

[Susan Crabtree, Talking Points Memo](#)

Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT) is pushing back against Rep. Darrell Issa's (R-CA) investigation into whether the Obama administration is politicizing Freedom of Information Act requests.

It's not that Welch opposes the general thrust of Issa's probe. He's just worried about what could turn out to be some pretty serious unintended consequences -- squelching interest in filing FOIA requests by revealing the identities of the private citizens making them.

Welch on Tuesday called on Issa, who chairs the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, to withdraw his request for government agencies to disclose sensitive data relating to FOIA requests.

Issa's dragnet would scoop up copies of actual FOIA letters citizens, corporations, nonprofits and the media have sent to various government agencies, thereby revealing the identities of those requesting the information and their areas of interest.

Demanding FOIA identities and content would "blow a cold, chilling wind on citizens' FOIA requests," he wrote in a letter to Issa.

Welch also poked fun at the use of Issa's voice for the iconic Viper car alarm, which Issa built into a multi-million-dollar company and helped him become one of the richest members of Congress.

"To paraphrase the Viper car alarm, Mr. Chairman, please step away from the lawful use of the Freedom of Information Act," Welch wrote in his letter.

"Requiring federal agencies to provide FOIA requests and identities of every person, non-profit

and corporation lawfully exercising their rights will hinder - not help - accountability and transparency," Welch continued. "It will impose unproductive burdens on agencies, incur unnecessary expense on taxpayers, and blow a cold, chilling wind on citizens' FOIA requests."

An Issa spokesman said the office had received the letter and is reviewing it.

In the last week, Issa has stepped up his FOIA investigation, asking Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and some of her senior advisers for detailed information about the department's alleged practice of stalling hundreds of requests for federal records while political advisers looked into the backgrounds of people requesting the documents.

Welch was reacting to a letter Issa sent federal agencies late last month asking for files containing the names of those who file FOIA requests, the date of their request and a description of the request. In the case of FOIA requests that have been delayed for more than 45 days, Issa asked for all communications between the requester and the federal government.

Rather than enhancing the FOIA process, Welch said Issa's directive would overly burden federal agencies and the committee while detracting from government transparency.

"The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform has two fundamental responsibilities: to ensure that the governmental agencies that serve the American people are both accountable and transparent," Welch wrote. "Your recent letter to all governmental agencies demanding Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) information will further neither responsibility and undermine both."

Welch's letter follows-up on another letter that Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD), the ranking member of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, and Gerry Connolly (D-VA), and Welch had sent to Issa last week.