

US House passes surveillance “reforms” aimed at codifying illegal spying

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In the latest episode of the political theater known as “surveillance reform,” the US House of Representatives passed the USA Freedom Act Wednesday, by a vote of 338 to 88.

If approved by the Senate, the bill would modify and reenact Section 215 of the USA Patriot Act, a main legislative pillar of the police-state measures put in place since 9/11. The act is currently set to expire on June 1.

The legislation passed by the House would supposedly protect telephone metadata records from government snooping by requiring them to remain stored on the servers of the major telecommunications companies rather than on government servers. The NSA could then demand access with an approval from the FISA court based on a given “selection term.”

As some analysts have noted, a single such “selection term” could be used to call up millions of communications records. The legislation would not even nominally address any of the other mass spying programs revealed over the past year by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

The Obama administration has given the legislation its enthusiastic support, hoping that it will give a pseudo-legal fig leaf to its unconstitutional activities.

The bill’s passage comes one week after a federal appeals court ruling held that bulk telephone metadata collection, an activity which the government has engaged in systematically for at least a decade, is illegal.

The political and media establishment are promoting the Freedom Act as a major blow against illegal domestic spying.

In comments Wednesday, John Conyers, Democratic Senator from Michigan, declared that, “a vote in favor of this bill is a vote to end dragnet surveillance in the

US.” Senate Democrat Harry Reid touted the act as “a chance to take bipartisan action that protects civil liberties.”

The Freedom Act “ends the federal government’s bulk collection of phone metadata from millions of law-abiding citizens,” Republican Senator from Texas Ted Cruz claimed.

Leading capitalist media outlets have lavished similar praise, with the *Los Angeles Times* proclaiming in its headline, “House votes overwhelmingly to end NSA’s mass collection of phone records.”

This is lying on an impressive scale, even by Washington’s standards. Taken at face value, the reforms contained in the legislation amount to nothing more than minor modifications of a single component of the vast spying machine erected by the US ruling class.

The current version of the bill may not even pass the Senate, where it will reportedly face opposition from some Republicans, led by Senator Mitch McConnell, who claim that the legislation will hamper necessary surveillance operations against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other extremist groups.

Senator McConnell favors instead a “clean extension” of the Patriot Act that would simply leave the bill as it is currently written. This position faces problems, however, since the federal appeals court ruled that the current language of the Patriot Act does not allow for the program that the government wants to keep in place.

If the bill does pass, existing surveillance powers laid out in Section 702 of the 2008 FISA Amendments Act and Executive Order 12333 would still provide the NSA and other security agencies with expansive authorizations to continue with their totalitarian surveillance programs. Any consideration of

amendments addressing the 2008 FAA and Executive Order 12333 was preemptively blocked by the House Rules Committee before the bill even arrived on the floor.

The experiences of the past decade leave no room for doubt about the determination of the ruling class and its political servants to abolish the most basic democratic rights. As early as 2001, the Bush administration secretly developed warrantless wiretapping programs, which included granting of access by US intelligence agents to virtually all communications passing through AT&T servers.

The US government today collects not just phone metadata but also audio recordings of virtually all voice communications worldwide, in an effort to comprehensively record and analyze the political views, relationships and most intimate personal matters of the population. On a daily basis, NSA and other federal agents sift through vast data archives accumulated by a spectrum of warrantless wiretapping and data mining programs set up over the past decade—“Processing it All,” “Exploiting it All,” and even “Sniffing it all,” as an agency motto displayed on PowerPoint slides leaked by Edward Snowden boasted.

Last week, new revelations confirmed that NSA translates the content of huge quantities of audio communications into searchable text.

The entire US political system is implicated in crimes carried out as part of a conscious class agenda to strip the US and world population of their democratic rights. The US Congress itself has sanctified the development of the surveillance programs, passing the FISA 1978 legislation, which created a secret parallel court system specifically devoted to approving mass spying operations, and later passing the USA Patriot Act, as well as a package of amendments to the FISA legislation in 2008.



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