

Official: Cheney pushed for eavesdropping

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- A former U.S. Justice Department official told senators that Vice President Dick Cheney disagreed with objections to a secret surveillance program.

James Comey, a former deputy attorney general, told the Senate Judiciary Committee that Cheney told Justice Department officials during a March 2004 meeting at the White House that he disagreed with their assertions that the warrantless wiretapping program was not legally sound, The Washington Post reported Thursday.

Comey said Cheney later prevented a senior Justice Department lawyer, Patrick Philbin, from receiving a promotion because he raised concerns about the program, which allowed the National Security Agency to eavesdrop without a warrant on phone calls and e-mails between the United States and overseas.

Comey, who was acting attorney general at the time, said the meeting took place one day before White House counsel Alberto Gonzales, now the attorney general, and White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, who resigned last year, visited Attorney

General John Ashcroft while he was recovering from gall bladder surgery in a hospital. Comey said the two men tried unsuccessfully to get Ashcroft to sign off on the program.

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