

Press Release

June 21, 2006

SCHAKOWSKY CALLS FOR VOTE ON PHONE RECORDS LEGISLATION, HEARINGS ON TELECOM COMPANIES SHARING RECORDS WITH NSA

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, ranking member on the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, at a hearing on pretexting before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations today renewed her call for the Prevention of Fraudulent Access to Phone Records Act to be brought to the floor of the House, and for Chairman Barton to hold hearings on allegations that telecommunications companies have shared consumers' phone and internet records with the NSA.

Schakowsky's opening statement is below:

Thank you, Chairman Whitfield and Ranking Member Stupak, for holding today's hearing on pretexting, the practice of deceptively posing as another person to get their phone records then selling the ill-gotten call logs online. I appreciate the opportunity to once again explore this issue.

Our Committee has discovered time and time again that for every new use of the Internet, there is a new con artist looking to skirt the law, crack security systems, or lure consumers into a web of theft and deception. Unfortunately, the Internet is not just a great place to set up shop for legitimate businesses, it is also a place where criminals proffer stolen goods - like phone records.

As we now know, personal and business phone records can be accessed with just the click of the mouse by anyone who wants them. When we started our investigation in February, there were over 40 websites offering phone records, with proclamations, such as, "You provide us with a working cell phone number .We will provide you all incoming and outgoing calls."

There's a lot more than just privacy at stake. Businesses can use phone records to steal competitors' clients. Stalkers can keep tabs on their victims. The Chicago Police Department

put out a warning to its undercover officers that drug dealers can use it to identify them. The FBI also warned its undercover agents that their cell phone records could be obtained by fraudsters, their covers blown, putting both agents and their work at risk.

I am disturbed about reports that law enforcement, including the FBI, may be buying personal phone records from the very fraudsters about whom they warned their officers. Not only does that undermine the attempts to protect their front-line employees, but it is not only a serious threat to our civil liberties, but illegal.

While I am glad that we are holding today's hearing on this dubious practice, I remain baffled over the disappearance of H.R. 4943, the Prevention of Fraudulent Access to Phone Records Act, which would prohibit pretexting for phone records. As you know, H.R. 4943 passed out of our committee by a unanimous vote and was scheduled for floor consideration on May 2, 2006. However, that vote never happened.

Eight days after it was pulled from the floor schedule, USA Today broke the story that the National Security Agency was acquiring the public's phone records from three of the major carriers without subpoenas, warrants, or any approval from the courts. If true, then the NSA and the phone companies are engaged in an even worse privacy invasion than the pretexters.

As you know, I, along with every Democrat on our Committee sent a letter to Chairman Barton calling for a hearing on the allegations concerning the phone companies and the NSA. That letter was sent on May 11th, and we still have not received a response. If we are serious about cracking down on ill-gotten personal phone records, then our investigation should not end until we look at that NSA program.