

Treasonous Senate OK Patriot Act - Bill Of Rights Dead

Patriot Act Wins Final Approval In Congress

By Thomas Ferraro

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Capping months of partisan wrangling, the U.S. Senate gave final congressional approval on Thursday to renewing the USA Patriot Act, which expanded the government's power to track down foes in the war on terrorism.

A day after passing a related bill to better protect civil liberties under the act, the Senate endorsed the overall measure 89-10. It next goes to President George W. Bush to sign into law. The House of Representatives passed it in December.

First enacted shortly after the September 11 attacks, the Patriot Act broadened the ability of the U.S. government to obtain private records, conduct wiretaps and searches and share information.

Fierce debate over the act's renewal has pitted critics who say its provisions have infringed too much on basic rights against backers who say such measures are essential to safeguard America against further attacks.

With 16 provisions of the act set to expire next week, the bill would make 14 of them permanent and extend two others by four years. The

bill would also provide fresh tools to combat terrorist financing, protect mass transit, secure ports and curb abuse of methamphetamines, a highly addictive drug.

The version approved by the House included a number of changes to better safeguard privacy. But Senate Democrats, joined by a handful of Republicans, demanded more.

"I applaud the Senate for voting to renew the Patriot Act and overcoming the partisan attempts to block its passage," Bush said in a statement issued during his trip to South Asia.

"The terrorists have not lost the will or the ability to attack us," he added. "The Patriot Act is vital to the war on terror and defending our citizens against a ruthless enemy."

Democratic Sen. Russ Feingold of Wisconsin, who led the opposition to renewal, predicted that more safeguards would eventually be adopted.

"This fight is not over," Feingold said.

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, a Tennessee Republican, also hailed passage of the bill, but said, "Due to persistent delays by some of my friends on the other side of the aisle, it has taken far too long."

Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid, who opposed the measure until more changes were made, said Congress can provide the government the power it needs to protect Americans "and at the same time ensure oversight to prevent abuses."

Passage of the bill was made possible by Senate approval on Wednesday of an administration-backed compromise bill, which would provide additional privacy protections. One change would clarify that traditional libraries would not be subjected to federal subpoenas issued without the approval of a judge. Another would remove a previously proposed requirement that recipients of such subpoenas provide the FBI with the names of their lawyers. A third would allow individuals

to challenge gag orders when they have been subpoenaed to produce personal information. But they would have to wait a year to do so.

Among the additional revisions already being pushed in the Senate for consideration later this year is one that would require the government to notify targets of "sneak-and-peek" searches within seven days.

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