

BROADCAST TRANSCRIPT

Lou Dobbs Tonight

CNN

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“White House Tracking You”

LOU DOBBS: President Obama today talked at a health care rally at the University of Maryland. Video of his speech was streamed live by the White House on Facebook. His speech comes with the news that the White House is now saving user information from social networking sites including Facebook and Twitter and doing so without notifying users or asking their permission. Ines Ferre has our report.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

INES FERRE, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): The Obama administration has been a pioneer in using the Internet to get messages out to supporters and interact with them. Recently it solicited bids from private contractors to archive comments, videos, and tweets left on White House social networking sites like Facebook and YouTube, part of an effort to comply with the Presidential Records Act.

User messages like "great job Obama" or "this president is full of it" could be digitally archived. The National Legal and Policy Center, a group that favors small government, is worried the government may use information for purposes other than archiving.

PETER FLAHERTY, NATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY CENTER: We believe this is the blueprint for a massive data mining operation by the White House which would allow it to collect personal information on millions of Americans with the potential of identifying friends and enemies.

FERRE: An administration spokesman says, quote, "The White House does not archive personally identifiable information or any information that users do not disclose voluntarily on the White House pages." It's complying with the federal law that requires documenting communications to and from the White House. Patrice McDermott from OpenTheGovernment.org doesn't think the government will mine the data.

PATRICE MCDERMOTT, OPENTHEGOVERNMENT.ORG: I think you have to read this in a context of a commitment of this administration to maintain the public record.

FERRE: But the privacy watchdog EPIC says the White House needs to spell out legal limitations on how it collects and uses data from social media sites.

MARC ROTENBERG, ELECTRONIC PRIVACY INFORMATION CENTER: If you're going to broadly say that the government has the right to collect this type of data, I think you should also broadly say that the government has an obligation to protect privacy of the data it collects.

FERRE: This isn't the first time the Obama administration's use of new media has prompted debate. It recently terminated flag@WhiteHouse.gov, an e-mail address for citizens to flag so-called myths about health care reform.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

FERRE: And the White House told CNN it's committed to protecting the privacy of its visitors. It is also committed to following the legal obligations of the Presidential Records Act, adding, quote, "that PRA applies to social media and public comments on the official Web sites of the White House" -- Lou.

DOBBS: Well it's interesting that a watchdog group like OpenTheGovernment.org would ascribe to anyone it's watching over motivation for what they're doing. They're collecting information from users without their permission or reporting that they're doing so at the time.

FERRE: And the White House says well if you leave a page on the White House -- page on Facebook then that's information that you're leaving for the White House...

DOBBS: But going to user information and identifying those individuals through that information on a social networking site goes beyond what most people would assume would be done with that information. It's striking that the watchdog groups that were so concerned about other issues in other -- in a previous administration seem to be giving this administration a free pass -- striking. Thank you very much. Appreciate it. Ines Ferre.