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CONGRESS

House Panel Approves Bill Expanding Surveillance

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 3 — By a vote of 36 to 0, the House Judiciary Committee approved a bill tonight that would give law enforcement officials broad new authority to investigate terrorist suspects.

House Republican leaders said they intended to take the legislation to the floor next week, one month after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Members of both parties said they expected the bill to gain easy approval.

Although the vote tonight was unanimous, it followed two weeks of impassioned debate, during which members of both parties struggled to strike a balance between aiding law enforcement and protecting the rights of citizens and immigrants.

The chairman of the committee, Representative F. James Sensenbrenner Jr., Republican of Wisconsin, hailed the vote.

"This shows that, with respect to conflicting viewpoints and a biparti-

He described today's negotiations as proceeding well, in contrast to Tuesday when Democrats and Republicans began feuding in ways that had not been seen since before the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Senator Trent Lott, Republican of Mississippi and the minority leader, warned on Tuesday that there could be another terrorist attack and Democrats would be vulnerable to accusations of having failed to respond quickly enough.

Democratic leaders said that staff aides would negotiate most of the night and that an agreement was possible with the White House by Thursday or Friday. The dispute centered on language that would govern the conditions under which law enforcement authorities could share information gathered in investigations and even from grand juries with other arms of the federal government.

House Judiciary Committee members worked on the legislation late into the evening, as Democrats offered several amendments. Some ideas were accepted and others withdrawn after Republican committee members promised to address the concerns later in the legislative process.

A unanimous vote after two weeks of impassioned debate.

san approach, the legislative process works," Mr. Sensenbrenner said. "We are all the winners. The terrorists are the losers."

The House bill was drafted by Mr. Sensenbrenner and the senior Democrat on the committee, Representative John Conyers Jr. of Michigan, in consultation with the Bush administration.

The bill would expand the powers of law enforcement officials to wiretap the telephones of terrorist suspects as well as monitor their e-mail traffic. The legislation would also allow officials to detain foreign nationals suspected of involvement in terrorism for up to seven days, after which they would have to be released if they were not charged with a crime.

At the same time, the Senate remained locked in negotiations with the White House on its version of an antiterrorism package.

Senator Tom Daschle, Democrat of South Dakota and the majority leader, said today that it was likely that when an agreement was reached, the Senate bill would be taken directly to the Senate floor, bypassing several usual procedural steps in the Judiciary Committee that could delay its consideration.

"Based on conversations we've had over the last eight hours, I would say that there is a strong likelihood that the bill will be able to go to the floor next week," Mr. Daschle told reporters.

Mr. Conyers said he had tried to balance concern for civil liberties with the need to fight terrorism but noted he still had reservations.

"My friends in law enforcement tell me they can be trusted not to abuse the sweeping new powers they have requested," Mr. Conyers said. "I wish that were true, but history has proven otherwise, regardless of what political party was in charge."

He cited the suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War, the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II and the illegal gathering of information by the Federal Bureau of Investigation about civil rights activists and antiwar activists in the 1960's.

The committee accepted by voice vote an amendment establishing new civil penalties for federal investigators who improperly disclose information obtained through electronic surveillance.

The author of the proposal, Representative Barney Frank, Democrat of Massachusetts, said people should have a new right to sue "if information is inappropriately leaked."

Representative Bob Barr, Republican of Georgia, who opposed earlier versions of the bill, said he supported the bipartisan compromise.

But Jerry J. Berman, executive director of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a civil liberties group, said the bill would dismantle some of the privacy safeguards enacted in response to Watergate.

"We have major concerns with the House bill, and more concerns with the bill being written in the Senate," Mr. Berman said.