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TCP Disappointed Senate Blocks Vote on Surveillance Reform

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Virginia Sloan, president of The Constitution Project, offered the following comment on the Senate's decision earlier tonight against proceeding with the USA Freedom Act:

"The Senate's failure to proceed on surveillance reform is very disappointing. As the Director of National Intelligence and the Attorney General previously made clear, this bill would preserve essential surveillance capabilities while providing appropriate privacy protections and eliminating unnecessary bulk collection of our phone records. The bill was an important step forward that was supported by technology and communications companies, privacy and civil liberties groups from across the political spectrum, as well as the administration and the intelligence community. It is unfortunate that the Senate did not allow this important and widely supported legislation to come to a vote."

USA Freedom Act (S. 2685), introduced by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), is a [compromise version](#) of legislation aimed at curbing the dragnet collection of millions of telephone records by the NSA and providing greater transparency of policies underlying government surveillance programs, in part by allowing the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to appoint a special advocate to represent privacy concerns whenever it considers cases presenting "a novel or significant interpretation of the law." It was endorsed by the [Obama administration](#), [the intelligence community](#) and [key stakeholders](#) in the private sector, including TCP. TCP [released a report](#) earlier in the year that recommended the creation of a special advocate as a necessary component of any surveillance reform.

The House passed its version of the legislation in May. At the time, TCP and other privacy advocates urged the Senate to improve [certain provisions](#) during its consideration of the bill. With tonight's decision against proceeding, the legislation is unlikely to be voted on again in the current Congress.

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Created out of the belief that we must cast aside the labels that divide us in order to keep our democracy strong, The Constitution Project brings together policy experts and legal practitioners from across the political spectrum to foster consensus-based solutions to the most difficult constitutional challenges of our time through scholarship, advocacy, policy reform and public education initiatives. Established in 1997, TCP is based in Washington, D.C.

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