



Harry Reid tries to shut down PATRIOT Act reforms

Wed, 05/25/2011 - 10:00am | posted by [Jason Pye](#)

There were some shenanigans on the Senate floor yesterday as Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) [tabled the PATRIOT Act](#), his motion passed by a [vote of 74 to 13](#), in an attempt to prevent Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) from offering needed reforms to the law:

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, seeking to circumvent Paul's opposition, used parliamentary tactics Tuesday evening in an effort to save time and pass the extension before some of the law's provisions expire Friday. But it remains unclear whether the Nevada Democrat will be successful.

[...]

Paul and Reid could not reach an agreement on amendments Tuesday, leading the freshman Republican to delay a vote on a key procedural motion, which in turn threatened to push the vote on the reauthorization beyond the expiration deadline. Paul spent all day on the Senate floor to prevent a unanimous consent agreement from being reached to move up the procedural vote and the vote on final passage.

In response, Reid maneuvered to skip a procedural step and shorten the debate time until the final vote. However, Paul might still be able to delay passage until after the PATRIOT Act provisions expire by forcing the Senate to run out the clock on debate time.

Paul accused Reid of running "through procedural hoops" and failing to honor a commitment to allowing time for amendments to the extension.

"Sen. Reid denied the Senate the opportunity to debate the constitutionality of its provisions," Paul said in a statement Tuesday. "Today's events further underscore the U.S. government's lack of transparency and accountability to the American people."

If Sen. Paul decides to use all 30 hours of available time to debate the bill, the little used provisions in the PATRIOT Act that this measure covers would expire for a short time - a point that *The Hill* [seemed to continuously hammer home](#) - before reauthorization could be signed by ~~President George W. Bush~~ President Barack Obama. While *The Hill* seems to be in a panic, Julian Sanchez, a policy expert at the Cato Institute who just recently published [a study on reforming the PATRIOT Act](#), [notes](#) that current investigations would be grandfathered in.

It appears that the one of the reasons that Paul is being shut down is because of an amendment, which I mentioned yesterday, that would [prevent law enforcement from obtaining certain firearms records](#).

And it's worth noting that Sen. Paul isn't the only member calling for these reforms, some Democrats [have stepped up to support protecting civil liberties](#):

[T]he legislation also drew opposition from Democrats who said it was important that individual rights not be overlooked in the critical effort to thwart terrorists. "The balance between freedom and security is a delicate one," said Sen. Mark Udall, D-Colo., who joined with Paul and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., in proposing amendments, including one that would have required intelligence agencies to identify either the target or the location in carrying out roving wiretaps.

The opponents of the bill drew some sympathy from one of its chief proponents, Sen. Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., who has pushed both for extension of the provisions and changes to assure that civil liberties and constitutional privacy rights are not abused.

"Every one of us in the Senate understands that America continues to face threats of terrorism," he said in prepared remarks on the Senate floor Tuesday. But "tools are only useful if they are regularly checked and maintained. Otherwise they become blunt instruments that can do harm, rather than accomplish the job."

Stay tuned. The next day or two should be interesting.