

June 19, 2008

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) stood up for civil liberties today when he voted against H.R.6304, the FISA (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act) Amendments Act. The legislation granted *de facto* immunity to telecommunications companies that collaborated with the Administration's unlawful surveillance program, a sticking point for Congressman DeFazio because it violates the Constitution. Under the law, District courts will be forced to dismiss pending cases upon a certification from the Attorney General that the telecommunications companies were asked for their compliance, regardless of whether the request was legal. The legislation also allows the government to collect massive amounts of information on individuals even if the FISA court denies a wiretap application.

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"We do not need to trample over the U.S. Constitution in order to protect Americans from terrorism. That is akin to sinking the boat so the enemy can't sink it," DeFazio said. "This law gives the President extraordinarily broad power to spy on anyone at anytime."

Controversy around the bill has been whether or not to grant immunity to telecommunications companies who help the NSA spy on innocent Americans. The President has refused to show most Members of Congress the classified documents that provide the basis for telecommunications companies' immunity protection. Instead he says "trust me."

"Congress should not have let these corporations off the hook without knowing what role they played in the President's wiretapping program. One can only conclude that the President's bid for immunity for telecommunications companies is a self serving effort to protect his Administration," DeFazio said. "I was deeply disappointed that this compromise legislation still leaves the communications of law abiding Americans vulnerable to a run-amok, over-stepping government, with little or no recourse. It is for this reason that I strongly opposed it."