

Ashcroft almost quit over eavesdropping

by UPI

WASHINGTON - Former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft nearly resigned after the White House recertified an anti-terrorism program, another former official told Congress.

Former Deputy Attorney General James Comey testified before the Senate

Judiciary Committee that he, Ashcroft and other officials were poised to resign when the White House went ahead with a counter-terrorism program that Ashcroft had refused to approve, The Washington Post reported Wednesday.

Comey didn't say which program he was discussing, but U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., said the program was the National Security Agency warrantless surveillance program, The Hill reported.

Comey described a 2004 scene in which White House aides, including Counsel Alberto Gonzales, now the U.S. attorney general, tried to pressure Ashcroft in his hospital bed into approving the domestic eavesdropping program.

Ashcroft was described as very ill. He was suffering from pancreatitis, which led to his gall bladder being removed. He had transferred his power as attorney general to Comey.

Ashcroft "lifted his head off the pillow and in very strong terms expressed his view of the matter, rich in both substance and fact, which stunned me," Comey said.

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