



**ACLU**

**AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION**

**>> ORGANIZER TOOL KIT >>**

[www.aclu.org/safeandfree](http://www.aclu.org/safeandfree)

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# Civil Liberties Under Attack

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks presented our country and its leaders with a profound challenge — keeping America both safe *and* free. Unfortunately, the Bush administration's response to 9/11, led by Attorney General John Ashcroft, has threatened freedom in America in three profoundly disturbing ways:

- >> By focusing suspicion on groups or individuals, based on religion or national origin alone;
- >> By demanding virtually unchecked authority to snoop and spy on law-abiding Americans not suspected of any crime; and
- >> By shutting down dissent and due process with strategies ranging from secret hearings and detentions, to open disregard of the courts.

Security does not have to come at the expense of freedom, justice, tolerance and equality. To stop the Bush administration from further trampling our Constitutional rights, we need to have our voices heard through legislative pressure and legal action.

*“To those who pit Americans against immigrants, and citizens against non-citizens; to those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty; my message is this: Your tactics only aid terrorists — for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve.”*

*U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
December 6, 2001*

# The USA PATRIOT Act: A Threat to Your Personal Privacy

Soon after the tragic September 11 terrorist attacks, Attorney General John Ashcroft sent to Congress a proposal containing the Justice Department's wish list for increased police powers, with little or no judicial oversight. After intense pressure from the Bush administration and little debate, Congress passed a far-reaching law — the USA PATRIOT Act — handing Ashcroft virtually all the surveillance tools he wanted and several more he had not requested.

The USA PATRIOT Act threatens rights to personal privacy guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights by allowing for increased governmental surveillance.

If you did not realize that the USA PATRIOT Act gave the federal government expanded power to invade your privacy, imprison people without due process and punish individuals for exercising their First Amendment rights, you are not alone. The books you read, Web sites you've visited or a letter to the editor you've written can trigger a federal government surveillance of your financial records, medical history, Internet usage, bookstore purchases, library usage, travel patterns or any other activity that leaves a record, all without your knowledge.

**Even if you are not suspected of a crime, it is now legal for the federal government to:**

- >> Break into your home when you are away, conduct a search and keep you from finding out for days, weeks and even months that a warrant was ever issued.
- >> Get the courts to rubberstamp its demands for information about the books you read and the materials that you borrow from the library, and prevent librarians from ever telling you.
- >> Obtain credit reports and other sensitive information without judicial approval and without your consent.

# “Unpatriotic” Activity: Promoting a Climate of Fear and Intolerance

In addition to increased governmental intrusion into our private lives, we are living in a climate where fear, not values, governs our lives. From Capitol Hill to small towns across America, refusal to conform is being attacked and labeled as “unpatriotic.”

- >> Former White House spokesperson Ari Fleischer warned Americans to “watch what they say.” And conservative commentators like Bill O’Reilly suggested prosecuting war protesters as “enemies of the state.”
- >> People brandishing anti-war signs and slogans have been turned away from public areas, such as commuter trains in Seattle and suburban shopping malls in upstate New York.
- >> Country music stations stopped playing Dixie Chicks songs, and CD burning events have been staged after Natalie Maines, one of the singers in the trio, told a concert crowd in London, “Just so you know, we’re ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas.”
- >> During presidential appearances, the Bush administration has herded protesters out of sight into “designated protest zones.” When President Bush made a Labor Day visit to Pittsburgh in 2002, people with pro-Bush signs lined the streets while police, under what they said were orders from the Secret Service, moved dissenters one-third of a mile away. People who refused to be moved were arrested.

# What We Can Accomplish Together: Civil Liberties Success Stories

By joining together — educating, organizing and taking action — we can make a difference.

- >> More than 140 communities, representing over 17 million Americans, and three states (Alaska, Hawaii and Vermont) have adopted resolutions affirming citizens' free speech, privacy and due process rights.
- >> The California Police Chiefs Association and police departments from Detroit to Austin have also come out publicly against a blurring of the lines between federal and local law enforcement. Many have bravely risked their shares of a promised \$1.5 billion in federal anti-terrorism funds — for fear of jeopardizing their primary, crime-fighting roles in immigrant communities.
- >> Libraries from Buffalo to Santa Cruz have posted signs to warn patrons that records of the materials they view and borrow may wind up in the hands of federal agents. Some are shredding library records, in an effort to preserve patrons' privacy.
- >> As the Bush administration prepared to take military action in Iraq, a coalition of Chicago-area legal organizations, assembled by the ACLU of Illinois, mobilized volunteer lawyers to offer free legal services for Iraqi Americans and Iraqi immigrants designated for questioning by the U.S. Department of Justice.

# Join the ACLU's KEEP AMERICA SAFE AND FREE Campaign

Americans of all backgrounds are increasingly concerned about the intrusion by the federal government into their private lives, and are participating in Keep America Safe and Free: The ACLU Campaign to Defend the Constitution in an effort to:

- >> Put an end to federal government spying on political and religious activities;
- >> Repeal the anti-civil liberties provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act; and
- >> Protect privacy by limiting surveillance, data collection and information sharing.

While proponents of laws like the USA PATRIOT Act would have you believe that questioning and criticizing this Act and other forms of governmental intrusion is unpatriotic — you know just the opposite to be true.

Being a patriot means being governed by our values, not our fears, and defending the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Now more than ever, we must spread the word about the current threat to our civil liberties and the need to safeguard both our safety *and* our freedom.

# Host a KEEP AMERICA SAFE AND FREE House Party

The Keep America Safe and Free Tool Kit contains information and resources to help you educate, inspire and activate your community, friends, family, co-workers and neighbors.

Use this kit to host a house party or other gathering and get the word out to 10 people who share your concerns, but need the facts and the tools to get involved.

## Here are five easy steps:

**Invite.** Use the enclosed postcards, call or email people who you believe will be interested and concerned about increased federal government surveillance and personal privacy violations in your community.

**Educate.** Talk about the current threats to personal privacy under the USA PATRIOT Act, concentrating on the places within your community where the threat may be greatest by circulating and discussing the Personal Privacy Checklist.

**Pledge.** Ask the individuals in your group to take the pledge to protect and preserve the Constitution and Bill of Rights by signing and carrying a Bill of Rights wallet card.

**Join.** Ask your guests to join the ACLU Action Network by signing up at your event or going online to: [www.aclu.org/action](http://www.aclu.org/action)

**Take Action.** Identify at least one action to take now — such as agreeing to meet once a month to share personal stories, meeting with your local library to investigate federal surveillance under the USA PATRIOT Act or organizing around the passage of a local resolution affirming free speech, privacy and due process rights.

## Connect Online to the KEEP AMERICA SAFE AND FREE Campaign Web Site

The ACLU has created a Keep America Safe and Free Campaign Web site, with a special section designed specifically for you — the Safe and Free Campaign community organizer. This site is a way for you to stay up to date on the issues, get the latest on organizing ideas and activities and learn about what is going on in communities across the country. Check it out at: [www.aclu.org/safeandfree](http://www.aclu.org/safeandfree)

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