



No investigation over Cruz debate comments

Rudy Takala

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The Senate Intelligence Committee is not investigating Sen. Ted Cruz over comments he made during Tuesday night's debate that some thought might have disclosed classified information over government surveillance.

"The committee is not investigating anything said during last night's Republican presidential debate," Sens. Richard Burr and Dianne Feinstein said in a statement.

Earlier in the day, Burr said his staff was reviewing a transcript of Tuesday's Republican presidential debate.

The Texas senator and rival Republican Sen. Marco Rubio engaged in a heated discussion of the United States' surveillance capabilities and foreign policies, and Cruz went into detail on the new law, which Rubio voted against.

"The USA Freedom Act expands that so now we have cell phones, now we have Internet phones, now we have the phones that terrorists are likely to use and the focus of law enforcement is on targeting the bad guys," Cruz said. "What [Rubio] knows is that the old program covered 20 percent to 30 percent of phone numbers to search for terrorists. The new program covers nearly 100 percent. That gives us greater ability to stop acts of terrorism, and he knows that that's the case."

Rubio responded and said the candidates needed to be cautious about getting into details of the program.

"Let me be very careful when answering this, because I don't think national television in front of 15 million people is the place to discuss classified information. So let me just be very clear. There is nothing that we are allowed to do under this bill that we could not do before," Rubio said.

The percentages Cruz cited were originally reported by several media outlets in early 2014, though that would not have necessarily had the technical effect of declassifying the information.

"While you and I are free to discuss these public facts, someone with a security clearance is not supposed to unless they've been formally declassified," said Julian Sanchez, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, who specializes in intelligence surveillance.

"There's a slight irony here in that, for all the public knows, Cruz might well have just been repeating what he'd read in the newspaper, until a member of the Intelligence Committee and an intelligence staffer both confirmed that he was discussing authentic 'classified information,'" Sanchez said.

Sanchez was alluding to Burr's communications director, Becca Glover Watkins, who was the first to suggest there was a problem when she posted a message about Cruz's comments before the debate was over.

"Cruz shouldn't have said that," Watkins tweeted.