

## Information from Phone Companies, Consumer Privacy Advocate Groups

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### NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Committee Opens Investigation into Warrantless Wiretapping  
Dingell, Markey, Stupak Request Information from Phone Companies, Consumer Privacy Advocate Groups

Washington, D.C. — The Committee on Energy and Commerce launched an inquiry today into the National Security Agency's warrantless wiretapping program. Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee, Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, and Rep. Bart Stupak (D-MI), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, sent letters to AT&T, Verizon and Qwest, requesting that the telecommunications companies provide details on the reported efforts by government agencies to obtain information about customers' telephone and Internet use.

"Without question, the American government must be able to protect its citizens from terrorist threats. If reports about the government surveillance program are accurate, Congress has a duty to inquire about whether such a program violates the Constitution, as well as consumer protection and privacy laws," said Dingell. "Congress has a duty to determine what occurred and also to examine the difficult position of the phone companies who may have been asked by the government to violate the privacy of their customers without the assurance of liability protections."

In May 2006, it was widely reported that some large phone companies participated in a government surveillance program by allowing U.S. government agencies access to millions of their customers' telephone records without the customers' knowledge or consent. Qwest was reportedly approached by the government but declined to participate. The Director of National Intelligence has since acknowledged the existence of the program.

"As reports about government intelligence agencies running roughshod over telecommunications privacy laws continue to surface, I have grown more and more concerned that the rights of consumers are being lost in the shuffle. Protecting the homeland is vital, but such efforts should not undermine the essential privacy rights of American citizens. Since the Bush Administration has been unwilling to discuss adequately this situation, I hope these telecommunications companies will be more forthcoming about the circumstances in which they have disclosed consumer information. I also look forward to hearing the opinion of privacy advocates on these policies," said Markey.

"Our government certainly has a responsibility to protect us from terrorism and threats to our national security, but that does not provide the government carte blanche to listen in on citizens' calls," said Stupak. "I will be interested to learn what leverage, pressure and arguments the Administration used in persuading these telecommunications carriers to release customers' proprietary information."

Dingell, Markey and Stupak sent additional letters to privacy advocate groups, including the Electronic Privacy Information Center, American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Democracy and Technology. In the letters, the members solicited the groups' opinions on the effects of the increasing number of government databases including citizens' personal information, and the likelihood that these databases could be used for alternate purposes.

The Committee requested responses from all parties by October 12, 2007.

American Civil Liberties Union

AT & T Inc.

Center for Democracy and Technology

Computer & Communications Industry Association

Electronic Frontier Foundation

Electronic Privacy Information Center

Qwest

Verizon Communications

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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