



June 19, 2008 – **Editorial**

Who we are: Anti-torture bill tells other whether North Carolina 'gets it.'

If the vote goes off as scheduled, check, at the end of the day, and see which of your elected representatives voted against making North Carolina a torture-free zone. See who voted not to make it a felony to kidnap people and whisk them away, possibly to be tortured elsewhere.

If you're guessing that this bill had its origins in a dispute over anti-terrorism tactics, you're right. Remember the fuss over those mysterious flights out of Smithfield? But here are the salient facts:

- ◆ The bill applies to everyone, not just to government officials and their hirelings. If it passes, you can't commit torture in North Carolina; we can't torture; they can't torture. You can't 'disappear' anyone in North Carolina, nor can we, or they. And what is wrong with that?
- ◆ The bill can do no harm. Even if it's true that we can't adequately defend ourselves without becoming just as low and brutal as our enemies, Congress can pass itself a bill explicitly permitting what this bill explicitly forbids, and federal law will, as usual, trump state law.

This bill doesn't pretend to solve all problems or settle all debates. Its primary effect will be simply to let the rest of America and the world know who we are – and what we are not.

North Carolina cannot single-handedly put a stop to "renditioning" and "enhanced interrogation" and all those other atrocities for which so many cynical euphemisms have been coined. But it can say "Not here" and "Not in our name," then leave it to others, if they are so inclined, to explain why one state's ban on a couple of police-state, goon squad tactics cannot be allowed to stand.

Actually, it's not the bill that will make that statement. It's the vote that matters, because we are making a statement about ourselves no matter which way it goes, just as preventing a House judiciary panel vote on it would make a statement.

At the end of this day, more people will know more about us – our values, our honor, our humanity – than they knew when they went to bed last night. And we'll know more about ourselves.

This is no epic battle. Tomorrow will be much like today. The question, after trying to reconcile what's been going on for the past half-decade with our history's most famous declarations about the rights of men and our binding covenants with other nations, is how we'll feel when next we look into a mirror.

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