



Laura Scher

Just Say NO to Telecom Immunity

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While we all know how Bush and his pals, big telecom, want this legislation to go, I want to know what the next president has to say. And three key senators (Clinton, McCain, and Obama) who happen to also be presidential candidates, have a unique platform and the country's attention.

I'm urging these presidential candidates to get off the campaign trail and get back to Washington D.C. to vote against amnesty.

If you want to join me in taking action, [click here](#).

I know it's a little odd as the CEO of a phone company to be against immunity for other phone companies. But I'd like to think of myself as the voice of reason: I just don't believe we should be in the business of providing customer data to the Bush administration without a warrant. It's simply a bad business practice to violate your customers' trust. Maybe that's why the Bush administration didn't even bother to ask me to break the law. Instead, they went to the big boys who happily handed over whatever they were asked.

But that's exactly the problem. From what we've seen, it's shockingly easy for the government to illegally obtain private records -- just by asking. All the Bush administration has to do to shrink our constitutional rights is ratchet up the terror threat and these big companies fall into lock-step, and turn over your private data. Among the nation's major telecom companies, only one CEO asked to see a warrant and refused to turn over customer data when the government couldn't produce it. Feel safer yet?

Now Congress is poised to give immunity to telecom companies that turned over their customers' call records. The Bush administration says that's how to ensure companies cooperate with investigations. I say that violates the spirit of the free market the telecommunications reforms were supposed to promote and exactly what companies like AT&T and Verizon have undermined by throwing money and political muscle around in Washington. Instead of regulation, we get triangulation.

But now that the issue has moved from thwarting competition to spying on Americans, Congress should finally pay attention to what the public has to say.

And no-one should be more attune to what the public cares about than the three front-runners of this campaign who also have a front-row seat in Washington. While the presidential campaign is about our future, this legislation is about the future of our Constitution. We need our senators -- all of them -- to ensure it is safeguarded now.

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