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### Iglesias: Ashcroft Was 'Pushed Out' Because He 'Refused To Sign Off On The Warrantless Wiretaps'

BY MATT CORLEY ON JULY 14, 2008 AT 1:11 PM



In March 2004, then-acting Attorney General James Comey refused to sign an order extending President Bush's warrantless domestic spying program "amid concerns about its legality and oversight." Comey told the Senate Judiciary Committee in May 2007 that the White House tried to force John Ashcroft to overrule him despite the fact that Ashcroft was debilitated in a hospital with pancreatitis.

"Attorney General Ashcroft then stunned me," Comey told the committee. "He lifted his head off the pillow and in very strong terms expressed his view" that the program was questionable and that Comey held "the powers of the attorney general" at that moment:

"I was angry," Comey told the panel. **"I thought I had just witnessed an effort to take advantage of a very sick man who did not have the powers of the attorney general."**

Now, former New Mexico U.S. Attorney David Iglesias — who was fired by the administration for refusing to file bogus voter fraud charges — tells the Dallas Morning News that Ashcroft's refusal to support the warrantless wiretapping program actually led to him being "pushed out" of the Bush administration:

IGLESIAS: The one really intriguing question I've had was from a book buyer a few months ago who **asked whether I thought John Ashcroft had been pushed out or not after he refused to sign off on the warrantless wiretaps. That's something that a journalist has never asked me. The honest answer is, yes,** that had Ashcroft done the wrong

thing, the unconstitutional thing, and signed off on it, he'd probably still be the AG. But Ashcroft served honorably. **He did the right thing, and he paid the price. He was asked to move on.**

After the visit to Ashcroft's hospital bed by then-White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales and then-White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, Bush reauthorized his warrantless wiretapping program without Justice Department certification that it was legal, which led Ashcroft, FBI Director Robert Mueller, and several other top Justice Department officials to threaten to resign. Bush then agreed to unspecified changes to the program

When Ashcroft resigned from the Bush administration in November 2004, he claimed that he was leaving because he believed the Justice Department would be "well served by new leadership and fresh inspiration." He was succeeded by Alberto Gonzales, who potentially lied to Congress in order to defend the wiretapping program.

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