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ACLU Launches Latest “Safe *and* Free” Ads in Utah, Urges Senators to End Sneak and Peek Searches

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, September 17, 2003

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SALT LAKE CITY -- The American Civil Liberties Union has launched the latest installment in its advertising campaign to “Keep America Safe and Free,” running radio ads in Utah to educate the public about a controversial provision of the USA PATRIOT Act, and urging Utahns to contact their Senators to restore privacy rights.

“Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle and Americans of all political stripes are increasingly aware that the PATRIOT Act went too far, too fast.” said Dani Eyer, Executive Director of the ACLU of Utah. “The public needs to know what freedoms we lost under the PATRIOT Act, and how we can restore them. Senators Hatch and Bennett need to hear from Utah that we can, and must, be both safe *and* free.”

The radio advertisements, which are running this week, highlight how the PATRIOT Act and other government policies are eroding civil liberties. Specifically, the ads target section 213 of the PATRIOT Act, which authorized “sneak and peek” or delayed notification searches. Similar ads are running in New Hampshire, Colorado, Maine, Idaho, and Alaska.

Section 213 of the USA PATRIOT Act allows for law enforcement to enter residences and establishments, conduct searches, copy and seize records, and permits a delay in notification to the owner that a search has been conducted. The ACLU said that such powers violate the tradition of “knock and announce” around the issuance of warrants, and that the statute’s language would permit an indefinite delay in notification.

The PATRIOT Act has recently been under increased Congressional scrutiny and pressure. Last month, the House of Representatives adopted, on an overwhelming bipartisan majority, an amendment offered by Rep. C.L. "Butch" Otter (R-ID) prohibiting the implementation of these “sneak-and-peek” searches. Also in Congress, Sens. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) recently introduced a bill to narrow other sections of the law, and Sen. Russell Feingold (D-WI) sponsored a bill to roll back Section 215 of the PATRIOT Act. In the courts, the ACLU filed the first lawsuit against a section of the PATRIOT Act this past summer.

Across the United States, more than 162 communities – including three states – have adopted resolutions calling for a fix to troubling sections of the PATRIOT Act. Many contain language calling for the most controversial provisions of the PATRIOT Act to be brought back in line with American traditions.

“When the average citizen in Utah hears about these new powers,” Eyer added, “many realize that the PATRIOT Act is anything but patriotic.”

For more on the ACLU’s campaign to keep America Safe *and* Free, go to:
<http://www.aclu.org/safeandfree>