

White House rejects petition for Snowden pardon signed by 168,000

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30 July 2015

The Obama White House has rebuffed a petition signed by almost 168,000 people demanding “a full, free, and absolute pardon” for NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

The petition on whitehouse.gov had surpassed the 100,000 signatures required by the White House for a response in June 2013, over two years ago. It declared “Edward Snowden is a national hero and should immediately be issued a full, free, and absolute pardon for any crimes he has committed or may have committed related to blowing the whistle on secret NSA surveillance programs.”

The Obama administration studiously ignored the petition, which collected 100,000 signatures in only 15 days. While it was stalling for two years, another 68,000 people added their support.

No doubt the administration feared the immense response by working Americans to the increasingly disturbing NSA revelations, which include metadata retention, voice-to-text programs, facial recognition software and the use of surveillance data to guide drone strikes.

The arrogant response by Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Lisa Monaco on July 28 exposes the Obama administration claims to be “the most transparent administration in history.”

In it, Monaco repeats the unsubstantiated lie that “Snowden’s dangerous decision to steal and disclose classified information had severe consequences for the security of our country and the people who work day in and day out to protect it.” This claim flies in the face of reality, and journalists and analysts have exposed it time and time again.

Moreover, Snowden did not actually “disclose” any documents. Instead, he turned them over to a group of

journalists from several news organizations, including the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post*, who then published the revelations about NSA. The White House would rather not dwell on this, since the logical result of Monaco’s comment is to arrest and prosecute the journalists and the publications they worked for. *New York Times* journalist James Risen has already called the Obama administration “the greatest enemy of press freedom that we have encountered in at least a generation.”

Monaco also repeats the tired canard that Snowden should “accept the consequences of his actions ... not hide behind the cover of an authoritarian regime [Russia].” It was the Obama administration itself that stranded Snowden at the Moscow airport by revoking his passport as he attempted to fly to South America.

Snowden has repeatedly stated that he would return to the United States if he were able to present a whistleblowing defense at his trial. Under the 1917 Espionage Act, however, Snowden would be unable to argue that his leaks were justified because the NSA spying was illegal and unconstitutional and the American public had a right to know about it.

One signatory remarked on Twitter, “Man, the White House’s response to the Snowden petition I signed some time back is remarkably pathetic.”

The scale of ordinary people’s response to the Snowden revelations is demonstrated not only in the number of signatories but also in their distribution. Many signatories listed their cities, which ranged from Rochester, New York (where the petition’s creator lived in 2013) to Piedmont, South Carolina; Central City, Iowa and Portland, Oregon.

In other words, people from every region of the United States expressed their belief that, because of his heroism in exposing a conspiracy to unconstitutionally

spy on and lie to the American people, Snowden should be pardoned.

The general response of the Obama administration to petitions on whitehouse.gov has been a combination of dismissiveness and contempt.

Despite over 27 million signatures by 19.5 million registered users—with the largest number of petitions dealing with civil rights and liberties and human rights, according to the administration’s data—many petitions have been ignored. When the administration answered the Snowden petition on July 28 it also issued answers to 19 other long-neglected petitions.

These included non-answers and evasions on petitions advocating the federal prosecution of police officers Darren Wilson and Peter Liang for the killings of Michael Brown and Akai Gurley, respectively. The White House also endorsed a vague “update” to the Electronic Communications Privacy Act in response to a petition entitled “Reform ECPA: Tell the Government to Get a Warrant.” The word “warrant” is not to be found in the reply.

The entire political establishment, including its supposed “left” wing, has lined up against Snowden. MSNBC host Melissa Harris-Perry, voice practically dripping with contempt, asked Snowden to “come on home, Ed.” Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, Clinton’s supposedly “socialist” rival for the Democratic nomination, has said that “there is no debate that Mr. Snowden violated an oath and committed a crime” and has called only for “some form of clemency or a plea agreement that would spare him a long prison sentence or permanent exile”—in other words, jail Snowden, but not forever.



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