

Trust the FBI?

Republicans set to renew scandal-ridden FISA

PROMISING reforms is the easiest way to perpetuate abuses in Washington. For more than a decade, illegal federal-surveillance scandals have rocked the nation. Unfortunately, the House will likely vote this week to continue letting the feds secretly spy on American citizens for another five years.

Whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed in 2013 that the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act had unleashed federal agencies to snoop on anyone they pleased, including anyone “searching the web for suspicious stuff.”

In 2016, a top FBI lawyer made false claims to the FISA court to launch turbo-charged surveillance of a Trump campaign official, helping open the door to the Russiagate bogus scandal that rocked the Trump presidency. Justice Department inspector-general reports have repeatedly exposed FISA violations since then.

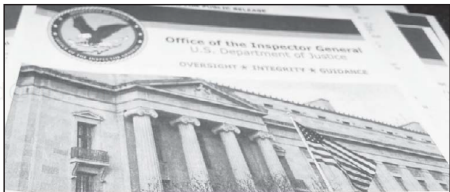
A coalition of principled Republican and Democratic members of Congress vigorously pushed for ending the warrantless searches of Americans’ data in December.

The law was temporarily extended but expires April 19.

Under FISA Section 702, the National Security Agency vacuums up troves of information as part of its foreign surveillance. But vast amounts of Americans’ personal data are also incidentally snared. Perpetual abuses have occurred when the FBI sifts through Americans’ emails and other information without a search warrant. This is why Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) quipped that FISA stands for “Federal Investigators Stalking Americans.”

Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) seemed to agree, just declaring in a Dear Colleague letter, “I can state unequivocally that the FBI terribly abused the FISA authority in recent years, and in turn, violated the trust and confidence of the American people.” But he’s betrayed reformers and helped scuttle any attempt for meaningful limits on FISA spying on Americans.

In lieu of requiring a search warrant, Johnson and the Deep State fan club on Capitol Hill are pushing the Reforming Intelligence and Securing America Act. Proponents boast that the bill includes 56 reforms to pro-



Review of Four FISA Applications and Other Aspects of the FBI's Crossfire Hurricane Investigation

Damning: Details on the FBI using FISA to target the 2016 Trump campaign.

tect Americans’ rights. Some of the “reforms” should have made this bill a laughingstock:

- Requires FBI to establish minimum accountability standards for employees.

- Requiring FBI personnel who conduct 702 queries to undergo annual training.

Why didn’t proponents add two more provisions — “cross their Ts” and “dot their

Is” — and claim the bill has 58 fixes for FISA?

Capitol Hill is a surreal atmosphere where almost all prior government abuses vanish into mist when congressmen seek to perpetuate federal power.

House Intelligence Committee Chair Mike Turner (R-Ohio) is relying on Orwellian-caliber falsehoods to spur support for reauthorization: “We are not spying on Americans. This is not a warrantless-surveillance program.” On Sunday, Turner told Politico: “FISA is about surveillance of foreigners abroad — the issues of Americans’ privacy and data are unrelated to our spying on foreigners.”

Plus or minus 3,394,053? That’s the number of Americans whose privacy was unjustifiably zapped by FBI warrantless searches using Section 702 in a single year, per a 2022 federal report. Turner did not disclose what size broom he used to sweep 3+ million cases under a rug.

FBI chief Christopher Wray testified last month the bureau’s FISA reforms “are working” with a stratospheric compliance rate. But the FBI admitted to conducting 278,000 illicit searches of Ameri-

cans in 2020 and early 2021. The FBI abused FISA to target people who notified the FBI of crimes, repairmen entering FBI facilities and even chumps volunteering for the FBI “Citizens Academy.”

House Judiciary Committee Chair Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) led the push to require the FBI get a search warrant to pilfer Americans’ personal info. But the RISA pseudo-reform would merely “require approval from an FBI lawyer for database searches about Americans.” It was FBI lawyers that inspector-general reports condemned for brazen falsehoods and abuses in the 2016 and 2017 FISA targeting of the Trump campaign.

Maybe just rewrite the Fourth Amendment’s prohibition on “unreasonable searches and seizures” by adding “except when approved by an FBI lawyer”?

Republicans who are scurrying to perpetuate FISA could enable Team Biden to steal the 2024 presidential election. The 2016 election settled any doubts about whether FBI officials would abuse FISA to undermine a presidential candidate. Why expect Biden appointees to be more scrupulous than were Obama administration officials eight years ago?

Any politicians who dishonestly deny past outrages cannot be trusted to prevent future abuses. Confessing millions of violations of Americans’ privacy is not “close enough for government work” in safeguarding constitutional rights. As Sen. Lee observed, “The government has lied, obfuscated, cheated, and manipulated FISA 702, depriving Americans of one of our core constitutional protections.”

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REUTERS