

RON WYDEN, SENATOR FOR OREGON

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WYDEN STATEMENT ON PRESIDENT OBAMA'S PROPOSED REFORMS TO THE FISC AND PATRIOT ACT

Friday, August 9, 2013

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) issued the following statement regarding President Obama's announcement of potential reforms to Section 215 of the PATRIOT ACT and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

"Many of the reforms proposed by the President stem from suggestions made by myself and my colleagues to deal with the severe threat to civil liberties posed by current surveillance authorities and programs. While more details are clearly necessary, the President's proposals are certainly encouraging steps toward bringing about the kind of civil liberty protections that I and others have been working to achieve for several years.

The president outlined proposed reforms to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court -- the most one-sided court in the nation -- that include making the FISC a truly adversarial court by creating an advocate who could challenge the assertions made by the government during court proceedings. This is an essential reform that I completely support, as is the releasing of the legal rationale for the bulk collection of Americans' phone records and other important legal documents that explain what authorites the government believes it has when it comes to the collection of Americans' communications.

The President also stated that he would support reforms to section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act, which is the provision of the law that has been secretly interpreted to allow the government to engage in the bulk collection of Americans' records. I have seen absolutely zero evidence that the bulk collection of Americans' phone records under Section 215 of the PATRIOT Act has provided any unique value to intelligence gathering or actually made Americans any safer, so I believe that these reforms should ensure that bulk collection is ended.

I will work closely with my colleagues and the President to seek that repeal and ensure that whatever reforms are made to this problematic law strengthen civil liberty protections as much as possible.

Notably absent from President Obama's speech was any mention of closing the backdoor searches loophole that potentially allows for the warrantless searches of Americans' phone calls and emails under section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. I believe that this provision requires significant reforms as well and I will continue to fight to close that loophole. I am also concerned that the executive branch has not fully acknowledged the extent to which violations of FISC orders and the spirit of the law have already had a significant impact on Americans' privacy.

Overall, I welcome the proposals made today by the President and intend to work closely with my colleagues, including Senators Udall, Leahy, Blumenthal, Merkley and Feinstein and Reps. Sensenbrenner and Lofgren, to ensure that the president's proposals are strengthened and become law."