



House votes 293-123 to cut funding for NSA spying on Americans

The amendment would also stop "backdoors" from being built into tech products.

By Megan Geuss

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In a surprising vote late Thursday night, a strong majority of the House of Representatives voted to cut funding to NSA operations that involve warrantless spying on Americans or involve putting hardware or software "backdoors" into various products. The amendment to a defense appropriations bill, offered by Reps. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), and Thomas Massie (R-KY), passed 293 to 123.

The amendment specifies that, with a few exceptions, "none of the funds made available by this Act may be used by an officer or employee of the United States to query a collection of foreign intelligence information acquired under section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (50 U.S.C. 1881a) using a United States person as an identifier."

In addition, "none of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the National Security Agency or the Central Intelligence Agency to mandate or request that a person...alter its product or service to permit the electronic surveillance...of any user of said product or service for said agencies." Since Edward Snowden began leaking documents about the NSA's tactics in June of last year, security experts have worried about reports of intentional weaknesses left in widely used cryptography specifications.

The amendment is a contrast to the USA Freedom Act passed last month. That bill was initially intended to reform the NSA but, in its final form, still permitted the spy agency to access its vast trove of phone call metadata. Because the item passed tonight was an amendment to an appropriations bill, it went to the floor without being scrutinized by the intelligence committee, which is "basically a proxy for the intelligence community," as Julian Sanchez of the Cato Institute explained to *Wired*.

The amendment still has to be approved by the Senate in order to take effect in 2015.