

More newspapers have editorialized recently in favor of the "Free Flow of Information Act" which would establish a federal media shield, including the *Indianapolis Star*:

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[Obama tightens leash on watchdogs](#)

Barack Obama during the presidential campaign last year promised that if elected he would endorse giving more protection to journalists who are threatened with imprisonment for not revealing the names of confidential sources of information.

Now that he's in the White House, Obama is on the verge of breaking that promise.

The Senate Judiciary Committee is scheduled to vote today on legislation that would grant federal protection not just to journalists but also their sources in cases where prosecutors use jail time as a hammer to shatter promises of anonymity.

The bill, with Indiana's Sen. Richard Lugar and Rep. Mike Pence among the authors, had until recently gained bipartisan support.

But Obama, apparently at the urging of the Justice Department, withdrew his endorsement of the legislation last week. The president is now pushing alterations that would make the legislation all but meaningless.

No one is arguing that journalists or their sources should be excused from testifying in all cases. In certain situations, lives may be stake or national security compromised to the point that it's

warranted to compel witnesses to come forward.

Under the House-passed version of the bill, judges would review whether the so-called "media shield" could be employed in a case. Prosecutors also would have to exhaust other avenues for information before turning to journalists to disclose sources. And the bill contains a balancing test by which courts would weigh the public's interest in aggressive newsgathering against the government's needs to safeguard the nation.

Obama wants to eliminate the balancing test in cases considered "significant" to national security. The government's concerns would in an ill-defined, possibly broad category of cases carry more weight than would the public's interest in having wrongdoing exposed.

The president's retrenchment on this issue is disappointing, and not just because it breaks a campaign promise. Obama, who was so critical of how his predecessor handled the buildup to the Iraq war and other issues surrounding national security, should understand the need for outside watchdogs who hold government leaders accountable. But now that he's in a position of power himself, Obama evidently has forgotten that principle.

Terre Haute Tribune-Star: "[Federal shield law needs to be passed, not weakened](#)"

Sounding eerily like its predecessor, the Obama White House now wants the Senate bill to be changed to allow its wishes - and words - to weigh more than the news media's before the judge ever hears the two sides. If the presidential administration in charge said, "This will (or already did) jeopardize national security," a judge would be bound to defer to that declaration without real argument or proof.

When the Bush administration was practicing this kind of unilateral stifling of information, Sen. Obama rightly disapproved. He may now deeply believe that his White House would never abuse such power - and it might not. But we don't know that anymore than we know what future administrations might do.

There is a reason such veteran legislators as Lugar and Pence - people who do not play fast

and loose with national security - have put their efforts into constructing this reasonable federal shield law. President Obama and his security advisers need to consider the history of this law and the intentions of the men and women who have crafted it and guided it through Congress. Sen. Obama was quite articulate on the subject.