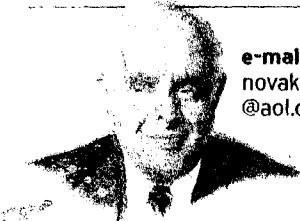


# FBI clings to policy of harassing whistleblowers

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**#1** **S**pecial Agent Robert Wright of the FBI's Chicago Division could not have been surprised by the bureau's reflexive reaction when he called a press conference June 2 at the National Press Club. He laid out an indictment of the FBI's "pathetic anti-terrorism efforts." One week later, the bureau responded like Pavlov's dog, secretly launching its fourth investigation of Wright.

**#2** Sen. Charles Grassley, as top congressional protector of whistleblowers, learned of this and did not conceal his rage in a June 12 letter to FBI Director Robert Mueller. He noted the bureau's Office of Professional Responsibility had initiated its fourth investigation of Wright after the first three in-

quiries found no wrongdoing. **#3** Grassley, second-ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, was joined by the panel's top Democrat, Sen. Patrick Leahy. "We are troubled," said their letter, "by the FBI's apparent haste to launch an OPR investigation every time an agent speaks publicly about problems within the FBI." The senators demanded a briefing on what is happening.

**#4** The FBI's public affairs office was not aware of the letter until I inquired about it. Although Grassley and Leahy only requested a telephone call to set a date for a briefing, the bureau's spokesman told me it could not comment until a letter to the senators was prepared.

**#5** Minneapolis Agent Coleen Rowley's whistleblowing about the FBI ignoring warnings of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks made her Time magazine's co-person of the year and won commendation from Mueller. In contrast, Wright has faced only trouble for raising questions deeper and broader than anything Rowley suggested. Wright's accusations go to the

*Robert Wright describes himself as the only agent banned from working on the Sept. 11 investigation.* **#10**

overriding question of whether the FBI can ever be reformed as an effective instrument in the war against terrorism.

**#6** Grassley does not blame Mueller for failing to transform the FBI's inbred, secretive culture in nearly two years as its director. Suggesting the persecution of Wright came without Mueller's knowledge, the senator told me: "He can't keep his eyes on everything."

**#7** Apart from giving Mueller leeway, Grassley is unforgiving about the Wright affair and draws broad conclusions from this incident.

"The problem with the FBI," he told me, "is that it can't tolerate dissent." To effectively combat terrorism, he said, "it's going to take a new FBI from the top to the bottom." As for his request for a briefing on the treatment of Wright, he answered with the understatement of the Iowa farmer that he is: "Sometimes it takes a long time to get an answer from them."

**#8** In contrast, the FBI hierarchy acts quickly when it hears whistleblowing, as when Agent Wright met with the Chicago special agent-in-charge in March 2001, and told him "the international terrorism unit of the FBI is a complete joke." Within three weeks, the OPR opened an inquiry into charges that Wright had supplied classified information to an assistant U.S. attorney. "This was a pathetic attempt," Wright declared in his June 2 press conference, "... before the Sept. 11th attacks, to further silence me from going public about the FBI's negligence and incompetence."

**#9** The FBI would soon find out that Bob Wright is not easily silenced. In September 1999, he had hired Chicago lawyer David Schippers, famed as House investigative counsel in the Clinton impeachment. When the FBI retaliated against Wright, Schippers contacted Judicial Watch, the conservative watchdog organization. The

FBI has had to face Judicial Watch's redoubtable Larry Klayman ever since.

**#10** The 2001 investigation and two subsequent internal probes all cleared Wright, who passed a polygraph test of charges he leaked classified information. Nevertheless, the FBI hierarchy has been implacable in its attitude toward Wright. It has banned publication of his manuscript, which Wright calls "a blueprint of how the events of September the eleventh were inevitable." He describes himself as the only FBI agent "banned from working in the investigation" of 9/11.

**#11** The fourth internal investigation of Wright was originally based on claims he was insubordinate ("... the FBI allowed known terrorists, their co-conspirators and financiers, to operate and roam freely throughout the United States.") then tacked on charges that he embarrassed the FBI and acted unprofessionally. Last week, OPR agents interrogated Wright. Clearly, Director Mueller has not changed the culture of the FBI that considers whistleblowing the supreme sin for its agents.