

# [***Senate passes, Biden signs surveillance bill despite contentious debate over privacy concerns***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BV4-0S21-JBSS-S00P-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Washington (CNN) &#8212; President Joe Biden on Saturday signed a bill that reauthorizes a key surveillance authority after the Senate passed the legislation late Friday night, avoiding a lapse in the controversial program.

Lawmakers voted 60-34 for the bill to reauthorize Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act after the House passed the measure late last week.

The House passed the bill after a new version was put forward for [*a two-year reauthorization*](https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2024/04/11/politics/house-republicans-fisa-modifications) instead of five years, a change that helped appease conservatives who had initially revolted against the legislation. A two-year reauthorization would give former President Donald Trump a chance to overhaul the law if he wins the upcoming presidential election.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan applauded the reauthorization, calling the program "one of the United States' most vital intelligence collection tools."

Congress had been up against a Friday deadline after authority for Section 702 was [*extended*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/07/politics/congress-johnson-speakership-threat-greene/index.html) through that date as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.

Whether Congress would avert the lapse remained in question earlier in the day as senators struggled to reach a deal to renew the key intelligence community surveillance tool.

Majority Leader Chuck Schumer had told lawmakers to be prepared to work over the weekend, but by Friday evening, locked in a negotiated agreement to vote. "All day long we persisted and persisted and persisted in hopes of reaching a breakthrough, and I'm glad we got it done," the New York Democrat said, referencing the stalled negotiations that threatened the program.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell also pressed for passage of the FISA bill, which he said had a number of changes in it to address past "abuses" by the FBI. The Kentucky Republican also warned that some critics of the bill were "fear mongering" that the legislation would allow spying on Americans in coffees shops and other places and should be ignored.

Supporters argue Section 702 is a critical tool for safeguarding national security, but it has come under scrutiny from some lawmakers over alleged misuse.

Under FISA's Section 702, the [*government hoovers up*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/11/politics/fisa-explained-what-matters/index.html) massive amounts of internet and cell phone data on foreign targets. Hundreds of thousands of Americans' information is incidentally collected during that process and then accessed each year without a warrant - down from millions of such queries the US government ran in past years. Critics refer to these queries as "backdoor" searches.

The trove of data, including a large portion of US internet traffic, is meant to provide US intelligence agencies with quick access to data regarding foreigners in other countries.

According to one assessment, it forms the basis of most of the intelligence the president views each morning and it has helped the US keep tabs on Russia's intentions in Ukraine, identify foreign efforts to access US infrastructure, uncover foreign terror networks and thwart terror attacks in the US.

The complicated ***politics*** surrounding the law have long united strange bedfellows: Some conservative Republicans have joined forces with progressive Democrats to push for reforms to the authority, while security-focused Democrats and Republicans have opposed major new restrictions.

On Friday, senators argued over an amendment that would require the intelligence community to get court warrants for spying. The program is currently warrantless, in large part because it is aimed at foreigners not Americans, but US citizens do get swept up in the surveillance when they are interacting with targets abroad. A similar amendment failed in the House, but on a tied vote.

Another amendment at issue was from Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, a member of the Intelligence Committee. His amendment, which was co-sponsored by several of the most liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans in the chamber, would strike a new part of the program that he argued would lead every day Americans into helping the government spy if they have "access to equipment that is being or may be used to transmit or store wire or electronic communications."

Last week, in a setback for House GOP leadership, a group of conservatives initially revolted against the bill and brought down [*a key procedural vote*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/10/politics/trump-fisa-speaker-johnson-house-republicans/index.html) after Trump called on Republicans to "KILL FISA" in a post on Truth Social.

That move threw the fate of the measure into question, but leadership ultimately steered a modified version of the surveillance bill to final passage.

Attorney General Merrick Garland on Saturday praised the bill's passage, saying it will help keep the country safe.

"This reauthorization of Section 702 gives the United States the authority to continue to collect foreign intelligence information about non-U.S. persons located outside the United States, while at the same time codifying important reforms the Justice Department has adopted to ensure the protection of Americans' privacy and civil liberties," Garland said.

This headline and story have been updated with additional developments.

CNN's Samantha Waldenberg and Katie Bo Lillis contributed to this report.

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