

South Florida Congressman Allen West, a retired Army colonel who served in Iraq, opposed extension of the Patriot Act, legislation that allows wiretapping and other enforcement powers to secure the homeland from terrorists.

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"I am not fully convinced that by extending these provisions for four years we would be any safer, but instead I fear they may only give us the illusion of being safer," West, a Republican from Plantation, told his colleagues.

The House and Senate approved the extension, and President Obama signed it into law late Thursday.

West's opposition reflects the growing unease by an unusual combination of conservatives and liberals who are concerned about the government's power to investigate citizens and foreigners in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attack.

West has asked FBI Director Robert Mueller to clarify how many times these provisions have been used on citizens and non-citizens, how many were convicted or investigated, how many were released without being charged and "what intelligence, if anything, came from these instances."

"There is a constant struggle between liberty and safety," West said, "and it is a principle that I am prepared to balance as a congressman of the United States."