

# White House seeks to maintain Patriot Act

*A spending bill that could weaken reach of the USA Patriot Act may be vetoed*

ALAN FRAM  
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WASHINGTON — The White House threatened Wednesday to veto a wide-ranging spending bill if the House uses it to weaken the USA Patriot Act, raising the prospect of an election-year fight over President Bush's quest for expanded powers to counter terrorists.

The warning came as Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., prepared to try amending the spending measure with a provision making it harder for the government to order libraries or book sellers to provide records to investigators. The vote seemed

likely to occur Thursday.

The USA Patriot Act, passed in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, strengthened the government's surveillance and detention powers. Bush has since tried to expand its reach, but the bill has been criticized by Democrats and conservative Republicans for going too far.

Sanders was planning to offer his amendment to a bill providing \$39.8 billion next year for the departments of Commerce, Justice and State. That is \$2.2 billion more than this year's total and \$240 million beyond what Bush proposed for 2005.

In a memo to lawmakers, the White House budget office warned that if an amendment "that would weaken the USA Patriot Act were

adopted and presented to the president for his signature, the president's senior advisers would recommend a veto."

But Sanders — whose amendment has been supported by conservatives, including Rep. Butch Otter, R-Idaho — said it was wrong for the government to be able to demand information about the books that individuals purchase or borrow.

"That is not, I believe, what this country is about," Sanders said.

Sanders was trying to block a USA Patriot Act provision that lets investigators get court orders requiring book dealers, libraries or others to surrender records. The orders are issued by a special court that handles foreign surveillance intelligence cases, and are easier to obtain than

search warrants or subpoenas.

The Senate has yet to write its version of the bill.

By 281-137, the House voted to boost the Small Business Administration's budget by \$70 million, to \$742 million. The sponsors, Reps. Donald Manzullo, R-Ill., and Nydia Velazquez, D-N.Y., said they would use the money to head off increased federal borrowing fees that small business owners face this fall.

The sponsors took the money from other accounts in the bill, mostly Justice Department salaries and automation, despite arguments that the cuts would hinder homeland security efforts. The vote underscored the potency of one theme of the presumed Democratic presidential ticket, Sens. John Kerry of

Massachusetts and John Edwards of North Carolina: that the middle class faces an economic squeeze.

The bill also would:

- Bar federal investigators from giving civil courts the data they gather to trace whether guns have been used in crimes. The provision is designed to block New York City from obtaining records for its suit claiming gun manufacturers and dealers are using practices that let criminals get guns.

- Forbid the Justice Department from providing legal support for the use of torture by federal officials or government contractors, a reaction to the prisoner abuse at Iraq's Abu Ghraib facility.

Alan Fram is a writer for the Associated Press.

# Bush, Kerry among top 2 percent in U.S. income

*Some claim less wealthy candidates are less successful with voters*

BY GENARO C. ARMAS  
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WASHINGTON — Americans have a choice in November — they can vote for millionaires John Kerry and John Edwards, or cast their ballot for millionaires George W. Bush and Dick Cheney.

Of the foursome, Vice President Cheney and his wife, Lynne, reported adjusted gross income of \$1.3 million, according to their 2003 tax returns. That's more than the other candidates reported and far more than what the typical American family brings home: The median household income in 2002 was slightly

more than \$42,400, according to the Census Bureau. Only about 2 percent of homes make more than \$200,000.

Count the Bush, Kerry, Cheney and Edwards clans among those 2 percent.

Bush and his wife, Laura, listed \$822,126 in adjusted gross income on their 2003 returns, while Kerry's income was about \$393,000. The four-term Massachusetts senator has four trusts worth between \$430,000 and \$2.1 million.

The Democratic candidate filed his return separately from his wife, Teresa Heinz Kerry, heiress to the \$500 million Heinz Co. fortune. She released information showing earnings of at least \$5 million in 2003.

Bush, a former oil company executive, major league baseball owner and governor of Texas, lists among his assets

his beloved 1,583-acre Texas ranch, worth between \$1 million and \$5 million. He also has U.S. Treasury notes valued at \$5 million to \$8.7 million.

Cheney, who once headed the oil company Halliburton Co., has between \$15 million to \$75 million in tax-exempt bond funds and \$2 million to \$10 million in stocks being handled by a global investment management firm.

Edwards, the North Carolina senator and Kerry's running mate, hasn't released his 2003 returns. He did file a financial disclosure statement that's required of the president, vice president, Cabinet secretaries and members of Congress.

In the statement, Edwards disclosed income of at least \$680,000 last year, although that's a conservative estimate because lawmakers are allowed to list their income on disclosure forms in

broad financial ranges.

While those statements lack the specifics of a tax return, they do offer a glimpse into the personal wealth of politicians. The net worth of Bush, Cheney, Kerry and Edwards runs well into the millions.

Edwards, the son of a two mill worker, built most of his wealth as a highly successful trial attorney, winning \$150 million worth of verdicts or settlements in the 1990s. His financial statement shows assets of at least \$19 million. Last year, Edwards sold his Washington, D.C., home for \$3 million, \$800,000 more than what he paid for it in 1999.

Running for national political office takes millions and millions, so having millionaire candidates isn't unusual, Charles Lewis, executive director of the Center for Public Integrity, a nonpartisan watchdog group,

said Wednesday.

"Unfortunately, it's not," Lewis said. "It's a sad commentary on our system."

Lewis said a voter may instead consider how a candidate made their money, or in what profession, rather than if they are wealthy. He also noted that in this year's Democratic primaries, less wealthy candidates such as Rep. Dick Gephardt of Missouri and Al Sharpton weren't popular with voters.

Terry Madonna, a political scientist at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pa., said he didn't think the typical voter "sees (rich candidates) as hypocrisy or as inconsistent. For the voters that matter, they will look at positions and policies more than anything else."

Genaro C. Armas is a writer for the Associated Press.

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