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GOP balks at retaining sections of Patriot Act

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WASHINGTON - Congressional Republicans signaled Wednesday that they are unwilling to rubber-stamp the administration's push to make permanent controversial sections of the Patriot Act.

The GOP lawmakers are considering at least some modifications on the authority of government agencies in charge of preventing future terror attacks.

Sixteen provisions of the Patriot Act, passed hastily in the wake of the 9/11 attacks to expand the government's investigative powers, are set to expire at the end of the year. The Bush administration has asked Congress to make them permanent.

However, two House committees, Intelligence and Judiciary, and a key senator, Arlen Specter, R-Pa., took steps Wednesday to extend the act's most controversial provisions for only a temporary period or add judicial checks on some powers the act grants to investigatory agencies.

The fact that the Republican-led committees in the House, which generally follow the administration's wishes, declined to make all the provisions permanent indicates that the White House is unlikely to get a blank check from Congress.

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