July 25, 2005 Congress passed legislation last week that reauthorizes the Patriot Act for another 10 years, although the bill faced far more opposition than the original Act four years ago. I'm heartened that more members of Congress are listening to their constituents, who remain deeply skeptical about the Patriot Act and expansions of federal police power in general. They rightfully wonder why Congress is so focused on American citizens, while bin Laden and other terrorist leaders still have not been captured. The tired arguments we're hearing today are that same ones we heard in 2001 when the Patriot Act was passed in the emotional aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks. If the Patriot Act is constitutional and badly needed, as its proponents swear, why were sunset provisions included at all? If it's unconstitutional and pernicious, why not abolish it immediately? All of this nonsense about sunsets and reauthorizations merely distracts us from the real issue, which is personal liberty. America was not founded on a promise of security, it was founded on a promise of personal liberty to pursue happiness. One prominent Democratic opined on national television that "most of the 170 page Patriot Act is fine," but that it needs some fine tuning. He then stated that he opposed the ten-year reauthorization bill on the grounds that Americans should not have their constitutional rights put on hold for a decade. His party's proposal, however, was to reauthorize the Patriot Act for only four years, as though a shorter moratorium on constitutional rights would be acceptable! So much for the opposition party and its claim to stand for civil liberties. Unfortunately, some of my congressional colleagues referenced the recent London bombings during the debate, insinuating that opponents of the Patriot Act somehow would be responsible for a similar act here at home. I won't even dignify that slur with the response it deserves. Let's remember that London is the most heavily monitored city in the world, with surveillance cameras recording virtually all public activity in the city center. British police officials are not hampered by our 4th amendment nor our numerous due process requirements. In other words, they can act without any constitutional restrictions, just as supporters of the Patriot Act want our own police to act. Despite this they were not able to prevent the bombings, proving that even a wholesale surveillance society cannot be made completely safe against determined terrorists. Congress misses the irony entirely. The London bombings don't prove the need for the Patriot Act, they prove the folly of it. The Patriot Act, like every political issue, boils down to a simple choice: Should we expand government power, or reduce it? This is the fundamental political question of our day, but it's quickly forgotten by politicians who once promised to stand for smaller government. Most governments, including our own, tend to do what they can get away with rather than what the law allows them to do. All governments seek to increase their power over the people they govern, whether we want to recognize it or not. The Patriot Act is a vivid example of this. Constitutions and laws don't keep government power in check; only a vigilant populace can do that.