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U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein responding to your message

2 messages

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Fri, Jul 19, 2013 at 8:04 AM

To: jesi [REDACTED]@gmail.com

Dianne Feinstein

United States Senator for California

Dear Jessica:

I received your communication indicating your concerns about the two National Security Agency programs that have been in the news recently. I appreciate that you took the time to write on this important issue and welcome the opportunity to respond.

First, I understand your concerns and want to point out that by law, the government cannot listen to an American's telephone calls or read their emails without a court warrant issued upon a showing of probable cause. As is described in the attachment to this letter provided by the Executive Branch, the programs that were recently disclosed have to do with information about phone calls – the kind of information that you might find on a telephone bill – in one case, and the internet communications (such as email) of non-Americans outside the United States in the other case. Both programs are subject to checks and balances, and oversight by the Executive Branch, the Congress, and the Judiciary.

As Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, I can tell you that I believe the oversight we have conducted is strong and effective and I am doing my level best to get more information declassified. Please know that it is equally frustrating to me, as it is to you, that I cannot provide more detail on the value these programs provide and the strict limitations placed on how this information is used. I take serious my responsibility to make sure intelligence programs are effective, but I work equally hard to ensure that intelligence activities strictly comply with the Constitution and our laws and protect Americans' privacy rights.

These surveillance programs have proven to be very effective in identifying terrorists, their activities, and those associated with terrorist plots, and in allowing the Intelligence Community and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to prevent numerous terrorist attacks. More information on this should be forthcoming.

- On June 18, 2003, the Director of the National Security Agency (NSA) testified to the House Intelligence Committee that there have been "over 50 potential terrorist events" that these programs helped prevent.
- While the specific uses of these surveillance programs remain largely classified, I have reviewed the classified testimony and reports from the Executive Branch that describe in detail how this surveillance has stopped attacks.
- Two examples where these surveillance programs were used to prevent terrorist attacks were: (1) the attempted bombing of the New York City subway system in September 2009 by Najibullah Zazi and his co-conspirators; and (2) the attempted attack on a Danish newspaper that published cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in October 2009 by U.S. citizen David Headley and his associates.