



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on October 9, 2009

Patriot Act Keeps Its Powers

Just as three privacy-infringing provisions of the USA Patriot Act were about to expire, the Senate Judiciary Committee has approved a bill to extend them for another four years.

The [three provisions](#) deal with allowing the government to obtain warrantless wiretaps, to access business records and issue [gag orders](#), and to conduct surveillance of individuals whether they are linked to a terrorist organization or not.

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The Committee began debate on the USA PATRIOT Act Sunset Extension Act of 2009, [S. 1692](#), by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) that would have renewed the sections with some modification, like only allowing the government to obtain business records if there is a terrorism connection. But the Committee scrapped it in favor of a toned-down version by Leahy & Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) that did not include the terrorism connection requirement. The committee also shot down a proposed amendment by Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) that would have accomplished the same thing. Some Senators argued that such language would jeopardize ongoing government investigations and could put the country in harm's way in regard to terrorist threats.

The new bill makes slight changes in procedures for warrantless searches but for the most part leaves the Patriot Act [unchanged and in effect](#) if both the Senate and House pass this new legislation before the end of this year when the three sections are set to expire.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has been an outspoken opponent of Patriot Act abuses and issued a [press release](#) after Thursday's vote. "This truly was a missed opportunity for the Senate Judiciary Committee to right the wrongs of the Patriot Act and stand up for Americans' [Fourth Amendment](#) rights," said Michael Macleod-Ball, acting director of the ACLU Washington Legislative Office. "We urge the Senate to adopt amendments on the floor that will bring this bill in line with the Constitution."

Neither the Senate nor the House have scheduled votes on the bill.



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