

**national**

# Suits seek end to warrantless wiretaps

## Two groups claim domestic spying program violated privacy

BY LARRY NEUMEISTER  
The Associated Press

President Bush has exceeded the powers of his office by allowing eavesdropping on conversations of Americans, including lawyers and journalists, according to federal lawsuits seeking to ban the practice.

"No president I've ever seen or read about has ever claimed so much power for himself," Center for Constitutional Rights Legal Direc-

tor Bill Goodman said yesterday after his organization sued in Manhattan to stop the practice and require judicial oversight.

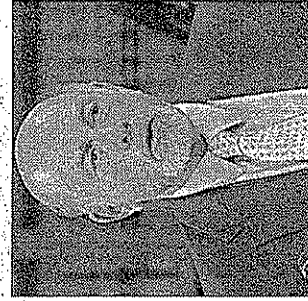
The center must assume that conversations its lawyers had with hundreds of people were subject to the secret government program to intercept phone calls and Internet communications, the lawsuit says.

"We now have to go back and audit, as much as we can, every communication over the past four or five years and determine

whether anything was disclosed that might undermine our representation of our clients," said Goodman, whose group has represented hundreds of men held as enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"I'm personally outraged that my confidential communication with my clients may have been listened to by the U.S. government," said plaintiff Rachel Meeropol, an attorney at the center.

In Detroit, a similar lawsuit was brought by the American Civil Liberties



Bill Goodman (AP)

Union on behalf of journalists, scholars, attorneys and national nonprofit organizations that communicate with people in the Middle East,

Asia and elsewhere.

The ACLU lawsuit said the National Security Agency eavesdrops on up to 1,000 people in the U.S. simultaneously as they communicate with people considered suspicious overseas.

It said the program has substantially impaired the ability of the plaintiffs to gather information from sources abroad as they try to locate witnesses, represent clients, do scholarly research or engage in advocacy.

The Department of Justice defended the practice. "We

believe these cases are without merit and plan to vigorously defend against the charges," said Justice Department spokesman Brian Roehrkasse.

Bush is named only in the New York suit. But both suits blame him for authorizing the NSA to eavesdrop on Americans.

On Jan. 1, Bush called the program legal and vital to thwarting terrorism. Bush has said the program is legal under a congressional resolution passed after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.