

Schakowsky Asks Negroponete To Explain Waiver Shielding Corporations

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Rep. Schakowsky (D-Ill.) asked a high-ranking intelligence official for more information about the govt.'s ability to shield companies that cooperate in requests for consumer phone and Internet records.

In a letter Thurs., Schakowsky asked John Negroponete, dir. of national intelligence (DNI), to explain authority he was given by President Bush to exempt corporations from record-keeping requirements and liability when they're asked to do tasks related to national security. Schakowsky said the DNI's waiver authority may have been used to facilitate the National Security Agency's program to track phone records and Internet messages in cooperation with major telecom companies. Schakowsky is sponsor of the Safe Call Act that would make illegal pretexting to obtain call records. Schakowsky's letter said she learned that President Bush gave the DNI the waiver authority May 5 and she was concerned because the DNI wouldn't have to seek permission from the President or Congress to issue directives based on the new authority. "I believe that such directives could have been issued to the major telecommunications firms concerning the sharing of phone call records with the National Security Agency without citizens' knowledge or consent," she wrote. She asked Negroponete to clarify how his office "has used or will use" the authority -- for example, whether the DNI asked for the authority and whether there was "a particular corporate activity that the DNI or another believed warranted such protection from disclosure and liability." She also asked: "Could directives be issued to telecommunications firms in order to obtain citizens' phone records without their knowledge or consent? If so, how would this be considered an issue of national security that should be covered up?" She asked for answers by June 22.