Senate passes surveillance bill without ban on web history snooping

The Senate has voted to reauthorize the USA Freedom Act, bringing the surveillance bill closer to becoming law. The USA Freedom Reauthorization Act restores government powers that expired in March with Section 215 of the Patriot Act. While the Senate adopted an amendment to expand oversight, it shot down a proposal that would have restricted warrantless collection of internet search and web browsing data.

The USA Freedom Reauthorization Act lets law enforcement collect "tangible things" related to national security investigations without a warrant, requiring only approval from a secret court that has reportedly rubber-stamped many requests. It passed the House of Representatives earlier this year, but it stalled in the Senate during the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Today, senators approved it with 80 votes for and 16 votes against, according to *The Hill*. The House of Representatives will need to approve the amended version of the bill before sending it to the president's desk.

The USA Freedom Act was designed to reform the Patriot Act and limit large-scale phone record collection, following leaks from NSA contractor Edward Snowden in 2013. But surveillance critics wanted to extend its limits in the reauthorized version. Sens. Mike Lee (R-UT) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT) successfully passed an amendment that would expand the role of independent advisers to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court.

Conversely, Sens. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Steve Daines (R-MT)

failed by one vote to pass a rule prohibiting warrantless surveillance of internet search and browsing records. Wyden ultimately voted against the reauthorization. “The legislation hands the government power for warrantless collection of Americans’ web browsing and internet searches, as well as other private information, without having to demonstrate that those Americans have done anything wrong,” he said in a statement. “Without further reform of these vague and dangerous Patriot Act authorities, Congress is inviting more secret interpretations of the law and more abuses.”

https://www.theverge.com/2020/5/14/21257782/surveillance-bill-congress-senate-pass-usa-freedom-reauthorization-act