

HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS LUBRICATE THE TELECOMS

In the third of its budget stories today, the WaPo reveals the scale of the funds provided to telecoms to provide vast amounts of data to the government: \$278 million this year, and \$394 million in 2011, for doing things like leasing networks and circuits.

The budget documents obtained by The Post list \$65.96 million for Blarney, \$94.74 million for Fairview, \$46.04 million for Stormbrew and \$9.41 million for Oakstar. It is unclear why the total of these four programs amounts to less than the overall budget of \$278 million.

Among the possible costs covered by these amounts are “network and circuit leases, equipment hardware and software maintenance, secure network connectivity, and covert site leases,” the documents say. They also list in a separate line item \$56.6 million in payments for “Foreign Partner Access,” although it is not clear whether these are for foreign companies, foreign governments or other foreign entities.

As former Global Crossing exec explains, it’s all about lubrication.

Former telecommunications executive Paul Kouroupas, a security officer who worked at Global Crossing for 12 years, said that some companies welcome the revenue and enter into contracts in which the government makes higher payments than otherwise available to firms receiving reimbursement for complying with surveillance orders.

[snip]

“It certainly lubricates the [surveillance] infrastructure,” Kouroupas said. He declined to say whether Global Crossing, which operated a fiber-optic network spanning several continents and was bought by Level 3 Communications in 2011, had such a contract.

Now, we have always known AT&T and Verizon were rather enthusiastic to cooperate with the government, whereas Google and Yahoo have both fought some of the dragnet requests. And—as WaPo notes—that goes back to years before 9/11 (which is one reason the telecoms cooperated in Cheney’s illegal collection for 4 years before they pushed for more extensive legal cover).

We just finally know what it takes to get the telecoms excited.