

## Obama near decision on NSA reforms

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 9 (UPI) -- WASHINGTON, Jan. 9 (UPI) -- President Obama is near a decision about National Security Agency reforms, the White House said, as Obama was to meet with key lawmakers on the matter Thursday.

The 11 a.m. meeting with top lawmakers on the Senate and House judiciary and intelligence panels would be the second of two meetings in two days Obama held on the reforming the NSA's collection and use of virtually all U.S. citizens' phone records and changing the rules and decision-making about U.S. spying on foreign leaders.

Obama met with Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board members Wednesday, the White House said. The board members -- responsible for advising the president and other senior executive branch officials on privacy and civil liberties concerns -- also talked about operations of the secret court overseeing surveillance.

"These meetings are an opportunity for the president to hear from key stakeholders as we near the end of our review," said White House National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden.

Privacy advocates from the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the New America Foundation's Open Technology Institute and the Cato Institute think tank are to meet separately Thursday with White House Counsel Kathy Rummeler, officials said.

The meetings are part of a broad review by Obama and other White House officials of 46 wide-ranging recommendations by a task force Obama assembled to assess the nation's surveillance and intelligence-gathering activities.

The panel's Dec. 18 recommendations include revamping the NSA's phone-records collection program, as well as the process of foreign spying.

"Any decision to engage in surveillance of the leaders of a foreign nation must be taken with great care," the report says. The group further recommends the administration consider informal arrangements with close allies to govern spying on each other's citizens.

The report would also end the NSA's bulk collection of phone records and instead force it to do focused searches of data held elsewhere. It additionally recommends making the NSA director a Senate-confirmed post and creating a "public advocate" to argue against the government's case in the secret U.S. Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

Obama promised last month to lay out his intelligence and surveillance reforms this month. Hayden says Obama will make his remarks before he delivers his State of the Union address Jan. 28. The Washington Post says he could announce the reforms as early as next week.