



Momentum on side of NSA reformers despite Boehner's push to legalize domestic spying

By: Jason Pye – December 2, 2013

The House of Representatives is planning to take up a measure soon, completely bypassing the committee process, that would ostensibly codify the National Security Agency's bulk data collection surveillance programs. The bill is reportedly similar to a measure recently passed by the Senate Intelligence Committee.

But it seems that Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) is getting pushback from Republicans who want a vote on legislation that would reform the NSA snooping programs and protect Americans' privacy, according to *The Hill*.

Boehner has apparently not learned much since the House took up an amendment, offered by Rep. Justin Amash (R-MI), in late July to the defense appropriations bill. That amendment would have limited the NSA's ability to collect data that "pertain[s] to a person who is the subject of an investigation."

Boehner, President Obama, and the intelligence community opposed the measure, and it was defeated on the House floor, though, by a very slim, 12-vote margin. It was a shot across the bow of the White House and the intelligence community, showing that the anger toward the programs is real.

What's more, as more information came out about the programs after his amendment was defeated, Amash noted that several House members pledged that they would support efforts to rein in the NSA in the future. Among those members is Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), chairman of the powerful House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

Rep. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) has introduced the USA FREEDOM Act, which would limit the NSA's spying to only those suspected of terrorist activity and establish a civil liberties advocate on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC).

Sensenbrenner opposition to the NSA programs is notable because he was the primary sponsor of the USA PATRIOT Act, the 2001 anti-terrorism law through which the administration and intelligence agencies have claimed such broad power.

"The phone records of innocent Americans do not relate to terrorism, whatsoever; and they are not reasonably likely to lead to information that relates to terrorism," said Sensenbrenner in an October speech at the Cato Institute. "Put simply, the phone calls we make to our friends, our families, and

business associates are private and have nothing to do with terrorism or the government's efforts to stop it."

The FREEDOM Act has 102 co-sponsors, evenly divided between parties, including at least 17 members who voted against the Amash amendment in July or missed the vote. If you're keeping score at home, that's more than the margin by which the amendment was defeated.

The latest wrinkle in the congressional debate over domestic surveillance comes amid reports that the NSA outlined goals for more even more power and reforms the administration has implemented that have been, to this point, shrouded in secrecy.