

Obama Calls For Orwellian Smart Grid That Will End Privacy In Your Home As You Know It

October 11, 2010 - Do you think that the government should be able to tell you to turn off your television because it uses too much power? Should the government be able to shut down your air conditioner because they think you are emitting too much in the way of greenhouse gases? For that matter, would you feel comfortable if both the government and your local utility company knew about and could monitor each and every appliance in your home? Or if they could look at when and how much you use each of those appliances? Welcome to the Smart Grid.

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s.type = 'text/javascript';  
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';  
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);  
})();
```

This is not some piece of science fiction. There have been numerous notices in the Federal Register seeking comments about the Smart Grid and we've written about what is coming before. Of course, they are excluding comments that they don't like. I know, because my original comments have never been posted.

Today, in a speech about America's failing infrastructure, Obama called on Congress to form an Infrastructure Bank; a new bank that will provide funding for infrastructure projects across the country. As a part of that speech, he specifically mentioned the Smart Grid.

There are a number of problems with his vision. His call for an Infrastructure Bank is simply more wasteful spending. There is still more than \$200 Billion in unspent funds from the last stimulus bill that are supposed to go to "shovel ready projects". Based on this alone, Obama's vision appears to be nothing more than a continued excuse for government spending at a time when the country is in serious financial trouble.

More importantly, as innocuous as his call for the Smart Grid may sound, it has the potential to become the most intrusive government program to ever enter any American home. The government is already working with appliance manufacturers, the consumer electronics industry, utility companies, and electric component manufacturers to come up with a set of standards for information delivery. They are telling the public that the Smart Grid will allow you to monitor your own use of electric power to help you save on your electric bills. But here is some of the stuff that they are not saying; at least they are not saying it outside of the Federal Register.

First, the standards that they are discussing would allow either your utility company or the government to be able to see individual appliances in your home, and shut them down individually. Going back to our earlier article, how do you like the idea of the government being able to turn off your television because they don't like what you are watching? That technology is likely to be incorporated into Smart Grid enabled TV's.

And although there have been discussions about allowing citizens to control what information is broadcast across the Smart Grid, it is not likely to be an "opt-in" program. If anything, it will be opt-out (meaning that you will actively have to figure out how to prevent your home appliances from transmitting information about you) and you probably won't be able to completely shut off the transmission of data. So, for instance, maybe you can tell the government to pound sand when it comes to the programs you watch, but you may not be able to tell them that they can't monitor your TV usage.

Just as disturbing is the lack of a privacy standard that places consumers in control of their information. It seems that some organizations are already lining up to figure out how to use the wealth of personal information that can be collected. Just imagine the marketing opportunities that will be available to utility companies if they can share your information. The cost of marketing inserts in your utility bill will go through the roof for advertisers!

The so called Smart Grid is also likely to lead to unintended consequences; possibly of a criminal nature. Since the Smart Grid will allow you to see your usage habits via the internet, the hacking and virus opportunities will be endless. If a criminal wants to know if you are home, all they will have to do is find a way to monitor your electric usage information. And just imagine the joy of having the install antivirus software on your oven or toaster. If you don't like the way your computer works when the antivirus software is working overtime, then you're bound to love it when television freezes up because it now needs a virus scan.

The Smart Grid appears, at least on its face, to be a very dumb idea. It is a pig that the government is trying to dress up in a tuxedo. And in this brave new world that some in government envision for all of us, it is a way for the government to monitor you when you are within the walls of your own home. Frankly, what you do within those walls is your business alone. It might be time for you to let the government, and specifically the President, know that.

byJim Malmberg

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