



# Catholic Courier

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## Liberty and the law

### Varied groups criticize the Patriot Act

A group of strange political bedfellows believe a federal law designed to stop terror may also be destroying liberty.

That belief is shared by prominent pro-life and pro-choice advocates, environmentalists, gun-owners, Catholic peace protesters, Republicans, Democrats, Jews, Protestants and Muslims. In varying degrees, they have all criticized the USA Patriot Act, which stands for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism.

Passed with bipartisan congressional support little more than a month after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Patriot Act expanded the federal government's power to conduct searches, wiretaps, electronic and computer eavesdropping, and to access personal and business records. Among its hundreds of pages of

provisions, for example, the act allows the FBI to obtain secret warrants for books, records and other documents.

Such groups as the American Civil Liberties Union say the Patriot Act has helped to make some American citizens afraid to worship God publicly, take out certain books from the library or speak publicly on controversial issues. The fact that most such citizens are Muslims should be of no great comfort to the rest of the citizenry, the act's critics argue. Indeed, a few such advocates are even afraid the federal government could someday target all citizens' civil liberties under a military dictatorship that could have its seeds in the Patriot Act.

Those fears were fueled by the recent comments of U.S. Army General Tommy Franks, who led allied forces in the Iraq War last year. He speculated in a December 2003 interview with *Cigar Aficionado* magazine that the federal government

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Story by Rob Cullivan

