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Gonzales open to Patriot Act revisions

But says none should weaken the anti-terrorism tool

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said Sunday the door is open for "some amendments, some clarifications" in the Patriot Act, citing as an example the so-called "library provision."

But Gonzales reiterated on CNN's "Late Edition" that the Bush administration would "not accept changes that would in any way weaken the Patriot Act, that would make it more difficult to protect America against additional terrorist attacks."

Up for reauthorization in Congress are 16 provisions of the act set to expire at the end of the year.

On Thursday, the House passed its version of the reauthorization bill 257-171, just hours after reports of new terrorist attacks in Britain. The Senate is debating its own version.

The House bill makes permanent 14 of the 16 provisions and extends two others for 10 years. Those two involve roving wiretaps and the searches of library and medical records. ([Full story](#))

The Patriot Act -- which was part of Congress' response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 -- allowed expanded surveillance of terror suspects, increased use of material witness warrants to hold suspects incommunicado and permitted secret proceedings in immigration cases.

Gonzales praised the act, saying it has been instrumental in detecting and deterring terrorist acts and in allowing the law enforcement community and intelligence communities to share information.

Some of its provisions, however, have aroused civil liberties concerns among liberals and conservatives.

Gonzales said the Justice Department might be amenable to changes to the provision that allows authorities to seek business records, including those of public libraries.

"I'm as concerned about the privacy of American citizens as anyone, but we cannot allow libraries and use of libraries to become safe havens for terrorists," Gonzales said.

"To take it [the library provision] away as a tool for law enforcement, I think would be counterproductive and would make America less safe," he said.

Gonzales said would be open to changes that would clarify the "relevant standard" in seeking a court order for library records in a terrorism investigation.

He also said he is open to changes that would allow business owners to consult with an attorney and challenge in court an order seeking their records.

"But we can't have a situation where we provide a blanket safe haven for terrorists, that they can go to a library computer and communicate with their colleagues.

"It's absolutely essential that we have the ability to go after records that are related to a terrorism investigation," he said.

"We have no interest in perusing the library records of average Americans," Gonzales said.

"We do, however, feel an obligation and a need to be able to go after information that may be related to ongoing terrorism activities."

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