

Larson Weighs Against Patriot Act's Imbalances

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 21, 2005
Larson Weighs Against Patriot Act's Imbalances

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman John B. Larson, CT-01, voted Thursday night against the reauthorization of the so-called PATRIOT Act (The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001, H.R. 3199) as offered by the Republican majority.

Larson's primary objection stemmed from the bill's failure to properly balance security and constitutional liberties and its failure to fill in critical gaps in our homeland defense.

"Undoubtedly, it is an absolute necessity for us to remove barriers to conducting legitimate investigations into terrorist activities. But as the 9/11 commission's report stated, many of those barriers had to do with the failure of communication among agencies and not the ability to obtain information in a timely fashion. We may have gone unnecessarily far, investing in the F.B.I and others agencies powers so broad and unregulated that they are ripe for illegitimate uses.

Larson added: "It is wrong for Congress to abdicate its responsibility to the American people to exercise oversight of powers that may not leave them safer from terrorists, but put them at risk of unwarranted intrusion into the most private aspects of their personal lives - such as the medical condition they are being treated for or the library books they have on their nightstands. We do make America safer by securing our ports and borders, supporting our first responders, and ensuring that our transit systems, nuclear power plants and schools are protected from those who seek to do us harm."

Larson took issue with the Republican's decision to make permanent, rather than extend for further review, a host of expanded police powers. The two of the Act's 16 provisions not made permanent were extended for another decade before they sunset.

Several of the measures broadened law enforcement agencies' ability to conduct secret searches and seizures and to obtain unlimited records, including those from doctor's offices and libraries, while lowering the threshold of why and against whom they can be used. In addition, several of the provisions drop the requirement of judicial review and impose gag orders, leaving the public without legal protection or redress.

"This bill provides the potential for law enforcement to invade the privacy of Americans without their consent, knowledge or objection," Larson said. "We need to strike a balance between the nation's safety and protecting the civil liberties that made this nation."

###