

AMARILLO GLOBE-NEWS

Hentoff: Romney, Obama fail to protect Americans

By Nat Hentoff - October 21, 2012

On the eve of our crucial presidential election, little public attention has been paid to the disclosure of Mitt Romney's long-silent views on torture and other lawless actions of the George W. Bush-Dick Cheney and Barack Obama regimes.

Romney said this month that he supports the Patriot Act. That law, which was rushed through Congress soon after 9/11, is still enforced against a wide range of our Bill of Rights — from deep denials of our personal right of privacy to expansions of executive branch authority that subvert the Constitution's fundamental requirement of the separation of powers.

A worrisome footnote: Before he had been anointed by Romney, vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan voted for a continuation of the Patriot Act while serving as a member of the House.

As we continue, I don't consider it irrelevant to highlight a recent New York Times article that reported "during a fundraiser at (Dick) Cheney's ranch, Mr. Romney called the former vice president 'a great American leader.'"

Cheney was the inspirer of the Bush Administration's "dark side" (as he called it) of the War on Terror — from waterboarding to such other interrogation operations as CIA renditions and additional brutal torture.

Indeed, Romney said at a news conference in Charleston, S.C., last year: "We'll use enhanced interrogation techniques which go beyond those that are in the military handbook right now."

John Glaser, in a blog post for antiwar.com, said Savage's story for the Times shows that "Romney knowingly signaled that he would reinstitute torture of terrorist subjects."

Furthermore, Savage — a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter on imperious administrations — wrote Romney was asked urgently by a reporter at the Charleston news conference "whether he thought waterboarding was torture, and Mr. Romney replied, 'I don't.'"

It's not torture?

Dig this: Under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1949 Geneva Conventions (both of which we signed) and our own Torture Victim Protection Act of 1991, the basic definition of torture is: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

When a terrified prisoner is very close to asphyxiation while being waterboarded, Mr. Romney, that’s torture. See, for example, this recent headline from Matthew Rothschild: “Bringing Torture Back: Romney Wants to Waterboard Again.”

Now we come to one of the most frightening caricatures of our rule of law by the Obama administration — supported by our commander in chief — the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2012, which allows our military to imprison indefinitely without trial American citizens “associated with” or giving “substantial support” to suspected terrorists.

During a debate in January, Romney said he would have supported the bill and indefinite detention.

“Yes, I would have,” he said, receiving boos from the crowd. “And I do believe that it is appropriate to have in our nation the capacity to detain people who are threats to this country, who are members of al Qaeda.”

But, sir, as Election Day is almost upon us, I ask you how, as president, you would be so confident to cage an American citizen without him or her having had their fundamental constitutional right to defend themselves in an American court? Shouldn’t the government be required to produce evidence that shows the detained American was or is a member of al Qaeda?

I have written previously that I am so intent on getting the current president — who is the most contemptuous of the Constitution in our history — out of office that I will vote for Romney because he isn’t Obama.

But will Romney be any stronger a defender of the Constitution than Obama — even when he swears to uphold it after being elected? Do I want Romney to fill the next vacancies on the Supreme Court?

I am already on record right here, using the First Amendment, to strongly question his constitutional values.

Will Romney’s FBI, under its domestic surveillance rules, then put me on a “threat assessment” list? And what about the American citizens in the act’s cages?

I’m not voting for Romney. Why trust ourselves to him after four years of Obama?

I’m going to write in Rand Paul on the ballot. That’s Rand, not Ron.

I know he keeps reading the Constitution.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.