

# Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-4314

January 22, 2004

Hon. James Sensenbrenner  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
2138 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. John Conyers  
Ranking Member, House  
2142 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Sensenbrenner and Ranking Member Conyers:

We respectfully request the Judiciary Committee hold hearings regarding recent allegations that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is planning to monitor the activities of peaceful protesters. We also request that the committee examine reports that federal funds were used to violate the right of Americans to peacefully assemble and petition government officials at the recent Free Trade Area for the Americans (FTAA) ministerial meeting in Miami, Florida.

Recent media reports centering on a leaked FBI memo suggest the FBI is planning to monitor the organizers of, and participants in, anti-war demonstrations. While we certainly support the federal government's efforts to identify terrorists and other agents of hostile powers operating in the United States, we are concerned that government monitoring of political movements, absent reasonable suspicion of criminal activity and continuous congressional oversight, may chill activity protected under the First Amendment.

We need not remind you that in the past federal agencies abused their power by harassing advocates of unpopular political causes as well as political opponents. Allegations of such abuses have been raised against administrations of both parties. Concerns that their activities will be monitored by the federal government and that they may end up on a list of "suspicious persons" could cause many citizens to refrain from supporting unpopular

causes, thus weakening the nation's political dialogue and even the ability of the nation to adopt needed reforms. We would remind you that many ultimately successful causes, such as the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement, began as unpopular movements that were considered threats to public order.

As you are aware, many Americans have long worried that the broad definition of terrorist activity in the PATRIOT Act would authorize government surveillance of peaceful political activity. Since the sunset provisions of the PATRIOT Act will force Congress to reexamine many of the issues surrounding this bill, the FBI's actions provide a perfect forum to begin reexamining whether the definition of terrorism needs to be tightened to ensure that federal resources are focused on identifying and apprehending terrorists, instead of being used to threaten the liberties of law-abiding Americans.

The Committee on the Judiciary should also examine allegations that federal funds provided to the City of Miami for security for the recent FTAA ministerial meeting were used to deny citizens the right to peacefully assemble and petition their government. According to reports from some Americans who went to Miami to participate in lawful protests of the FTAA, demonstrators who posed no threat to persons, property or public order where harassed by the police. We have even received reports that some demonstrators where beaten and arrested without doing any thing to provoke such an extreme reaction by local law enforcement. While crowd control is a local function, the use of federal taxpayers money gives Congress a responsibility to ensure that taxpayer funds are not used in a manner that violates the First Amendment.

In conclusion, we once again respectfully request that the Committee on the Judiciary hold hearings on reports that the FBI has been monitoring peaceful political activities and that federal funds were used to violate the First Amendment rights of protesters at the recent FTAA ministerial meeting in Miami. It is more important than ever that Congress maintains vigorous oversight of federal law-enforcement agencies to ensure our government is fighting terrorism in the most effective way possible without sacrificing the people's liberties.

Sincerely,



Ron Paul



Leonard Boswell



Sherrod Brown



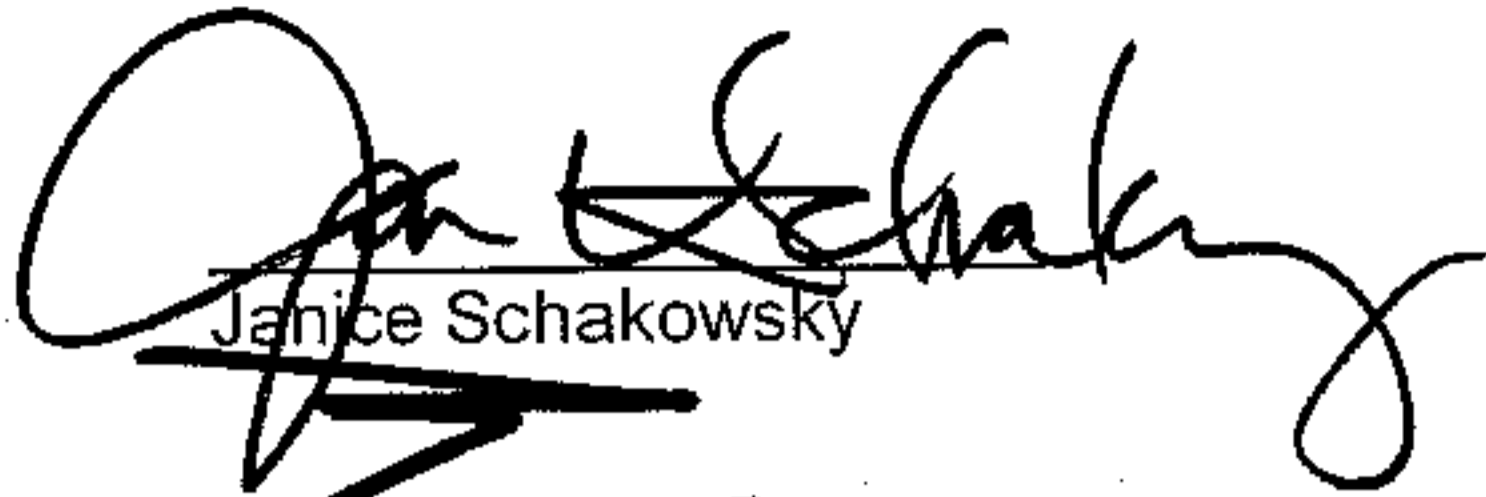
Peter DeFazio



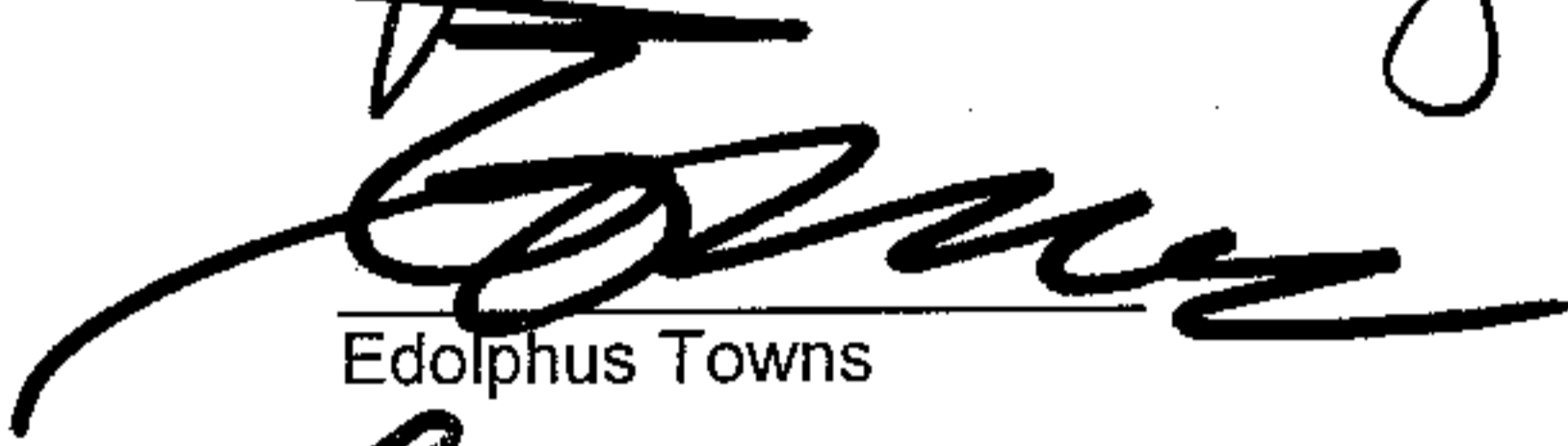
Dennis Kucinich



Bernard Sanders



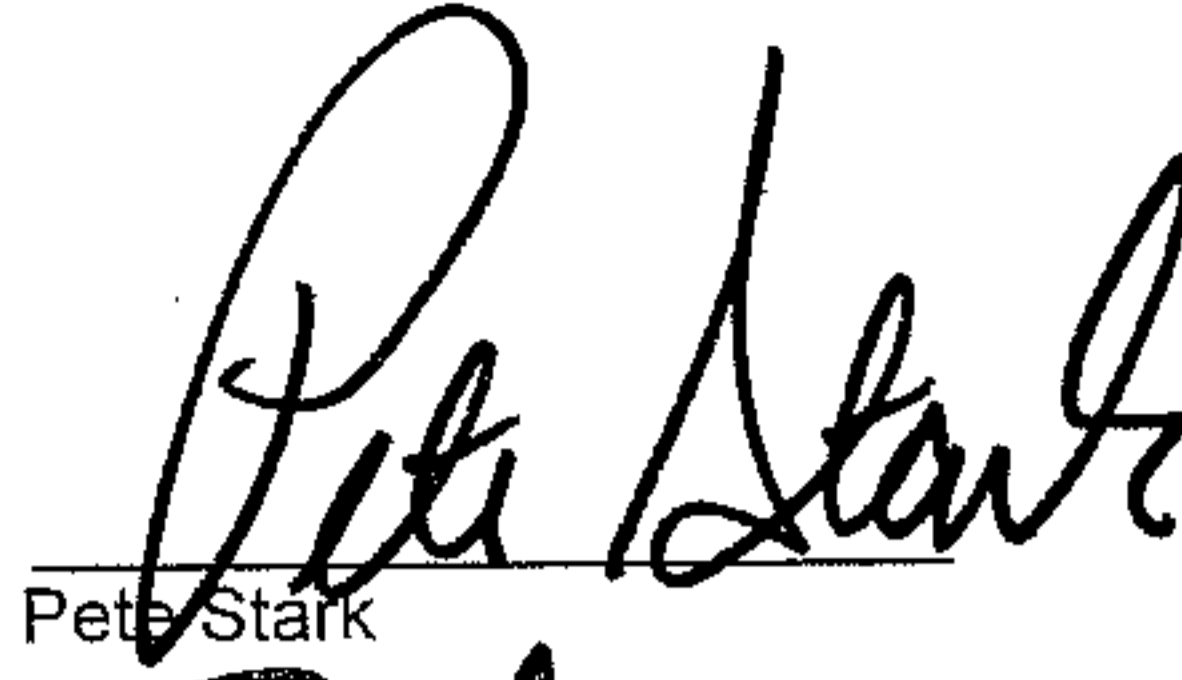
Janice Schakowsky



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