

Big Brother Surveillance: House votes to extend Foreign Surveillance Act (FISA) in Derogation of US Constitution

By [Global Research News](#)

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On Wednesday, September 12th, the House of Representatives voted [301-118](#) to extend the 2008 amendments to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) for another five years, despite continuing secrecy, unanswered questions, and concerns from across the political spectrum about its sweeping invasions of privacy.

When originally passed, FISA was meant to curtail the federal government's surveillance practices. Over the years, [provisions for dragnet surveillance have been expanded](#), particularly since 2002. During the Bush administration, the National Security Agency began a warrantless wiretapping scheme hatched in secret, and in such clear violation of FISA that [Attorney General John Ashcroft refused to authorize it](#) and Justice Department officials threatened to resign en masse.

When the program was [first revealed to the public in 2005](#), by *New York Times* journalists who risked prosecution to reveal state secrets, it caused an earthquake in Washington. However, in 2008, [Congress amended FISA](#) to essentially permit what the original statute prohibited. Since then, the program has continued to operate in secret, drawing widespread concerns as [the NSA has escalated its war on privacy](#) and the Constitution.

In response to questions from Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR), the Director of National Intelligence has even [admitted that the NSA's activities violated the Constitution](#), and the incredibly permissive limits of FISA, on at least one occasion.

The House's vote to reauthorize the 2008 FISA amendments is beyond troubling. Many legislators and concerned Americans have called for greater transparency in the interpretation of this law, and how it has been applied. Yet the NSA has [continuously denied requests](#) to reveal information about how many Americans have been monitored.

Even more troubling is that lawmakers in the House voted to reauthorize these amendments without such information, aiming to entrench even beyond the next administration what BORDC executive director Shahid Buttar calls "the most pervasive state surveillance system ever known to humankind. The only settings in which powers like it have ever existed are dystopian science fiction novels." In his recent article, "[Uncle Sam is watching you](#)," Buttar states that though much about the NSA has been kept secret, what we do know about the program is quite telling:

We know that it began illegally, without any authorization by Congress and in clear violation of the FISA law crafted by Congress in the 1970s to stop our government from spying on Americans.

We know it is so vast and unchecked that, nearly ten years ago, Attorney General John Ashcroft refused to authorize it, even despite coercion from the Bush White House.

We know that an architect of the program, alarmed at how his work was co-opted to abuse the rights of Americans, [blew a whistle about fraud and waste](#), only to face prosecution by the Obama Administration for espionage—until a federal court ultimately told the government to stop chasing a loyal servant of the American people.

Buttar also notes the Congressional failure is spread across party lines:

We know that congressional Democrats—including then Senator Obama—joined their Republican colleagues in 2008 to approve FISA, even while both parties paid lip service about defending constitutional values in Washington. Despite the partisan rancor apparent on many issues, Congress marches in lockstep on national security, elevating government power well beyond constitutional limits.

With the House vote complete, this overreaching authorization of unwarranted and unprecedented domestic surveillance will now move to the Senate. Unfortunately, unless Senators finally heed the voices of Americans demanding answers and the restoration of their Fourth Amendment rights, many appear content to rubber stamp the House bill. For instance, Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Dianne [Feinstein \(D-CA\) supports Senate approval](#) without further revisions.

Until legislators acknowledge the concerned voices of We the People and act to impose overdue limits on dragnet domestic surveillance, it will be safe to presume that Uncle Sam is watching you.

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