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CONGRESSMEN WRITE LANDMARK SURVEILLANCE REFORM

AMASH, BIPARTISAN COALITION INTRODUCE COMPREHENSIVE BILL TO REIN IN NSA SNOOPING

Washington, D.C. – Rep. Justin Amash (R-MI) and a bipartisan coalition of congressmen this morning introduced comprehensive legislation to rein in the federal government’s unconstitutional surveillance of Americans.

The USA FREEDOM Act, H.R. 3361, reforms parts of the USA PATRIOT Act that have been used to surveil Americans’ telephone records and Internet activity, according to recent leaks. Amash joined Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI), Rep. John Conyers (D-MI), Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), and more than 70 cosponsors in the House. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-VT) introduced the companion bill in the Senate.

“The days of unfettered spying on the American people are numbered. This is the bill the public has been waiting for. We now have legislation that ceases the government’s unconstitutional surveillance. I am confident that Americans and their representatives will rally behind it,” said Amash.

Amash continued, “I am thrilled to join senior colleagues on the Judiciary Committee such as Subcommittee Chairman Sensenbrenner and Ranking Member Conyers in introducing the bill. Leading members on the committee of jurisdiction and a diverse group of more than 70 congressmen have signed on as original cosponsors. We have strong momentum.”

The comprehensive bill reforms several provisions in the Patriot Act that reportedly have been used to commit privacy abuses. First, the bill ends the government’s blanket collection of Americans’ records. Second, it increases the transparency of government surveillance. It ends the era of secret law by requiring FISA court opinions to be made available to all congressmen and summaries of the opinions to be made publicly available. Gag orders on telecommunications companies are modified so that the companies can make more information about government surveillance available to customers. Third, the bill increases privacy protections. It installs a Special Advocate to argue on behalf of Americans’ privacy before the FISA court, and the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board receives subpoena power to perform its duties.

Introduction of the Freedom Act marks a major acceleration in the movement to reform government surveillance. The Amash-Conyers amendment, which was substantively incorporated into the Freedom Act, failed narrowly on a 205-217 vote in July. Eight of the Freedom Act’s original cosponsors voted against Amash-Conyers. Sensenbrenner and Leahy are the primary authors of the Patriot Act, which the Freedom Act reforms.

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