

Privacy Advocates Demand Government Stop Snooping on Private Citizens

Taking its cue from George Orwell's famous novel *1984*, the Obama administration is mining customer data from major Internet vendors and collecting telephone records of millions of U.S. citizens indiscriminately—regardless of whether they are suspected of a crime.

The National Security Agency (NSA) is currently collecting the records of U.S. customers of Verizon under a top-secret court order issued in April. It is requiring Verizon to give the NSA information on all telephone calls in its system—and also demanding Verizon's silence on the order.

The secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court granted the order to the FBI on April 25, giving the government unlimited authority to obtain the data for a specified three-month period ending on July 19.

In addition, *The Washington Post* reports that the NSA and the FBI are tapping directly into the servers of nine leading U.S. Internet companies: Microsoft, Yahoo, Google, Facebook, PalTalk, AOL, Skype, YouTube and Apple. Under a program called PRISM, they're extracting audio and video chats, photographs, emails, documents and connection logs that enable government analysts to trace a user's network of associates.

"How many violations of the Bill of Rights will it take for civil libertarians to abandon their support of a president who has not only continued—but escalated—the sins of the Bush administration?" asks Geoffrey J. Neale, chair of the Libertarian Party.

The FBI/NSA's broad surveillance of domestic calls is

allegedly authorized by the Patriot Act and by 2008 reforms of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). Then—U.S. Sen. Barack Obama voted in favor of the reforms.

“Full repeal of FISA, the Patriot Act and the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and massive downsizing of federal spy agencies is the only answer,” Neale says. “Not maybe. Not later. Now. This will stop the incremental yet rapid decline of our privacy and civil liberties, put a check on government power and help to ensure that every American is afforded due process and justice if charged with a crime.”