



Cheri Honkala, national organizer of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, was among the activists protesting Wednesday outside City Hall in Philadelphia. DAVID MAIALETTI / Staff Photographer

At rally, activists urge Corbett to limit agencies' monitoring

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A group of activists monitored by the state of Pennsylvania on Wednesday called on Gov.-elect Tom Corbett to prohibit state agencies from gathering information about people's political and religious beliefs.

About 20 people gathered outside City Hall for a rally on the proposal, which would allow an exception for criminal investigations stemming from evidence of illegal behavior.

"I don't think it's the job of the government to spy on organizations that pose no threat to the security of this country," said Charles Lane, a representative of the Lancaster Coalition for Peace and Justice, one of the groups investigated by the Institute on Terrorism Research and Response, which had a \$103,000 contract with Pennsylvania's Homeland Security Office to help monitor potential threats to the state's in-

frastructure.

A series of bulletins prepared by the Philadelphia institute showed it was reporting on citizen groups that posed no obvious threat to public safety, including student protesters and opponents of natural-gas drilling.

Homeland Security Director James Powers, who hired the institute, resigned last month amid the controversy.

Corbett said he was aware of the request but had not looked into it. "I don't think you need to issue an executive order to see that common sense is used."

On the issue of homeland security and monitoring, he said he read up on what transpired in the transition report prepared by the Rendell administration.

"I will deal with it as I see fit," he said. "I don't see issuing a whole lot of executive orders unless absolutely necessary."

Holdings signs that read, "Dissent is patriotic," and

"Don't spy on us," the protesters urged people to write legislators in Harrisburg for a full investigation into how and why information on them was collected and used.

Paul Hetznecker, a Philadelphia civil rights and criminal defense lawyer, said people must guard their First Amendment rights carefully, or governments will take them away.

"We give life to the First Amendment by raising the voice of dissent," he said.

Virginia Cody of Factoryville, Pa., said her name turned up in institute memos because she had opposed a type of gas drilling known as fracking.

"I want Mr. Corbett, Attorney General Corbett, to sign an executive order declaring cessation of the spying on all law-abiding citizens in the state," Cody told the crowd.

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