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Wolf: Dept. hiding truth in dropped prosecution

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The Justice Department is covering up the truth in its decision not to prosecute two New Black Panthers for alleged voter intimidation in 2008, a local congressman said Wednesday.

Rep. Frank Wolf, R-10th, unloaded on the department for not answering questions about why charges were dropped against two members of the New Black Panther Party for allegedly intimidating voters in 2008.

"After five months of unanswered questions, the American people can tell a cover up when they see one," Wolf says in a statement.

"If the Justice Department had any credible reason for dropping these charges, what do they have to hide by providing those answers to Congress?" he says.

It all began on Election Day 2008, when two members of the New Black Panther Party in paramilitary uniforms stationed themselves outside a Philadelphia polling place.

The two alleged shook a nightstick at voters and used racial epithets toward them.

Lawyers for the Justice Department acted quickly and filed a civil suit in January -- in the last days of the Bush administration -- against the group and those involved, alleging illegal voter intimidation.

Court documents show that the department was on a fast track to win the case; none of the defendants bothered to file a defense, or even show up at the courthouse.

But then in May, the department reversed course and withdrew the complaint, winning only a limited injunction against King Samir Shabazz -- the man with the nightstick -- that blocked him from showing a weapon within 100 feet of any polling place in Philadelphia on Election Day.

The other man, Jerry Jackson, faced no penalty for his actions.

Wolf, a Philadelphia native, and other congressmen began asking Attorney General Eric Holder and other Justice officials why the case was dismissed and who made the decision.

Justice officials said "the law did not support pursuing those claims" against anyone but Shabazz and as a result moved for dismissal.

Wolf eventually won an investigation from the department's Office of Professional Responsibility.

But three months later, investigators aren't talking to Wolf or the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which has opened its own investigation into the matter.

Wolf didn't mince words discussing the matter this week.

Officials are simply using the internal investigation to deflect questions from Congress and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, he said.

"The continued refusal of this Administration to answer these simple questions is proof that wrongful political considerations were behind the Administration's decision to drop charges against their political ally," Wolf said.

The Justice Department did not respond to requests for comment on Thursday.

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