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Hoekstra: Congress Passes Republican FISA Legislation *Vows push to modernize FISA, make technology neutral*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., the top Republican on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, voted to approve FISA legislation that protects civil liberties for Americans while denying them to radical jihadists and agents of rogue nations, like North Korea, Iran, Cuba and Venezuela.

“We have taken a major step forward for the safety of our nation,” Hoekstra said. “The FISA law was meant to protect the rights of Americans, not shield the activities of our nation’s enemies. As a result of this action, America’s adversaries will no longer have the protection of our laws to hide their plots.”

Congress voted Saturday to change the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act following months of pressure by House Republicans to eliminate a loophole in the law that was allowing terrorists and foreign adversaries to evade surveillance. Because FISA has not been modernized and made technology neutral, the law was extending legal protections enjoyed by Americans to enemy agents and the same radical jihadists who have pledged to attack America because of our Constitutional freedoms.

The House concurred with a Senate bill that is nearly identical to legislation introduced by Hoekstra on Wednesday to fix FISA. Hoekstra was joined in introducing that bill by House Republican Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio; Republican Whip Roy Blunt, R-Mo.; and Republican Conference Chair Adam Putnam, R-Fla.

The bill, which now goes to the president, eliminates the court order requirement for surveillance to collect foreign intelligence on foreign targets outside the United States. It provides a means to authorize and compel assistance to the government from third parties to aid in gathering intelligence information on targets outside the United States. It also provides for FISA Court review for those procedures and reporting to Congress. The bill also provides a liability defense for those who provide assistance to the U.S. Intelligence Community, under authority of the bill, to protect America from attack. The bill keeps intact all current protections for the civil liberties of Americans and eliminates the FISA law’s unintended extension of those rights to non-U.S. citizens.

Congressional action follows the release of an unclassified National Intelligence Estimate that warned that America faces a heightened threat of attack. Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell had also warned Congress that America's intelligence agencies were missing out on a significant amount of information needed to keep the homeland safe and that FISA was in need of an immediate fix.

Hoekstra said he would use momentum from Congressional Republicans' efforts to fix FISA to push for comprehensive reform of the law to make it technology neutral and obtain retroactive liability for parties who may have aided the government. Without technological neutrality, he noted, Congress will have to repeatedly pass FISA fixes.

“House Republicans have been demanding comprehensive FISA reform for some time, and Congress must finish the job. The threats to our nation are real, and they are persistent. Our nation's intelligence professionals are the first line of America's defense, and we must give them the tools and authorities to keep our nation safe.”