in widespread surveillance were "scare tactics" to Reid that "irresponsibly distort reality." (Then Reid rolled over for Bush.)

That's nowhere near the end of Reid's hypocrisy here. When the Senate debated renewing the Patriot Act in 2006, Reid, a supporter of the bill's surveillance procedures, himself slowed up the bill's passage to allow amendments to it – the better to allow "sensible checks on the arbitrary exercise of executive power." Sounding a whole lot like Rand Paul, the 2006-vintage Reid registered his "objection to the procedural maneuver under which Senators have been blocked from offering any amendments to this bill" and reminded his colleagues, "the hallmark of the Senate is free speech and open debate."

Reid could hardly be more of an opportunist here. He favors broad surveillance authorities – just as long as those scary Republicans stop being mean to liberals. When Attorney General John Ashcroft warned civil libertarians that their "phantoms of lost liberty... only aid terrorists," Reid told CNN on December 8, 2001 that "people should just cool their jets" – but not that Ashcroft was actually, you know, wrong. By contrast, the ultra-conservative pundit Bob Novak said Ashcroft made "one

of the most disreputable statements I have heard from an attorney general.”

Exactly right. But it gets worse. Rand Paul also had an amendment, but he, unlike our fine Democratic Senators, was not willing to quietly go off into the night. Paul stood his ground and now Reid has agreed to let Paul’s amendment to exempt gun purchases from Patriot’s scope have a vote:

Senate Democratic leadership seems poised to acquiesce to Sen. Rand Paul’s (R-Ky.) demand that the chamber vote on an amendment that would restrict national security officials from examining gun dealer records in their efforts to track potential terrorists.

The Kentucky Republican had been insisting that such language at least receive a vote as an addition to the extension of the USA Patriot Act.

So, that is where the Democratic party, Democratic Senate Leadership and the Obama Administration are on protecting the Constitution and its 4th Amendment. Sane and intelligent amendments to narrow focus and appropriately protect American’s privacy are squashed like small irritating bugs under a hail of fearmongering and demagoguery – from Democratic Leadership – and terrorists’ rights to buy guns with impunity and privacy are protected because just one GOP senator has the balls to actually stand up and insist on it.

Hanoi Harry Reid is on point and leading this clown car of civil liberties insanity, and so deserves a healthy chunk of the blame, but he is certainly not alone. For all the noise they made, why cannot Ron Wyden and Mark Udall stand up in a similar fashion? Where are the other Democrats who used to have such alarm when it was the Bush/Cheney Administration doing these things? Where is Russ Feingold, I miss him so,

but I am sure that Obama and Reid are glad he is gone on days like today. Exactly why Feingold was, and is, so important.

UPDATE: There is late word Reid may have talked Mitch McConnell and GOP Senate leadership into putting a clamp on Rand Paul and holding up his amendment debate demand. We shall see.