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Anti-terrorism bills should be rejected for 'recycled police state-style snooping'

WASHINGTON, DC — The anti-terrorism bills just passed by the House and Senate will allow the government to secretly search your home, spy on bank accounts around the world, and monitor your e-mail — provisions that Congress has rejected before and that Americans overwhelmingly oppose, the Libertarian Party said today.

“These bills could be called **‘Spying on Americans: The Sequel,’**” said Steve Dasbach, national director of the Libertarian Party. “It appears that politicians are trying to use terrorism as an excuse for imposing anti-privacy measures that the American public has soundly rejected in the past. That’s not just wrong — it’s offensive.”

This week, the House and Senate are working to reach agreement about conflicting provisions of two anti-terrorism bills: The USA Act, passed by the Senate on Thursday, and The PATRIOT Act, passed by the House on Friday. A conference committee is working to resolve the differences, and President Bush could sign the final version by week’s end.

Both bills dramatically expand law enforcement agencies’ power to conduct searches, wiretaps, and other forms of electronic surveillance — and those provisions should be stripped out of the final bill, said Dasbach.

“Politicians claim they’re struggling to ‘strike a balance between liberty and safety’ in the fight against terrorism,” he said. “Here’s a simple rule to follow when trying to strike that balance: Don’t turn an anti-terrorism bill into a Christmas tree, festooned with all sorts of anti-privacy regulations that have been rejected before.” The bills would:

- Allow secret **“Sneak-and-peak” searches**, which was stripped from the Methamphetamine Anti-Proliferation Act (HR 2987) in 2000.
- Authorize **“Know Your Customer”-style bank spying**, which 275,000 angry Americans stopped in 1998 when the FDIC tried to impose it.
- Expand the **Carnivore e-mail surveillance scheme**, which generated massive public outcry in 2000 and led to Congressional hearings and curbs on its use.

What both bills have in common, said Dasbach, is they would require Americans to give up fundamental civil liberties because the government claims it would help fight terrorists. And both contain provisions that have been debated before — and rejected.

“Libertarians share the desire to punish terrorists for their bloody attacks,” he said. “But that can be achieved without inflicting collateral damage on Americans’ privacy with these provisions, which are nothing but recycled police state-style snooping.

“As Congress debates, remember: Terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center, but they didn’t destroy our Constitution. Only politicians can do that. We can’t let them.”