

Paul Applauds Congressional Restrictions on Patriot Act

Washington, DC- Congressman Ron Paul praised two landmark votes in Congress that could mark a turning point in the battle to protect civil liberties threatened by the Patriot Act. Paul has been an outspoken critic of the Patriot Act since its hasty passage in the weeks following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The Act endangers civil liberties by easing federal rules for search warrants, allowing warrantless searches in some instances, allowing expanded wiretaps and internet monitoring, and even allowing federal agents to examine library and bookstore records. Yet despite these serious constitutional questions, few if any members of Congress read the 500-page Patriot Act prior to voting on it!

However, the House of Representatives recently passed two amendments to the annual Justice department funding bill that show many in Congress are having second thoughts about the Patriot Act.

One amendment, sponsored by Congressman Butch Otter of Idaho and cosponsored by Paul, denies funding for the Justice department to execute so-called “sneak and peek” warrants authorized by the Patriot Act. “Sneak and peek” warrants enable federal authorities to search a person’s home, office, or personal property without the person’s knowledge! This secrecy upsets decades of legal precedent requiring that an individual be served with a warrant before a search. The House voted overwhelmingly not to fund this overzealous federal police practice.

The House also unanimously passed an amendment prohibiting funds for the Justice department to force libraries and bookstores to turn over records of books read by their patrons. Librarians around the country have led the charge against this provision in the Patriot Act, arguing that Americans have always been free to read whatever they choose without being monitored by government.

The battle against the Patriot Act has only just begun, however, as the Senate could strip the new restrictions passed by the House. Both the administration and congressional leadership

continue to support the Act, despite public outcry against it and growing opposition among rank and file members of the House. Paul and hundreds of his House colleagues now hope to capitalize on their momentum by working to repeal all or part of the Patriot Act itself.