

CHRISTIE LIED ABOUT 9/11 TO TRY TO SHUT DOWN PAUL'S OPPOSITION TO DRAGNET SPYING [UPDATED]

One of the most contentious exchanges in last night's debate came when Megyn Kelly raised Chris Christie's past attacks on Rand Paul for opposing the bulk dragnet.

KELLY: Alright, gentlemen, we're gonna switch topics now and talk a bit about terror and national security.

Governor Christie. You've said that Senator Paul's opposition to the NSA's collection of phone records has made the United States weaker and more vulnerable, even going so far as to say that he should be called before Congress to answer for it if we should be hit by another terrorist attack.

Do you really believe you can assign blame to Senator Paul just for opposing he bulk collection of people's phone records in the event of a terrorist attack?

CHRISTIE: Yes, I do. And I'll tell you why: because I'm the only person on this stage who's actually filed applications under the Patriot Act, who has gone before the federal – the Foreign Intelligence Service court, who has prosecuted and investigated and jailed terrorists in this country after September 11th.

I was appointed U.S. attorney by President Bush on September 10th, 2001,

and the world changed enormously the next day, and that happened in my state.

This is not theoretical to me. I went to the funerals. We lost friends of ours in the Trade Center that day. My own wife was two blocks from the Trade Center that day, at her office, having gone through it that morning.

Never mind that most US Attorneys don't, themselves, go before the FISC to present cases (usually it is people from the National Security Division, though it was OIPR when Christie was US Attorney), never mind that the name of the court is the "Foreign Intelligence *Surveillance* Court.

The real doozie here is Chris Christie's claim that he "was appointed U.S. attorney by President Bush on September 10th, 2001."

On December 7, 2001 – three months after the attacks – President Bush released this notice of nomination.

The President intends to nominate Christopher J. Christie to be United States Attorney for the District of New Jersey. Christie has been a partner with Dughi, Hewitt and Palatucci of Cranford, New Jersey since 1987. He is a graduate of the University of Delaware and Seton Hall University School of Law.

Christie was confirmed quickly and started as US Attorney in January 2002.

Now, maybe Bush spoke with his big New Jersey fundraiser Chris Christie and assured him the payoff – in the form of a key appointment – would be coming. Maybe that conversation even happened on September 10.

But it is not the case that he was nominated on September 10.

I attribute this fib – like the mistakes about

the name of FISC – to be bluster and debate confusion. What I find more offensive is that Andrea Mitchell, when hailing Christie's national security credentials later in the night, literally claimed he was nominated on September 10 and started on September 12.

And there's a far bigger subtext here.

Christie implies he was involved in the dragnet in question. He was US Attorney from January 2002 to December 2008 – so he in fact would have been in office during the two years when the phone dragnet worked through the Servic-um, Surveillance court, and four years of the Internet dragnet. But if, as he implies, he was involved in the dragnet for the entire span of his tenure – and remember, there were huge cases run out of Trenton right out of 9/11 – then he was also using the fruits of illegal wiretapping to do his job. Not Servic – um, Surveillance court authorized dragnets and wiretaps, but also illegal wiretaps.

Which may explain why he's so invested in rebutting any questions about the legitimacy of the program.

Update: Here's what his official biography says about his tenure as US Attorney. (h/t JH)

Christie was named U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey in 2002. As the chief federal law enforcement officer in New Jersey, earning praise from leaders in both parties and drawing national attention for his efforts in battling political corruption, corporate crime, human trafficking, gangs, terrorism and environmental polluters.

Update: In an absolutely hysterical attempt to rebut the clear fact that he was not nominated when he said he was, Christie's people said he was informed he would be on September 10 at 4:30 (as I suggested was likely). But the rest of the explanation makes it clear they hadn't even done a background check yet!

The intervening crisis caused by the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington then delayed action on the nomination. In the interview for the book, Christie said he didn't hear again from the White House for two weeks and that things were slowed because there were no available FBI agents to do background checks, as they had been assigned to investigating the 9/11 attacks.