



Freedom, safety don't always equate

May 1, 2013

In the wake of horrific massacres and deadly acts within our own borders, there's always someone ready to claim being safer means giving up some of the freedoms we enjoy. Don't believe them. Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, measures have been shuffled back and forth or inserted into obscure legislation that have chipped away at the First, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Eighth and 14th amendments. For example, librarians could be prosecuted if they tell anyone the government was investigating a patron. Americans can now be jailed without any formal charge under the guise of homeland security; they can also be denied the right to see a lawyer. Government agents can monitor and even infiltrate religious or political groups — i.e., spy — without needing to have so much as a suspicion there is criminal activity taking place. A Homeland Security database of people with connections to potential “threat groups” — everything from pro-gun advocates to pro- and anti-abortion activists — now includes one-third of the U.S. population, according to research by the Cato Institute. The tendency of the government to circumvent the Constitution is clear in the latest effort to trample the remaining rights we do have: The Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act, commonly known as CISPA. The proposal would allow private firms — such as Facebook, Google or Internet and cellphone providers — to search through anything users did online and, if it was determined something was suspicious, to share that information with the federal government. That venting post you made on your friend's Facebook page, that angry text to your wife or husband, that search for information about bombs? All fair game. There are a lot of dangers within such a proposal, even beyond the frightening aspect of allowing what amounts to warrantless searches by any of more than 600 federal agencies. The language in the proposal is also so poorly written that it is vague and not clearly defined in scope. It essentially “creates” its own loopholes in the law. It still managed to clear the House 288-127. Fortunately, it has stalled in the Senate, which is the same fate dealt to a similar proposal last year. We're encouraged senators recognize that Americans still enjoy some freedoms, even if we're watching them erode around us.