

OBAMA ADMINISTRATION WANTS TO MAKE DOMESTIC SURVEILLANCE POWER GRAB

The White House wants to add just four words to the law that empowers the government to collect information on you w/o a warrant. But it would represent a huge expansion of the what the government could (legally) collect on you.

The administration wants to add just four words – “electronic communication transactional records” – to a list of items that the law says the FBI may demand without a judge’s approval. Government lawyers say this category of information includes the addresses to which an Internet user sends e-mail; the times and dates e-mail was sent and received; and possibly a user’s browser history. It does not include, the lawyers hasten to point out, the “content” of e-mail or other Internet communication. But what officials portray as a technical clarification designed to remedy a legal ambiguity strikes industry lawyers and privacy advocates as an expansion of the power the government wields through so-called national security letters. These missives, which can be issued by an FBI field office on its own authority, require the recipient to provide the requested information and to keep the request secret. They are the mechanism the government would use to obtain the electronic records.

Make no mistake. This is one of the most important pieces of civil liberties news in a long time. The Obama Administration is asking Congress to sanction the collection of internet records without a warrant—the kind of shit they used to do without a warrant, until people expressed their opposition.

But then Democrats took over and now they want legal sanction and now—Voila, a request that presumably provides cover.

Go read this article. I'll have more to say about it, but for the moment, Julian Sanchez makes sense.