



DHS spied on Americans, collected their financial information in bulk: U.S. senator

Description

USA: A U.S. senator is alleging that the *Department of Homeland Security* has mass-collected financial information on Americans in bulk and very likely in violation of privacy laws and the Constitution.

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) unveiled the existence of DHS' financial surveillance program in a March 8 letter to the agency's inspector general in which he also called for an investigation into the activity, which was not previously known.

The Oregon Democrat said he only recently learned that a law enforcement component of DHS, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), was operating an "indiscriminate and bulk surveillance program that swept up millions of financial records about Americans."

"After my staff contacted HSI about the program in January 2022, HSI immediately terminated the program," Wyden noted in his letter to DHS Inspector General Joseph Cuffari, adding that his office was briefed by the agency on Feb. 18, which was the first time that Congress was informed about the program's existence.

"HSI told my staff that it used custom summonses to obtain approximately six million records about money transfers above \$500, to or from Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas and Mexico," Wyden wrote. "HSI obtained these records using a total of eight customs summonses, which it sent to Western Union and Maxitransfers Corporation (Maxi), demanding records for a six-month period following the order."

Wyden also said the agency's financial surveillance operation was extremely problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the fact that only eight summonses were utilized in order to obtain in excess of six million records.

"The customs summonses authority only permits the government to seek records that are 'relevant' to an investigation," he wrote.

"HSI should have known that this authority could not be used to conduct bulk surveillance, particularly

after the *Department of Justice* inspector general harshly criticized the Drug Enforcement Administration in 2019 for using subpoenas to conduct a bulk surveillance program involving records of international phone calls,” he continued.

The senator noted that the HSA database also provided hundreds of law enforcement agencies “unfettered access” to those same financial records, and all without any court order or supervision.

What’s more, that DHS immediately halted the program after it was discovered by Wyden also proves that [there wasn’t any internal oversight as well](#).

“I write to request that you thoroughly investigate the program to determine whether HSI’s surveillance of Americans was consistent with DHS policy, statutory law and the United States Constitution,” Wyden’s letter said.

In response to Wyden’s findings, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) declared the HSI program to be “blatantly illegal.”

“This practice presents real-world harms to people who, for good reason, would like to keep private the transfer of money and the identifying information that goes with it,” EFF, an international nonprofit digital rights group, noted in a [March 10 statement](#).

“Sharing financial and other personally identifying records of domestic violence survivors, asylum seekers, and human rights activists could expose them to danger, particularly given that TRAC allows hundreds of law enforcement agencies unfettered access to these records.”

The org agreed with Wyden that there should be an investigation into who launched the program and under what authority while adding that the six million-plus records ought to immediately be purged. Also, the EFF said companies like Maxi and Western Union should reject government intrusions like that and protect the privacy of consumers.

“Companies like Western Union and Maxi should stop caving to these overbroad administrative subpoenas for sensitive customer information by filing motions to quash. These administrative subpoenas are government requests – not official warrants, signed by a judge, that legally compel the company to hand over all of this data,” EFF stated.

“Companies should answer only when compelled by law to do so. Until then, they have an obligation to protect their customers’ information, and that obligation should extend to protections from overly-broad and easily rebuttable government fishing expeditions.”

The problem with IG investigations is that IGs have no authority to indict, making them virtually worthless – which is why federal officials [continue to flaunt existing laws and the Constitution](#). *They can easily get away with it.*

Sources include:

[TheEpochTimes.com](#)

[NaturalNews.com](#)

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