



Senators Sensenbrenner and Leahy Introduce first Bill to Rein in Surveillance

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The first legislative repercussions of Edward Snowden's efforts hit the U.S. Congress today, when Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-Wisc.), chairman of the Crime and Terrorism Subcommittee in the House, introduced the USA Freedom Act. The bill seeks to end the government's dragnet collection of phone records and requires greater oversight, transparency, and accountability of domestic surveillance authorities. The bill has 15 bipartisan co-sponsors in the Senate, and more than 70 in the House. "Modest transparency and oversight provisions are not enough. We need real reform," said Leahy.

Leahy and Sensenbrenner were the primary authors of the post-9/11 Patriot Act, which the intelligence agencies have used to further their Surveillance State operations. In a statement on his website, Sensenbrenner said, "[S]omewhere along the way, the balance between security and privacy was lost. It's now time for the judiciary committees to again come together in a bipartisan fashion to ensure the law is properly interpreted, past abuses are not repeated and American liberties are protected. Washington must regain Americans' trust in their government. The USA FREEDOM Act is an essential first step....

"The USA FREEDOM Act would end the dragnet collection of Americans phone records under Section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act and ensure that other authorities cannot be used to justify similar dragnet collection. The bill also provides more safeguards for warrantless surveillance under the FISA Amendments Act.

"The bill includes other significant privacy and oversight provisions, provides for the creation of a Special Advocate to focus on the protection of privacy rights and civil liberties before the FISA Court, and requires more detailed public reporting about the numbers and types of FISA orders that are issued."

The bill would rein in the dragnet collection of data by the National Security Agency (NSA) and other government agencies, increase transparency of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC), provide businesses the ability to release information regarding FISA requests, and create an independent constitutional advocate to argue cases before the FISC.

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