

FBI Redacts Letter About Drone Usage That Was Already Published In Full By Sen. Rand Paul

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from the *redaction-by-random-number-generator* dept

The government's [overclassification problem](#) has turned its redaction efforts into a farce. When not deploying [questionable exceptions](#) to avoid returning responsive documents to FOIA requests, government agencies are cranking out [amateurishly redacted](#) pages that leave info exposed in one response and covered up in the next. No wonder they fear the "[mosaic](#)" approach to FOIA requests. If they'd just come up with some meaningful redaction guidelines, they could avoid this. [Instead, things like the following bit of stupidity happen.](#)

When outgoing director Robert Mueller told the Senate Judiciary Committee last July that the FBI was in the "initial stages" of [developing guidelines for its drone program](#), a handful of privacy hawks in Congress perked up and requested more details. The FBI released correspondence with three members of Congress—Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY), Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) and Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX)—in its latest bundle. Paul had [already posted in full](#) the FBI's answers to questions about the scope and purpose of domestic UAV surveillance, but FBI FOIA officers still saw fit to sanitize them.

Here are the two versions of the same document, with the legislator's clean copy up top and the needlessly redacted version sent to Muckrock below it.



The FBI can't even keep track of what it's already sent out in unredacted form, making a mockery of its own paranoiac "but for criminals/terrorism" tendencies. What makes this even more ridiculous is that the inverse happened just a couple of weeks ago, when Tom Coburn [called out the DHS](#) for producing drone documents to Congress that were more heavily redacted than the ones it [supplied in response](#) to an EFF FOIA request (which were also rather heavily redacted).

For 2010 alone, my staff has tallied at least 20 instances in which the publicly-released documents appear to contain legible passages which are redacted entirely or in large part from the documents DHS provided the Committee. In other words, DHS appears to have chosen to withhold information from Congress which the DOJ — and, we must assume, DHS — has determined was appropriate to share with the American public.

Why these agencies even bother redacting anything at this point is inexplicable. There's obviously no rationale behind what gets released and what gets withheld. It's apparently an arbitrary decision made by each individual employee tasked with handling responses to outside queries. The stated concerns about "security" are obviously a sham. The public already has the information they're choosing to redact, which instantly nullifies any justifications given for the redactions.

If the redactions are essentially meaningless, then every redaction should be challenged. We can't see what's behind the black ink and whiteout, so we're expected to assume the info is "sensitive." But it obviously isn't if it can be revealed elsewhere without the security of the nation collapsing. The truth appears to be that no one in charge of redacting documents has any real idea what the fuck they're doing. That calls into question many of the efforts being made in the name of national security, something made even more depressing when you consider the exponential growth of that area of the government over the last 12 years.

Who watches the watchers? Well, we do. And what we're seeing is a bumbling display of ineptitude, propelled by an outsized sense of paranoia — a bureaucratic farce where the right hand is completely unaware the left hand even exists, much less has any earthly idea what it's up to.

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/1018476/071913fbiresponse.pdf>
(PDF)
<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/1018476/071913fbiresponse.txt>
(Text)

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/1018475/1218644-0-inq-and-resp-to-use-of-uavs->

