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Bipartisan Coalition Strongly Opposes U.S. House of Representatives Secret Session on Reauthorizing Mass Surveillance Authorities

Washington, D.C. – [Politico](#) has reported that the U.S. House is planning to move at least part of the public debate over mass and often secret surveillance behind closed doors in a secret session, raising alarm that these powerful authorities will be reauthorized without public scrutiny. The U.S. House going into a secret session is an extraordinary and unnecessary action. Should it occur, it would only be the [fifth time since 1830](#).

In the wake of the last secret session, in 2008, Congress codified the mass collection of internet and phone data under the warrantless surveillance program known as [Stellar Wind](#), which was later found to be illegal.

The following statement comes from a bipartisan coalition of privacy, civil rights, civil liberties, and government transparency organizations:

It is appalling that the U.S. House of Representatives has not learned the lessons of the last secret session on warrantless surveillance in 2008, which perpetuated a mass violation of constitutional rights. This week, the House is poised to repeat those mistakes by going into another extraordinarily rare and wholly unnecessary secret session to shut out the public and potentially move toward another expansion of warrantless surveillance powers.

The reason why there is bipartisan support among civil society and members of Congress for warrantless surveillance reform is the [well-documented abuses](#) of FISA authorities by the federal government for well over a decade. These powers have been used to conduct [tens of thousands](#) of inappropriate [searches](#), some related to the exercise of constitutionally protected activities. Members of Congress have been surveilled, average Americans have been surveilled, and unless there is reform now, the abuses will continue.

According to a recent poll, 78% of Americans think Congress should “strengthen privacy protections for people in the U.S. against warrantless government surveillance.” Congress has a duty to continue public debate and not circumvent the American people. To conduct proceedings in secret on a set of authorities that directly impact Americans is antithetical to a free society.

Organizations

Access Now

Advocacy for Principled Action in Government

American Civil Liberties Union

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC

Center for Democracy and Technology
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Common Cause
Defending Rights & Dissent
Demand Progress
Due Process Institute
Fight for the Future
Freedom of the Press Foundation
FreedomWorks
Free Press Action
Government Information Watch
MPower Change Action Fund
Muslim Advocates
Project for Privacy and Surveillance Accountability
Project On Government Oversight
X-Lab