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Dear Mr. Danilow:

Thank you for contacting me about the U.S. intelligence community and legal, court-supervised intelligence gathering methods that protect American citizens from terrorist attacks.

The U.S. intelligence community's mission is to collect intelligence concerning terrorist organizations and potential threats to our national security. In furtherance of this mission, the government engages in a number of properly authorized and lawful data collection programs, two of which were leaked to the media recently.

One of these programs enables the government to acquire "metadata," in essence, business records, associated with telephone calls, such as the numbers dialed and the date, time and duration of the calls, but not the content. The other program is aimed at obtaining foreign intelligence and enables the government to acquire the content of communications of non-U.S. persons located abroad.

Again, both are lawful and court-approved programs. Congress has been briefed extensively on both, and both operate pursuant to court orders issued by Federal judges who sit on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

Additionally, when U.S. persons are scrutinized for the content of their communications, the government must first obtain a court order based upon probable cause that those people are acting as agents of a foreign power.

These programs operate pursuant to court-approved procedures that minimize the acquisition, retention, and dissemination of any incidentally acquired information about U.S. persons.

And both have produced vital intelligence that has and is presently helping to protect Americans from terrorist attacks and other threats. These unauthorized disclosures jeopardize our nation's security.

I appreciate your thoughts on this issue. You can be assured I will continue to monitor this situation closely.

Sincerely,
Bill Nelson

P.S. From time to time, I compile electronic news briefs highlighting key issues and hot topics of particular importance to Floridians. If you'd like to receive these e-briefs, visit my Web site and sign up for them at <http://billnelson.senate.gov/news/ebriefs.cfm>