

US House okays renewal of controversial surveillance program

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A part of the US surveillance program known as Section 702 allows intelligence agencies to conduct warrantless electronic monitoring of foreigners outside the United States.

The US House of Representatives voted Friday to reauthorize an electronic surveillance program targeting foreigners, a practice officials

say is critical to national security but criticized by opponents over concerns for American citizens' privacy.

The Republican-controlled House voted to reauthorize a section of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, widely known as FISA, by a bipartisan vote of 273-147.

A part of the program known as Section 702 allows US intelligence agencies to conduct warrantless electronic surveillance of foreigners outside the United States.

While it is meant to be used solely to spy on foreign citizens—by monitoring email traffic and other communications—Americans' messages can get pulled in if they are in conversation with the foreigners being surveilled.

Concerns over possible abuses had drawn strong opposition from some privacy-minded Republicans and progressive Democrats.

Renewal still requires approval by the Senate, where its prospects are not clear. If it fails there, it could lapse next Friday.

The vote in the House came over the vigorous opposition of former president Donald Trump, who hopes to defeat Democrat Joe Biden in the November election and return to the White House.

In a post on his Truth Social platform this week he had urged lawmakers: "Kill FISA, it was illegally used against me, and many others. They spied on my campaign!!!"

He apparently was referring to wiretap orders against a former Trump campaign aide obtained by the FBI in 2016—under a different section of FISA—during its investigation of Russian influence on US elections.

The FBI later said it had mishandled that matter.

In any case, Trump's online message this week appeared to have its desired effect, as a vote for renewal fell short on Wednesday.

But House Speaker Mike Johnson changed the terms of the program extension from five years to two, gaining needed support from some far-right Republicans.

Supporters say the program is absolutely vital to [national security](#), and that safeguards are in place to ensure it is used only as intended.

A senior White House official in December urged Congress to renew the [program](#), saying that with wars continuing in Gaza and Ukraine, and amid high tensions with China and a persistent threat of cyberattacks, it would be a dangerous time for "unilateral" disarmament.

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