

Congress Has Only A Few Weeks Left to Modernize Surveillance Laws

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by Susan Molinari, Vice President, Americas Public Policy and Government Relations

Nearly two years have passed since the initial Snowden revelations. In about a month, Section 215 of the Patriot Act -- one of the key authorities relied upon by the government to undertake bulk collection -- is set to expire. As we and others noted last month, Section 215 should not be reauthorized without significant changes.

Yesterday, a bipartisan group of legislators in the House and Senate introduced legislation that represents a step toward broader surveillance reform while preserving important national security authorities. Google supports this measure as introduced, the USA Freedom Act of 2015, and we urge Congress to move expeditiously to enact it into law.

The bill would advance several important goals that Google and other members of the Reform Government Surveillance coalition (RGS) underscored in principles unveiled in 2013:

- First, the bill would end the bulk collection of communications metadata under various legal authorities. This not only includes telephony metadata collected under Section 215, but also Internet metadata that has been or could be collected under other legal authorities.
- Second, the bill would enable companies like Google to disclose the volume and scope of national security demands in smaller ranges (bands of 500) than we are currently permitted to report national security demands (bands of 1,000).
- Finally, the bill would create new oversight and accountability mechanisms that will shed greater light on the decisions reached by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC), and enable participation by outside attorneys in cases involving significant interpretations of the law.

While the USA Freedom Act of 2015 does not address the full panoply of reforms that Congress ought to undertake, it represents a significant down payment on broader government surveillance reform. It is critical that Congress now act to begin to restore consumers' trust in the Internet.