

Eshoo Fights to Protect Civil Liberties in U.S. PATRIOT Act

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WASHINGTON, DC -- In a meeting today of the full House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo (D-Palo Alto) introduced an amendment to the so-called library provision of the US PATRIOT Act (Section 215). Because some provisions of the Act will sunset on December 31, 2005, legislation is required to reauthorize the Act.

Rep. Eshoo's amendment would have prohibited the FBI from obtaining library circulation records, patron lists, bookstore records, and customer lists without a warrant or grand jury subpoena. The provision of the US PATRIOT Act that currently permits such activities has been one of the most controversial and highly protested across the country. Despite strong opposition, the Committee rejected the amendment.

"The library provision as it currently exists is dangerously broad," said Eshoo. "It permits the government to obtain anything tangible as long it's sought under the guise of a terrorism investigation, and without the check of a judge. This clearly leaves too much room for abuse and it threatens our civil liberties."

Last month, a measure was introduced in the House by Rep. Bernard Sanders (D-VT) to deny funding for these exact provisions in the PATRIOT Act. The amendment passed the full House overwhelmingly, 238 to 187.

Though the legislation to reauthorize the PATRIOT Act will go to the full House for a vote with the library provision included, Members may have the opportunity to vote to overturn this provision. Eshoo and other House Intelligence Democrats are also hopeful that this provision will be defeated in the Senate's corresponding legislation and then in the Conference Committee.

"This fight isn't over yet," declared Eshoo. "Americans cherish their freedoms too much to let such intrusive policy go unchecked. I will continue to do everything I can to protect our civil liberties and protect our national security. Both can exist side by side."

Congresswoman Eshoo has served in the House of Representatives since 1993. She has been a member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence since 2002.

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