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## Politics

### Bill Would Remove Grounds for Impeachment, Bush Critics Suggest

By Susan Jones  
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(CNSNews.com) - A bill now pending in the Senate would make the Bush administration's enemy wiretapping program more practical and flexible, removing all doubt about its legality. But that worries some of Bush's fiercest critics.

According to one anti-Bush group, the bill "would pardon President Bush for breaking the law by illegally wiretapping innocent Americans without warrants."

MoveOn.org's political action committee has accused Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) of caving in to pressure when he introduced a bill that "justifies everything the president did."

The group quotes Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) as saying that Specter's bill would "immunize officials who have violated federal law by authorizing such illegal activities."

MoveOn.org notes that Democrats and some Republicans are "holding strong" against Specter's bill, and the liberal advocacy group is urging Bush opponents to sign a petition "opposing the Republican move to pardon President Bush for breaking the law."

In his weekly radio address on Saturday, President Bush urged Congress to "modernize" the nation's electronic surveillance laws.

Bush says the NSA wiretapping/surveillance program allows the U.S. to "quickly monitor terrorist communications between someone overseas and someone in America," and he says it has helped prevent attacks on U.S. soil.

"The principle behind this program is clear: When al Qaeda operatives are calling into or out of our country, we need to know who they are calling, why they are calling, and what they are planning," Bush said. He called Specter's bill an important element in winning the war on terror.

Specter's National Security Surveillance Act of 2006 would give the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court the authority to review electronic surveillance programs and decide whether they are constitutional.

In 1978, Congress passed a law that required the executive branch to get



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"case by case" warrants, similar to the ones prosecutors would seek in routine criminal investigations.

But the Bush administration argues that such case-by-case warrants don't work in the Internet and cell-phone age, when the enemy is able to move quickly and avoid detection.

MoveOn.org and other groups insist that the executive branch can wiretap anyone it likes as long as it gets FISA court approval a few days later. But the Bush administration has indicated that the sheer volume of communications to be monitored makes that impractical, if not impossible.

Specter has said he believes it's possible to give the president the flexibility and secrecy he needs to track terrorists, while providing for "meaningful supervision" outside of the executive branch.

Under Specter's bill, the attorney general must apply to the FISA court for permission to initiate a surveillance program and then seek re-authorization of that program every 45 days, but there would be no "case-by-case" warrants.

The attorney general must explain his legal basis for concluding that the surveillance program is constitutional, and he must give the FISA court - - but not the public -- details on who's being monitored.

Among other criticisms, MoveOn.org says that Specter's bill "would help 'immunize' any officials who broke the law...from being held accountable in the future." (The American Civil Liberties Union has argued that President Bush should be impeached over the NSA surveillance program.)

Specter's bill, passed last week by the Judiciary Committee, could come up for a vote in the full Senate this week.

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