
Subject: Liberals, conservatives unite vs. NSA spying
Posted by [CyberkNight](#) on Tue, 05 May 2015 18:12:52 GMT
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In an ornate room on the first floor of the Capitol, some of the most liberal members of Congress met for lunch on Thursday with nearly a dozen stalwart conservatives who've repeatedly taken on their own leadership for being too soft.

The agenda consisted of a single topic, perhaps the only one that would bring together such ideologically divergent politicians in Washington at this moment: their shared disdain for the PATRIOT Act.

With key provisions of the controversial post-9/11 law set to expire at the end of the month, including authority for the National Security Agency's bulk collection of Americans' phone records, critics in both parties are preparing to strike. Among those on hand for the meeting were Democratic Rep. Mark Pocan, a card-carrying ACLU member from the liberal mecca of Madison, Wisconsin, and GOP Rep. Thomas Massie, a tea party adherent from Kentucky.

"The collection of data is still way too wide and can still be too easily abused," Pocan said of the NSA program exposed by Edward Snowden two years ago.

The USA Freedom Act is expected to come to the House floor for a vote this month. The bill would narrow the government's collection of phone records only to individuals suspected of being a terrorist or connected to terror cells, while extending much of the existing surveillance authority. Telecommunications providers would still amass the telephone data, but the NSA could access certain records only after securing an order from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

The civil liberties-minded members want several changes. Pocan said lawmakers are concerned that privacy language in the current legislation is tailored to fit current technologies -- potentially putting data at risk of bulk collection if new technologies emerge. Pocan and Massie back a long-shot effort to repeal the PATRIOT Act entirely, while other lawmakers at the meeting have proposed cutting funding for the so-called backdoor searches by the NSA that don't require warrants.

Other lawmakers who attended the meeting have proposed aggressive reforms to other surveillance authorities, including ones that allow for warrantless online surveillance of U.S. citizens. Members of the group have also called for an end to government-required "backdoors" in companies' hardware and software products to give intelligence agencies easy access to data.

Across the Capitol, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) is eschewing reform. He offered a bill last week to extend the PATRIOT Act provisions for 5½ years without major changes, allowing the NSA to continue its bulk collection program, which he and supporters like Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) say is a vital tool to combat terrorists.

Full article: <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/05/liberal-conservatives-nsa-spying-patriot-act-117586.html>
