

By David Swanson

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Michigan's First Congressional District is cold enough to freeze spit. Half of it is disconnected from the rest of Michigan and tacked onto the top of Wisconsin. A bit of it is further north than that, but rumored to be inhabited nonetheless.

In the recent Congressional elections, incumbent Republican Congressman Dan Benishek was reelected to his third term with 52 percent of the votes. Benishek is a climate-change denier and committed to limiting himself to three terms, a pair of positions that may end up working well together.

Benishek's predecessor in Congress was a Democrat, and a Democrat took 45 percent of the vote this year. Will that Democrat run again in 2016? Some would argue that if he does it should be from prison. Before he ran for office, Jerry Cannon ran the U.S. death camp at Guantanamo and, according to a witness, was personally responsible for ordering torture.

Green Party candidate Ellis Boal took 1 percent of the vote in Michigan's First, after apparently failing to interest corporate media outlets in his campaign, and by his own account failing utterly to interest them in what he managed to learn about Cannon, who also "served" in the war in Iraq.

Now, Congress is jam-packed with members of both major parties who have effectively condoned and covered up torture for years. Both parties have elected numerous veterans of recent wars who have participated in *killing* in wars that they themselves, in some cases, denounce as misguided. And we've [read about](#) the Bush White House overseeing torture in real time from afar. But it still breaks new ground for the party of the President who has claimed to be trying to close Guantanamo for six years to put up as a candidate a man who ran the place, and a man whose role in torture was not entirely from his air-conditioned office.

I would also venture to say that it breaks new media ground for the news outlets covering the recent election nationally and locally in Michigan's First District to not only miss this story but actively refuse to cover it when Boal held it in their faces and screamed. "Despite many attempts," Boal says, "I have been unable to interest any media in it, save for a small newspaper in Traverse City (near me) which gave it cursory attention."

Boal sent out an offer to any reporter willing to take an interest: "I located a witness, a former detainee now cleared and back home in Bosnia, who can testify of an instance of torture visited on him in early 2004, ordered and supervised by Cannon. I can put you in touch with him through his attorney. The details of the incident are [here](#) . . . Without success I tried to make it a campaign issue."

Jerry Cannon, according to both [Wikipedia](#) and his own [website](#) , first "served" in the war that killed three to four million Vietnamese. He was commander of the Joint Detention Operations Group Joint Task Force Guantanamo from 2003 to 2004. He was Deputy Commanding General responsible for developing Iraqi police forces in Iraq from 2008 to 2009, and U.S. Forces-Iraq Provost Marshal General and Deputy Commanding General for Detention Operations in Iraq from 2010 to 2011. Boy, everything this guy touches turns out golden!

Boal has collected evidence of torture during Cannon's time at Guantanamo, from the Red Cross, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the U.S. Senate, and public reports including in the *New York Times*, [here](#)

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Boal focuses on Mustafa Ait Idir, a former prisoner of Guantanamo who, like most, has been widely written about, and who, like most, has been found innocent of any wrong-doing and been released (in November 2008 after years of wrongful imprisonment).

Mustafa Ait Idir says that soldiers at Guantanamo threw him down on rocks and jumped on him, causing injuries including a broken finger, dislocated knuckles, and half his face paralyzed; they sprayed chemicals in his face, squeezed his testicles, and slammed his head on the floor and jumped on him. They bent his fingers back to cause pain, and broke one of them in the process. They stuck his head in a toilet and flushed it. They stuck a hose in his mouth and

forced water down his throat. They refused him medical attention.

Boal communicated with Idir through Idir's lawyer, and Idir identified Cannon from photos and a video as the man who had threatened him with punishment if he did not hand over his pants. (Prisoners who believed they needed pants in order to pray were being stripped of their pants as a means of humiliation and abuse.) Idir refused to give up his pants unless he could have them back to wear for praying. Consequently, he was "enhanced interrogated."

Torture and complicity in torture are felonies under U.S. law, a fact that the entire U.S. political establishment has gone to great lengths to obscure.

I shared the information above with Rebecca Gordon, author of *Mainstreaming Torture*, and she replied:

"Torture is a 'non-partisan' practice in this country. It's beyond disgraceful that the Democratic Party would run Jerry Cannon for Congress. Sadly, while most (but clearly not all!) Dems have repudiated torture in words, their deeds have been more ambiguous. Five years after President Obama took office, the prison at Guantánamo remains open, and torture continues there. The Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA torture has yet to be released. (Perhaps lame duck senator Mark Udall will be persuaded to read the whole thing into the Congressional Record, as some of us are hoping.) We have yet to get a full accounting, not only of the CIA's activities, but of all U.S. torture in the 'war on terror.' Equally important, President Obama made it clear at the beginning of his first term that no one would be held accountable for torture. 'Nothing will be gained,' he said 'by spending our time and energy laying blame for the past.' But we know this is not true. When high government officials know that they can torture with impunity, torture will continue."

Noting Cannon's resume post-Guantanamo, Gordon said, "Under the al-Maliki government, the Iraqi police force, and in particular the detention centers operated by the Iraqi Special Police Commandos, routinely abused members of Iraq's Sunni communities, thereby further inflaming the political and social enmity between Sunnis and Shias in Iraq. When the so-called Islamic State began operating in Iraq, they found willing collaborators in Sunni communities whose members had been tortured by the al-Maliki government's police. When Jerry Cannon went to Guantánamo, he went as an Army reservist. In civilian life he was Sheriff of Kalkaska County in Michigan. Cannon's abusive practices and contemptuous attitudes towards detainees did not

originate in Guantánamo. He brought them with him from the United States. Similarly, in civilian life, the members of the reservist unit responsible for the famous outrages at Abu Ghraib were prison guards from West Virginia. Their ringleader, Specialist Charles Graner, famously wrote home to friends about his activities at Abu Ghraib, 'The Christian in me says it's wrong, but the corrections officer in me says, "I love to make a grown man piss himself.'" In fact, if you want to find torture hidden in plain sight, look no farther than the jails and prisons of this country."

The mystery of where torture came from turns out to be no mystery at all. It came from the prison industrial complex. And it's now been so mainstreamed that it's no bar to running for public office. But here's another mystery: Why is President Obama going to such lengths to cover up his predecessor's torture, including insisting on redactions in the Senate report on CIA torture that even Senator Dianne Feinstein claims not to want censored? Surely it's not because of all the gratitude Obama's receiving from former President Bush or his supporters! Actually, it's no mystery at all. As Gordon points out: the torture is ongoing.

President Elect Obama [made very clear](#) in January 2009 that he would not allow torturers to be prosecuted and would be "looking forward" instead of (what all law enforcement outside of science fiction requires) backward. By February 2009, reports were coming in that torture at Guantánamo was [worsening](#) rather than ceasing, and included: "beatings, the dislocation of limbs, spraying of pepper spray into closed cells, applying pepper spray to toilet paper and over-force-feeding detainees who are on hunger strike." In April 2009 a Guantánamo prisoner

[phoned](#) a media outlet to report being tortured. As time went by the reports kept [coming](#), as the military's written [policy](#) would lead one to [expect](#).

In May 2009, former vice president Dick Cheney forced into the news the fact that, even though Obama had "banned torture" by executive order (torture being a felony and a treaty violation before and after the "banning") Obama maintained the power to use torture as needed. Cheney [said](#) that Obama's continued claim of the power to torture vindicated his own (Cheney's) authorization of torture. David Axelrod, White House Senior Advisor, [refused repeatedly](#), to dispute Cheney's assertion -- also supported by Leon Panetta's confirmation hearing for CIA director, at which he said the president had the power to torture and noted that rendition would continue. In fact,

[it did](#)

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New York Times

quickly

[reported](#)

that the U.S. was now outsourcing more torture to other countries. The Obama administration announced a new policy on renditions that kept them in place, and a new policy on lawless permanent imprisonment that kept it in place but formalized it, mainstreamed it. Before long Obama-era rendition victims were alleging

[torture](#)

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As the Obama White House continued and sought to extend the occupation of Iraq, torture [continued](#)

to be an Iraqi policy, as it has post-occupation and during occupation 3.0. It has also

[remained](#)

a

[U.S.](#)

and Afghan

[policy](#)

in

[Afghanistan](#)

, with

[no end](#)

in sight. The U.S. military has continued

[to use](#)

the same personnel as part of its torture infrastructure. And

[secret CIA torture prisons](#)

have continued to pop into the news even though the CIA was falsely said to have abandoned that practice. While the Obama administration has claimed unprecedented powers to block civil suits against torturers, it has also

[used](#)

, in court, testimony produced by torture, something that used to be illegal (and still is if you go by written laws).

"Look at the current situation," Obama said in 2013, "where we are force-feeding detainees who are being held on a hunger strike . . . Is this who we are?" Well, it is certainly who some of us have become, including Obama, the senior authority in charge of the soldiers doing the force-feeding, and a human chameleon able to express outrage at his own policies, a trick that is perhaps more central to the mainstreaming of vicious and sadistic practices than we always care to acknowledge.

Those retaining some sense of decency are currently [urging](#) the Obama administration to go easy in its punishment of a nurse who refused to participate in the force-feeding, who in fact insisted on being "who we are."