

# *U.S. Congressional Panel Says Bulk Collection of Phone Records Illegal*

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Washington, January 25 (RHC)-- An independent U.S. Congressional panel has concluded the National Security Agency's bulk collection of phone records is illegal.

In a new report, the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board says the NSA program has had only minimal benefits in stopping terrorism and should be brought to an end.

The panel says the program "lacks a viable legal foundation under Section 215 [of the PATRIOT Act], implicates constitutional concerns under the First and Fourth Amendments, raises serious threats to privacy and civil liberties as a policy matter, and has shown only limited value," adding: "The board recommends that the government end the program."

The congressional panel's conclusion will likely reinforce calls for the granting of clemency to Edward Snowden, the whistleblower who brought bulk collection and other surveillance programs to light. At a public event, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder continued to rule out clemency for Snowden. Holder said he is only open to discussing a plea deal if Snowden returns home and pleads guilty.

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