



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on June 2, 2011

## Did Rand Paul Really Say People Attending Radical Speeches Should Be Locked Up?

Asked by Hannity about racial profiling at airports, the Tea Party favorite and Republican maverick [said](#):

I'm not for profiling people on the color of their skin, or on their religion, but I would take into account where they've been traveling and perhaps, you might have to indirectly take into account whether or not they've been going to radical political speeches by religious leaders. It wouldn't be that they are Islamic. But if someone is attending speeches from someone who is promoting the violent overthrow of our government, that's really an offense that we should be going after — they should be deported or put in prison.



The last sentence of those remarks echoed across the blogosphere. Paul's remarks before and after the above quote were edited out by the left-wing ThinkProgress, which went into orbit over the remarks. Alex Seitz-Wald of ThinkProgress.org [ranted](#): "Paul's suggestion that people be imprisoned or deported for merely attending a political speech would be a fairly egregious violation on the First Amendment, not to mention due process. What if someone attended a radical speech as a curious bystander? Should they too be thrown in prison? And who defines what is considered so 'radical' that it is worth imprisonment?" ThinkProgress then [titled](#) its story in sensationalist terms, "Rand Paul, Supposed Defender Of Civil Liberties, Calls For Jailing People Who Attend 'Radical Political Speeches,'" and promoted it on its home page as "Rand Paul Wants to Criminalize Speech." Much of the political establishment subsequently launched into political attack mode. [MSNBC's \*The Last Word\*](#) and [Cenk Uygur of \*MSNBC Live\*](#) inveighed against this supposed danger to the First Amendment. So did the reliably leftist [Huffington Post](#). Even the usually reasonable civil libertarian Glenn Greenwald of Salon.com [claimed](#) that ThinkProgress had "rightly take[n] Sen. Rand Paul to task" for the remarks.

None of them paused to consider that Senator Paul may simply have misspoken during the interview. Nor did they consider the conversation surrounding the remarks. Immediately preceding the incendiary remarks, Senator Paul [explained](#) that he opposed massive government surveillance and power: "The Fort Hood shooting occurred with the Patriot Act, and so you have to ask yourself 'How did we fail?' And, for example, I would say the reason we failed in Fort Hood is, people who were mentioning that this man was either unstable or was radicalized to a radical form of Islam, people knew that. And that's why we need to target our resources toward people who would attack us and not spend time searching and patting down six-year-olds at the airport."

After the remarks, Paul [described](#) his attempts to exempt gun records from the provisions of the Patriot



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Act: "I don't want them looking at all 100 million gun records.... Let's say that we have 100,000 exchange students from the Middle East. I want to know where they are, how long they've been here, whether they've overstayed their welcome, whether they are in school. And I would rather devote resources to that than I would patting down six-year-old kids in the airport."

If Paul intended to propose that the federal government seek out people "going to radical political speeches" and put them in prison, that would be a clear attack against the [First Amendment](#) to the U.S. Constitution. But there's nothing in the context of Paul's conversation before or after the controversial remarks that indicates Senator Paul thinks mere attendance at a radical speech is cause for imprisonment. To the contrary, the context of the conversation was one of how to stop foreign political terrorists from entering the United States.

Had Paul been given the time to expand upon or clarify his statement, the last sentence of his quoted remarks in the Hannity interview may have imparted a different meaning. Consider that last sentence with the following insertions in brackets: "But if someone [an immigrant] is attending speeches from someone who is promoting the violent overthrow of our government, that's really an offense that we should be going after [i.e., not admit them to the United States] — they [terrorist risks] should be deported or put in prison [if they are already here and act upon the incitements to violence]." All sensible Americans oppose admitting immigrants who openly favor violence against our people and government, just as Americans favor imprisoning those who violently act on those sentiments. It should be stressed that Senator Paul did not add the bracketed material, though from the context of his interview with Hannity such an insertion would be a reasonable explanation of what he intended.

"It's amazing at how they take your words almost on a continual basis and twist them," Hannity [told](#) Paul during the same interview. That may be so, but in this case Senator Paul appears to have given them some ammunition for their attacks. Paul should definitely issue a clarification of his remarks if he wishes constitutionalists to continue considering him a champion of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

*Photo of Rand Paul: AP Images*



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