

Bill that stops data collection signed into law

Written by By Matthew Reichbach NM Political Report
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A bill to stop the bulk collection of data as allowed through the post-9/11 Patriot Act passed the Senate on Tuesday and was quickly signed by President Barack Obama. Both members of the Senate from New Mexico voted in the majority on the 67-32 vote on the bill dubbed the USA Freedom Act.

The bill had overwhelmingly passed the House weeks ago, but the Senate failed to get 60 votes to pass the bill and instead tried to pass a full reauthorization of the Patriot Act. That effort by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., failed because of bipartisan opposition, highlighted by a filibuster by his fellow Kentuckian, Sen. Rand Paul.

New Mexico's junior Senator Martin Heinrich was among the Democrats who pitched in to the filibuster. Another high profile Democrat who participated in the filibuster was Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., who was instrumental behind the scenes in organizing against the full reauthorization.

After the failure of the full reauthorization of the Patriot Act, the Senate was able to pass the USA Freedom Act.

The main difference is that the legislation takes out the bulk collection of data by the National Security Agency. While the NSA did not collect the actual audio of phone calls, the agency did collect things such as the time and location of phone calls of many United States citizens.

"The USA Freedom Act will finally end the government's dragnet collection of law-abiding Americans' personal information," Heinrich said in a statement following the vote. "The legislation is a product of bipartisan compromise that helps restore the balance between keeping our nation safe with protecting the Constitutional liberties we all cherish."

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Heinrich has long been an opponent of government surveillance.

Tom Udall admitted that he “wanted to make this bill stronger” but said in a statement that “the USA Freedom Act ends a dark chapter in our history by finally ending the illegal dragnet phone records collection program and making other important reforms.”

“The bipartisan passage of this law — and rejection of amendments to weaken it — is a historic step,” Udall continued. “It will allow greater oversight, transparency and accountability with respect to domestic surveillance for the first time since the original legislation was rushed through following the 9/11 attacks. I firmly believe that our nation’s security doesn’t have to come at the expense of the constitutional freedoms that make our country great.”

Both Heinrich and Udall are Democrats.

Udall voted against the Patriot Act while a member of the House in 2001.

Democrats overwhelmingly voted for the USA Freedom Act—Sen. Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin was the only Democrat to vote against the bill and she did because she thought it did not go far enough—while 23 Republicans voted for the bill. There were 31 Republicans who voted against the bill, while newly-announced presidential candidate Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., missed the vote.

Paul voted against the bill because he felt it did not go far enough. The *New York Times* reported that at least two other Senators voted against the bill because it did not go far enough to curtail NSA surveillance.

Obama preferred a full renewal of the Patriot Act.

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The USA Freedom Act passed the House of Representatives on a 338-88 vote. All three members of the House from New Mexico voted for the bill. **Visit:** www.nmpoliticalreport.com