

Freedoms Lost Are Hard To Regain

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APPLETON - In 2011, Rep. Reid Ribble voted to give away our right to privacy and, last week, we see its shameful consequences.

With Ribble's permission, federal agents searched and seized personal telephone and electronic communications. In a single vote, Ribble erased what thousands of patriotic Americans died for — our right to privacy and our freedom of speech. As events in Washington show, freedoms lost are hard to regain.

The excuse offered by Ribble to allow the government to spy on all Americans was based on ignorance and fear. His statement reads in part, "While I have reservations with programs that put civil liberties at risk, the provisions that we voted on yesterday are carefully balanced to protect our vital, constitutionally protected civil liberties. These provisions permit law enforcement engaged in foreign terrorism investigations to carry out their duties without curtailing our rights. I've heard from law enforcement officials, other members of Congress and leaders from both parties that these tools have prevented attacks on our country and are necessary in our fight against terrorism."

Without curtailing our rights? Ignorance is no excuse, for there is no reason to give up our freedoms. Ben Franklin agreed: "Those who give up their liberty for more security neither deserve liberty nor security."

Thomas Jefferson also warned about ill-informed politicians: "If a nation expects to be both ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be."

Human history has proven there will never be an honest excuse for giving away our freedoms. Never in Wisconsin's 8th District history has an elected official been so easily duped into giving

away our civil liberties.

By contrast, this same issue arose in the House of Representatives late at night on Aug. 4, 2007. Due to time constraints, I was not permitted to speak against a similar bill to deprive us of our Fourth Amendment rights. Instead, I submitted this handwritten statement:

“Our nation has faced many challenges in our history, and none more serious or deadly than our battle against violent extremists. Make no mistake, we must do whatever it takes to defend America and keep hostilities from our shores. We must be tough and we must be smart. We have the tough part right, and now more than ever we must be smart.

“The bill now before the House asks the American people to give up our Fourth Amendment rights without firing a single shot, even when the facts reveal we already have laws to allow intelligence agencies to protect all of us.

“The Senate-sponsored bill trades our Fourth Amendment rights for a false promise of security. It pretends to offer our people the reassurance that the current attorney general — a man few believe to be honorable or honest — will exercise good judgment in defending all of us.

“Our nation has lost faith in this administration’s competence and has lost faith in the ability of President Bush to understand and obey the rule of law. Having lost our faith in this president, we must not lose our constitutional rights as well. We must defend our nation, and we can continue to do so under the rule of law.”

Elections are about choices and consequences, and sadly the election of a man with poor judgment resulted in the loss of our right to privacy and a diminution of our freedom of speech.

It will be difficult to regain our freedoms, but by working together, we will. Next election, vote for someone else, someone with good judgment who will fight to restore and protect all our rights and freedoms.

— Dr. Steve Kagen is an Appleton resident who represented Wisconsin's 8th Congressional District from 2007 to 2011.

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