



McConnell's PATRIOT Act Plan

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In a February 2013 **Reuters op-ed**, then-Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) criticized President Obama's spending plans. "By eliminating waste and reforming government to make it leaner and more efficient," he wrote, "we can remove roadblocks that hold back private-sector growth and job creation. Those same policies will also help lower spending, putting it on a more sustainable path."

At the end of April 2015, now-Majority Leader McConnell put forward a proposal that would continue indefinitely a failed government program that has costs taxpayers billions.

A special-interest perk for a Kentucky-based business? No. I am speaking of some crucial provisions of the PATRIOT Act, which are set to expire in June unless Congress reauthorizes them.

As *Politico* **reported** this week, McConnell is pursuing a "pure extension" of the law. He is doing so despite the **findings** of a presidential review group 18 months ago that one expiring provision, the act's Sec. 215 metadata program, was useless: "Our review suggests that the information contributed to terrorist investigations by the use of ... telephony metadata was not essential to preventing attacks and could readily have been obtained in a timely manner using conventional [court] orders."

And storing all of that useless information — the overwhelming majority of it the communications of innocent Americans, collected in **violation of the Constitution** according to one federal district judge — has **required** the NSA to build one of the biggest data centers on the planet, at a cost of \$1.7 billion, to hold it all.

Supporters of the surveillance status quo are clearly not concerned that this and similar programs also deemed worthless are budget-busting forms of "digital security theater." They have, however, resorted to a shopworn but still popular tactic: fear-mongering mixed with historical revisionism.

McConnell's key ally, Senate Intelligence Committee chairman Richard Burr (R., NC), told *Politico* that proposed **reforms** to NSA's surveillance powers would make it so the intelligence

community couldn't "connect dots." Of course, that formulation is a familiar one, appearing first in a 2002 [*USA Today*](#) story on the emerging findings of the Congressional Joint Inquiry into the 9/11 attacks, which would go on to conclude that managerial and analytical failures, not a lack of information, is what hampered our ability to foil the 9/11 attacks.

That finding would be echoed and amplified by the 9/11 Commission two years later. And as the *New York Times* **reported** last month, a 750-page intelligence-community report prepared by multiple inspectors general in 2009 found that warrantless surveillance carried out under the STELLAR WIND program — an illegal companion program to the officially sanctioned PATRIOT Act programs — was also virtually useless in countering national-security threats.

What we also know about these surveillance programs — beyond Edward Snowden's revelations — is that they failed to stop the "shoe bomber," the "underwear bomber," the Ft. Hood shooter, the Boston Marathon bombers, and, most recently, the Garland, Texas, shooters.

Federal mass-surveillance programs represent just the latest in a long and dishonorable line of costly government boondoggles. But even worse, this one robs us of our constitutional rights. Is it any wonder Congress's approval ratings are at historic lows?

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