



Surveillance State Repeal Bill Gets Bipartisan Support

By Donald Kaufman

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A bipartisan group of lawmakers is planning to push for a new bill to stop the federal government from forcing tech companies to give it access to customer emails, texts and photos.

Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., is spearheading the proposed legislation—called the Surveillance State Repeal Act—with the help of five co-sponsors, including Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky. Pocan plans to present it when Congress comes back from its two-week recess on April 12. The bill will also stop the government from forcing companies to allow backdoor access that bypasses security protocols for their customers' privacy.

USA Today reports:

FBI Director James Comey has publicly chastised tech companies for installing automatic encryption into their devices and has urged Congress to pass legislation that would prohibit it. Attorney General Eric Holder also has weighed in, saying that quick access to phone data can help law enforcement officers find victims snatched by kidnappers and child molesters.

“Encryption threatens to lead us all to a very, very dark place,” Comey said during a public appearance at the Brookings Institution in October. “Have we become so mistrustful of government and law enforcement in particular that we are willing to let bad guys walk away, willing to leave victims in search of justice?”

In an age of increased privacy concerns, there is no way that Congress would pass a bill to give the government greater access to electronic communications, said Patrick Eddington, the Cato Institute’s policy analyst for homeland security and civil liberties.

“If anyone tried to bring up a bill that would mandate backdoors, it would fail by probably 300 votes in the House of Representatives,” he said.

Eddington said the idea that encryption alone is going to shut down law enforcement is “absurd.”

“The mass surveillance that the NSA and FBI have developed didn’t stop the underwear bomber, the Boston Marathon bomber or the shootings at Fort Hood,” he said. Eddington and other critics of mass surveillance say law enforcement agencies achieve better results with targeted surveillance of suspected criminals carried out with warrants.

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