



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on January 16, 2017

Pardon Snowden Campaign Delivers Over One Million Signatures to Obama

With less than a week left of Obama's presidency, a coalition of organizations has collected more than a million signatures on a petition urging Obama to issue a full pardon to Edward Snowden, the whistle-blower who revealed the size and scope of the surveillance conducted by the NSA and other federal agencies. Snowden (shown) fled the country and has lived in exile in Russia since May of 2013. If pardoned, he could return to American soil a hero to many.



As this writer wrote for an article in the July 18, 2016 issue of the print version of *The New American*:

In May of 2013, a 29-year-old NSA data analyst shocked the world by leaking a trove of documents confirming what many had long suspected: U.S. government agencies routinely spy on everyone, including American citizens. Programs with names such as PRISM, MYSTIC, Boundless Informant, and Xkeyscore were — in direct violation of the Fourth Amendment's guarantee "against unreasonable searches and seizures" — intercepting everything from phone calls and texts to e-mails and browsing histories and everything in between from all Americans without anything that resembled probable cause or a warrant. Within days, Edward Snowden was one of the most talked about — and most wanted — men on the planet.

In the aftermath of those revelations, the myriad of three-letter agencies promised again and again to reform, only to be found playing a shell game with the American public. Each "reform" was, in reality, merely a re-branding that allowed the surveillance of the guilty and the innocent alike to continue and grow.

But, even while Snowden's disclosures [did not bring about the reform of the recalcitrant surveillance state](#), they did give rise to conversations about the proper role of government surveillance in relation to person liberty and national security. This led to increased demands by ordinary citizens who wanted to protect their privacy. In response to those increased demands, Apple announced in the summer of 2014 that — starting with iOS 8 — users' data, including data stored on the device such as e-mails, contacts, and photos, would be fully encrypted by default. Apple also said that the encryption process would happen on the device itself and that the company would not have access to the keys, meaning that Apple would not be able to access the encrypted data. Google followed suit early the next year by making better encryption available starting with Android 5.0. Since then, Google has implemented decryption by default. As a result, millions of Americans and others around the world have the ability to use encrypted devices to protect their communications and data.

As the scales tilted toward greater privacy as a result of Snowden's disclosures, the surveillance hawks attacked both Snowden and the [encryption tools his disclosures helped popularize](#), and demanded that he be brought back to the United States from Russia to stand trial for espionage. Snowden was



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stranded in Russia when the U.S. government canceled his passport as he was fleeing to “Ecuador via a safe route for the purposes of asylum,” according to WikiLeaks. He was later granted asylum in Russia, where he has lived since.

Perhaps calls for his return to the United States to stand trial seem reasonable to people who believe Snowden could get a fair trial. But considering the damage he did to the surveillance state and the rhetoric of some high-ranking surveillance hawks, a fair trial is not a likely prospect. In July of 2015, former U.S. Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.) said in a speech at the University of Georgia that Snowden should be publicly executed. “We need to hang him on the courthouse square as soon as we get our hands on him,” declared the recently retired senator. As this writer explained in an [article](#) at the time:

Chambliss retired from the Senate in January 2015 to pursue a lucrative career in lobbying. He is now on the payroll at DLA Piper. He also serves on several boards and is a sought-after speaker. Leaving the Senate will not likely lessen his influence over American politics.

His statement about Ed Snowden was made during the question-and-answer session after he had spoken to an audience at the University of Georgia Terry College of Business on July 16 as part of the school’s “Terry Third Thursday” series, which is sponsored by The Bank of North Georgia, the *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, and WABE-FM. His speech was titled, “Leadership Lessons from Capitol Hill.” As of the writing of this article, the University of Georgia (UGA) has not responded to multiple requests for a statement on Chambliss’ remarks. Chambliss is an alumnus of UGA.

The first question from the audience was about the [OPM hack that allowed China to steal sensitive information on over 21 million Americans](#). While answering the question, Chambliss went off point long enough to act as judge and jury and sentence Snowden to a public death.

“This is real and it’s going to be felt by lots of Americans. The worst part of it — not unlike the Snowden incident, which I hope none of you have sympathy for him because we need to hang him on the courthouse square as soon as we get our hands on him — but just like with Snowden, we’re going to lose American lives as a result of this breach,” he said.

Conspicuously absent from the former senator’s demand for Snowden’s death is any mention of a trial or due process. Chambliss said that Snowden should be hanged “as soon as we get our hands on him.” There is a word for that: lynching.

Chambliss is not alone in wanting to see Snowden dead. President-elect Donald Trump’s [pick for CIA director, Representative Mike Pompeo \(R-Kan.\)](#), has also called for Snowden to be killed. However, Pompeo would allow for a trial. [Last year on C-SPAN](#), he said:

He [Snowden] should be brought back from Russia and given due process, and I think that the proper outcome would be that he would be given a death sentence for having put friends of mine, friends of yours, in the military today, at enormous risk because of the information he stole and then released to foreign powers.

Trump’s picks for national security advisor, General Michael Flynn, and director of national intelligence, former Senator Dan Coats (R-Ind.), have similar regards for Snowden, as they are both confirmed members of the surveillance hawks club. Each has called him a traitor and said he deserves at least prison.

Considering the stakes, Snowden’s only two real options are to receive a full presidential pardon or stay



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put. While the surveillance hawks have called Snowden a traitor, a criminal, and an accessory to terrorism, those who value privacy and liberty have instead considered him a patriot. One thing is almost certain: Had there never been an Edward Snowden, there would not likely have been any increased interest in the day-to-day use of encryption for average citizens. That interest was a direct result of — a reasonable reaction to — the heavy-handed spying to which those average citizens were subjected at the hands of agents of their own government.

While there is certainly no guarantee that President Obama will issue a pardon, outgoing presidents customarily spend their waning days in the Oval Office signing pardons no one would have expected. To that end, the [PardonSnowden.org](#) campaign has spent months collecting signatures for a petition to urge Obama to issue a pardon to the man who blew the whistle on the unconstitutional and illegal action of the surveillance state operated by the intelligence community. According to an e-mail blast and press release, the coalition behind the campaign — which includes Amnesty International, the ACLU, and Human Rights Watch — said it has just “delivered a whopping 1,101,252 million signatures to President Barack Obama asking him to pardon whistleblower Edward Snowden before he leaves office on January 20.”

In response to the announcement, Snowden tweeted, “The world’s top human rights groups just delivered over one million signatures to Obama. For once, I have no words.” He followed that tweet with another, saying, “When I came forward, I expected to be alone.” He continued: “To have you with me — all these years later — is the greatest honor of my life.”

If the petition fails to sway President Obama, Snowden may have a long wait before any hope of another shot at a pardon. President-elect Trump is filling top intelligence posts with the same caliber of surveillance hawks as those in the Bush and Obama administrations. Those appointments are a sure sign that Snowden was right to disclose what he did because they indicate that the change that is needed will not come from within government — it must come from the people themselves. Millions of those people have chosen to protect their devices and communications with strong encryption, and more than a million of them are asking President Obama to pardon the man who made them aware of the size and scope of the spying.



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