



Written by [Wallis W. Wood](#) on July 26, 2013

Edward Snowden: Traitor or Hero?

In today's column, I'm going to share an extraordinary email exchange between a former U.S. Senator and Edward Snowden, the infamous betrayer of Washington secrets. I think I can promise that it will cause you to look at this controversy in a whole new way.

By now, you can almost feel a bit sorry for Snowden, the whistle-blower extraordinaire who has been forced to remain in the transit area of Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport for more than a month. I've been stuck at a lot of different airports over the years, and it was never fun. And none of them, thank God, was in Russia.



Now comes word that the Russian authorities will finally permit Snowden to leave the airport while they consider his application for asylum. I have no idea why it took so long. Like bureaucracies everywhere, the ones in Moscow apparently move at their own glacial pace.

So what do you think? Is Snowden a traitorous dog who deserves the harshest penalties the United States can impose on him (if U.S. authorities can ever get their hands on him, that is)?

Or is he an authentic American hero who sacrificed a comfortable life to bring us the truth about how far our government has gone to snoop on all of us? Even the members of the intelligence committees in Congress, who supposedly knew all about the secretive surveillance being carried out by the National Security Agency and other government watchdogs, say they have been shocked to learn of the extent of what was going on.

Two weeks ago, I had the opportunity to ask more than 1,000 liberty lovers what they thought of Snowden. I was the master of ceremonies at something called FreedomFest, an annual conference that describes itself as "the world's largest gathering of free minds." Most of the attendees would probably describe themselves as libertarians, although traditional conservatives were certainly well-represented, both in the audience and at the podium.

When I asked the audience for their opinion of Snowden and what he did, I expected them to be fairly evenly divided. It was not even close. Fewer than 10 percent raised their hands when I asked if they thought he should be prosecuted for revealing state secrets. The overwhelming majority — by a rough estimate, more than 85 percent of the audience — said he deserved our praise and thanks for helping to expose what one speaker referred to as "the surveillance state."

Shortly after returning home, I received a fascinating email exchange between Snowden and a former politician I remember fondly. Gordon J. Humphrey was a two-term Senator from New Hampshire. Here is the message he sent Snowden, via Glen Greenwald, the writer for [The Guardian](#) in London who broke the story of Snowden's incredible disclosures:

Mr. Snowden,



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Provided you have not leaked information that would put in harms [sic] way any intelligence agent, I believe you have done the right thing in exposing what I regard as massive violation of the United States Constitution.

Having served in the United States Senate for twelve years as a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, the Armed Services Committee and the Judiciary Committee, I think I have a good grounding to reach my conclusion.

I wish you well in your efforts to secure asylum and encourage you to persevere.

Kindly acknowledge this message, so that I will know it reached you.

Regards,

Gordon J. Humphrey

Former United States Senator

New Hampshire

Humphrey received the following email from Snowden. Its authenticity was also confirmed by Greenwald.

Mr. Humphrey,

Thank you for your words of support. I only wish more of our lawmakers shared your principles — the actions I've taken would not have been necessary.

The media has distorted my actions and intentions to distract from the substance of Constitutional violations and instead focus on personalities. It seems they believe every modern narrative requires a bad guy. Perhaps it does. Perhaps, in such times, loving one's country means being hated by its government.

If history proves that be so, I will not shy from that hatred. I will not hesitate to wear those charges of villainy for the rest of my life as a civic duty, allowing those governing few who dared not do so themselves to use me as an excuse to right these wrongs.

My intention, which I outlined when this began, is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them. I remain committed to that. Though reporters and officials may never believe it, I have not provided any information that would harm our people — agent or not — and I have no intention to do so.

Further, no intelligence service — not even our own — has the capacity to compromise the secrets I continue to protect. While it has not been reported in the media, one of my specializations was to teach our people at DIA how to keep such information from being compromised even in the highest threat counter-intelligence environments (i.e. China).

You may rest easy knowing I cannot be coerced into revealing that information, even under torture.

With my thanks for your service to the nation we both love,

Edward Snowden

So what do you think of that? When he talks about media distortions that are being done “to distract from the substance of Constitutional violations,” Snowden sounds like a columnist for *Personal Liberty Digest*, doesn't he?



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And when he wonders if “loving one’s country means being hated by its government,” he sounds like many of our readers.

Right now, there’s only one thing keeping me from coming down 100 percent on the side of “hero.” And that is the path Snowden has chosen to follow since those first incredible disclosures.

When the story first broke, I was impressed that this obscure contractor was willing to turn his life upside down to expose the truth about the NSA’s massive surveillance efforts. “Good for him,” was my first reaction. What an incredibly brave thing to do, I thought, knowing that he would immediately become the declared enemy of the most powerful government on Earth.

But it’s not civil disobedience if you’re not willing to face the consequences of your actions. I hoped that Snowden would come back to the United States and face his accusers in an open and public trial. Instead, he fled to China and then on to Russia — two countries that aren’t exactly known for a commitment to the freedom of their own citizens. And if he ever gets permission to leave Russia, he’s indicated that he might like to settle in Venezuela or Bolivia — two countries that are a lot closer to a “dictatorship of the proletariat” than anything resembling the Constitutional protections that we have long taken for granted.

What’s next? Anatoly Kucherena, Snowden’s Russian attorney, told [CNN](#): “As far as I know, he’s planning to stay in Russia to learn Russian culture, Russian language and (to) live here.” If he does, it won’t be anything like his life in Hawaii before all this happened, where Snowden himself said he lived in “paradise.”

Our government has asked Russia to extradite Snowden back to the United States, but it doesn’t sound like Russian President Vladimir Putin has any intention of granting that request. (There is no extradition treaty between the two countries.) Putin [has said](#) that Snowden will need to “stop his work aimed at harming our American partners” if he wants to remain in the country.

Meanwhile, both Venezuela and Bolivia have said they would be delighted to grant asylum to Snowden. And Nicaragua has said it would do so “if circumstances permit,” whatever that means.

Oh, and one more thing. When Greenwald contacted Humphrey, to confirm the authenticity of his original email, Humphrey expanded on what he wrote Snowden:

I object to the monumentally disproportionate campaign being waged by the U.S. Government against Edward Snowden, while no effort is being made to identify, remove from office and bring to justice those officials who have abused power, seriously and repeatedly violating the Constitution of the United States and the rights of millions of unsuspecting citizens.

Americans concerned about the growing arrogance of our government and its increasingly menacing nature should be working to help Mr. Snowden find asylum. Former Members of Congress, especially, should step forward and speak out.

Count me among those willing to speak out. I’d love to see us bring to justice those officials who have “abused power, seriously and repeatedly violating the Constitution of the United States.” Wouldn’t you?

In the meantime, I think we owe Snowden a huge “thank you” for what he’s done to expose the Big Brother surveillance taking place in what used to be the land of the free and the home of the brave. Now it seems we’re the not-so-free and the not-very-brave.

Until next time, keep some powder dry.



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