

Schakowsky Demands Answers from AT&T

By Frank Main

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Rep. Jan Schakowsky asked AT&T Tuesday to disclose whether it shared consumers' phone records and Internet messages with the National Security Agency.

The Illinois Democrat sent a letter to AT&T Chairman Ed Whitacre Jr. saying she was concerned the phone company and NSA were "working outside the law" without warrants, subpoenas or approval from a special intelligence court.

Schakowsky, a ranking member on the subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection, was referring to a USA Today story earlier this month that AT&T, BellSouth and Verizon helped the NSA compile a database of billions of calls placed by U.S. citizens to track terrorist activity.

AT&T has released a statement saying it "does not allow wiretapping or give consumer information to law enforcement agencies or government agencies without legal authorization."

Questions about legislation

Schakowsky asserted AT&T "may have received a directive from the Director of National Intelligence excusing AT&T from the duty of keeping records and liability for specific actions it may be taking."

She asked Whitacre a series of direct questions about AT&T's possible relationship with NSA, asking, for example, "has AT&T ever been approached by the NSA to share phone records of private citizens without their knowledge or consent?"

Schakowsky, who represents Chicago's North Side and north suburbs, also wanted to know if AT&T had played a role in sidetracking legislation she sponsored to ban the sale of consumers' phone records. The bill was prompted in part over concern by Chicago Police and the FBI that their phone records could be for sale.