

# US government spying campaign having “chilling effect,” AP president says

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Longtime sources have stopped talking to the Associated Press in response to the Obama administration's secret seizure of the wire service's phone records, said AP president Gary Pruitt on Wednesday during a speech at the National Press Club.

The Department of Justice admitted in May that it had secretly subpoenaed records on phone lines used by the AP as part of an investigation into the leaking of classified information during the spring of 2012. (See, “The AP spying scandal and the crisis of American democracy”)

The monitoring of the AP is part of a national and international spying program that has involved an unprecedented attack on democratic rights, including the freedom of the press and prohibitions against unreasonable searches and seizures.

“The actions of the DoJ against AP are already having an impact beyond the specifics of this particular case,” Pruitt said. “Some of our longtime trusted sources have become nervous and anxious about talking to us, even on stories that aren't about national security.”

“This chilling effect is not just at AP, it's happening at other news organizations as well,” Pruitt added. “Journalists from other news organizations have personally told me it has intimidated sources from speaking to them. Now, the government may love this. I suspect they do.”

“The DoJ's actions could not have been more tailor-made to comfort authoritarian regimes that want to suppress their own news media,” Pruitt said.

The Obama administration has rejected requests for information regarding the seizure of records from other media companies. Anyone speaking to the media has to assume that their information is available to the government.

The exposure of AP spying in May was followed by the revelation that the administration had alleged criminal activity on the part of a Fox News journalists in order obtain a court order to seize his emails. This was followed by the leaks from NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

The government has moved to prosecute Snowden, with top officials accusing him of “treason.” This is in line with the overall response of the administration to all exposures of criminal actions on the part of the US government—go after those who have exposed the crime.

During a conference call on Wednesday held jointly with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, Pentagon Papers leaker Daniel Ellsberg said, “With the Obama administration's prosecution of WikiLeaks, Assange, [Bradley] Manning and Snowden, and also their cases against publishers of the content, they are criminalizing the process of investigative journalism.”

Assange, who is currently staying at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in order to avoid extradition to Sweden and transfer to the US, has been working with his associates to broker a deal that will allow Snowden to receive asylum in Iceland. Reports have emerged that Snowden's tourist visa for Hong Kong may expire in August.

According to Assange, Snowden will soon be charged with espionage by the US government: “It is clear to me at this stage that Mr. Snowden. .. is being very aggressively pursued by the US national security sector, and there's an open question as to whether the journalists, Laura Poitras and Glenn Greenwald, will be in the same position that I will be in in a year's time,” he said.



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