

from our viewpoint...

Lot of chatter about wiretapping

There is a lot of chatter and a lot of misinformation about the president’s spying on “domestic” conversations.

The administration probably doesn’t want to talk about just how it listens in on people talking to al-Qaida backers, so the waters are muddy. But the rules ought to be clear.

If anyone, anywhere in the world, calls Osama bin Laden, they should expect to have the National Security Administration on one end of the line. Six or seven other intelligence agencies as well.

This is war, and the U.S. is going to listen in on enemy communications.

Makes no difference where the call originates, any more than it would if some American citizen called a Mafia kingpin whose phone happened to be tapped.

If you don’t like having the Feds listen in, don’t call the Mob. Or Osama.

The origin of the call isn’t really relevant; the destination is.

And if that destination is an al-Qaida supporter’s phone in a foreign country, so be it. An American calling out to a foreign country to talk to terrorists doesn’t have much expectation of privacy. There should be no need for a court order, because the target is outside the U.S. and not subject to ordinary court process.

Besides, if someone is talking with a terrorist, there’d be no time to go get a court order. The government can’t just turn off the tap and wait.

A whole different set of rules applies when the call is made, or e-mail sent, by and to a U.S. person within the country.

Then, the Bill of Rights applies. The president and his minions need a warrant to tap your phone, no matter what they think you did. If they are watching someone here, tapping outbound communications, they should have a court order.

There are laws and procedures governing the process. Special courts to issue orders. Ways to get things moving.

Under the so-called (and bogusly named) Patriot Act, the government can get authority for “roving” taps on a suspect, covering multiple lines and cell phones.

As long as a judge signs off on that, it’s legal and proper.

If the suspect, citizen or not, is in this country, then our normal laws and legal protections should cover them. The government has plenty of authority to go after terrorists and other criminals.

Our rights and freedoms as Americans are important. These are the things we treasure, after all. It wouldn’t make sense to win this war and lose what we are fighting for.

But wiretapping foreign terrorists, even if they are talking to Americans?

There are problems with the Patriot Act and real threats to our way of life, but that’s not one of them. — *Steve Haynes*

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Zippers are fighting back

Zippers are wonderful little devices, but they’ve started to fight back.

Now, I’m not talking about the proverbial joke about the barn door being open. This happens to both men and women these days, and most of us can take care of that little problem with a rueful smile and a little laugh of chagrin.

My problem is zippers in other areas.

The first was on my purse.

Actually, my purse has two zippers and a snap. The main compartment and the space where I keep money have zippers and the compartment where I keep my driver’s license and credit cards has a snap.

One day, I paid for a small item at the grocery, put the change back into the money compartment and zipped it. As I was picking up my grocery bag, I noticed the money compartment was not zipped. So I zipped it. It still wasn’t zipped. Running the zipper back and forth only resulted in frustration.

So far my money hasn’t fallen out. I’ve moved the bills to another compartment and try to keep the purse upright to keep dimes and nickels from spilling everywhere, but I guess



cynthia haynes

• open season

it’s time to get a new purse.

Dang, I hate changing purses. I hate shopping for purses almost as much as I hate shoe shopping. It’s unfeminine, I know, but I don’t like doing either.

Two days later, I was preparing to go home from work.

I put on my coat and started to zip it up. The zipper got halfway up and stuck. I looked down to see the zipper in the middle of the coat with the top and bottom undone.

Oh, I hate that! It’s almost impossible to get the zipper back down, and when you do, it usually closes the unclosed section of zipper.

In this case I struggled and muttered and argued with my coat (out loud) until the zipper was down.

My coworkers were practically rolling on

the floor. They thought it was hilarious that I was not only arguing with my coat, but losing that argument.

Two days later, I put a piece of tape over the zipper tab. I had twice grabbed my coat and tried to zip it with the same disastrous consequences as before. I was getting tired of the coat winning all our arguments.

This is why when you see me walking along and its 20 degrees, I’m grabbing the front of my coat. I’m waiting for the spring coat sales.

My grandmother always said trouble comes in threes and sevens. I figured that was because you just waited for the third shoe to drop and then wondered who the heck was living upstairs.

Well, my third zipper isn’t dead, but its pull is stuck sideways, making it hard to operate.

The third zipper is on a house shoe, however. If it breaks, the shoes are headed for the dump. I have a spare pair.

I suppose I should get a purse and a coat, but that just seems like too much trouble.

If you need me, just follow the trail of dimes and nickels to the crazy lady hanging on to both sides of her coat.

Scandals are bleeding GOP

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the ugliest of them all?

The most recent Fox News poll indicates that Americans see the Republican congressional majority as materially more corrupt and more responsible for the current spate of scandals than the Democrats. Indeed, the building sense of popular anger against the GOP resembles nothing more than the last congressional scandal — the bounced-check congressional bank affair of 1991 — in its political impact. But that scandal paved the way for Newt Gingrich’s takeover of Congress three years later. This one may undo the Republicans.

Generic cynicism about Washington is nothing new. Fox News poll respondents said that they felt that “most elected officials in Washington make policy decisions or take actions as a direct result of money they receive from major campaign contributors” by 65-21. Nothing new there. Because distrust of Congress is usually visited equally on both parties, it normally has no political impact.

But this scandal is different. With Republicans so completely in control of the government, this scandal is theirs. Asked “which political party in Washington” is “more corrupt,” respondents to the Jan. 11 survey said the Republicans are by 33-15. (Forty percent said both were equally dishonest). Independents, the vital element in any potential Republican majority, rate the GOP as the more corrupt by 23-5.

The scandal also seems to be spawning a reaction quite different from the usual cynicism in that it appears to be visited on each district’s local representative. While voters typically deride Congress as a whole, they usually speak highly of their own members. But not this time. Asked if “your own congressional representative has ever taken money or things of value in



dick morris

• commentary

return for voting a certain way,” voters said yes by 42-33, with Democrats and Republicans equally likely to think so.

Because this scandal is both partisan and local it will have a searing political impact. Recipients of lobbyist Jack Abramoff’s dubious generosity can’t dismiss their acceptance of his donations by saying it doesn’t matter because everybody took his money.

Those who did get contributions from him are in for an Election Day surprise. Forty-four percent of the Fox News survey respondents said that if “an elected official from your state took a campaign contribution from Jack Abramoff or organizations that he represented” it would be a “major” factor in deciding whether to vote for him in the next election. Even 31 percent of Republicans felt this way.

Washington scandals come and go. But about every decade or so, they metastasize into massive national affairs that embrace an entire political party. Republicans were victimized in 1974 by Nixon’s misconduct. Democrats kept Congress in 1992 after the 1991 check-bouncing scandal, but they did so because so many of their old bulls retired. In their places, Bill Clinton’s election swept into office young saplings who succumbed to the partisan wave of 1994, a wave kindled equally by disgust with Clinton and with the Democratic permanent Congressional majority.

The 2006 elections look to be another of these decadal bloodletting, victimizing, this time, the Republicans.

What can the GOP do to prevent it? It has to start by not coddling its members who are in the cross hairs of this scandal. But shedding individuals will not buy the party a pass from what voters see as an epidemic of scandal. Only real reform will suffice.

Obviously, Congress needs to ban lobbyist-sponsored travel. It was voter anger over taxpayer-paid junketing that spawned these free trips, as legislators looked to lobbyists rather than Uncle Sam to subsidize their vacations. But now the voters are as angry about lobbyist-paid trips as they were over funding the travel themselves. The trips have to go.

But the more serious reform would be to ban earmarking on appropriation bills. Voters have long since understood that it is a fiction that a legislator is fighting for a specific earmark to help the district. They know he is really doing it to get campaign contributions. Once the Supreme Court took away the president’s ability to use the line-item veto on spending bills — a key provision of the Contract with America that was enacted with Clinton’s approval — the natural next step has been to ban earmarking. The practice invites the kind of corruption that is crippling Republican chances in the next election, and it deserves to be ended.

Will the scandals translate into the loss of Congress by the Republicans in 2006? The generic 13-point Democratic lead in Congressional ballot would suggest that it might. Can popular revulsion overcome even Tom DeLay’s gerrymandering? You bet it can!

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