

Fund drive to pay Chelsea Manning's court fines raises \$267,000 in two days

Kevin Reed
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Within two days of launching a fundraising campaign, supporters of Chelsea Manning reached their goal of \$257,000 to pay the fines imposed on the courageous whistleblower by a US federal court for refusing to testify before a secret grand jury impaneled against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Manning was released from jail on Thursday, March 12 after a year of incarceration.

Nearly 7,000 contributions of between \$5 and \$10,000 were made by donors to a campaign organized by Manning's friend Kelly Wright on the crowdfunding website GoFundMe. Concluding the campaign with \$267,000 at 8 p.m. on Saturday evening, Wright wrote, "WE MET OUR GOAL! Thanks everyone who donated and shared! Seriously we are so immensely grateful for the resounding support and solidarity."

Wright immediately proceeded to organize a second GoFundMe campaign to raise \$30,000 for Manning's living expenses. As of this writing, the additional campaign had reached more than \$39,000 from 998 contributors within 24 hours.

The outpouring of financial assistance for Manning demonstrates the widespread public support for the principled stand taken by the former Army intelligence analyst. Manning has steadfastly stood up against both the US military—by sharing with WikiLeaks in 2010 proof of American war crimes in the Middle East—and her subsequent persecution by the American political and judicial establishment over the past decade.

Manning was released from jail one day after she attempted suicide. On Wednesday, authorities reported—and her attorney Moira Meltzer-Cohen confirmed—that Manning was found unconscious in her cell and was taken to a hospital where she was in stable condition. The next day, Judge Anthony J. Trenga of

the US Eastern District of Virginia issued an order for Manning's immediate release on the grounds that the grand jury was dismissed and her testimony "is no longer needed, in light of which her detention no longer serves a coercive purpose," not mentioning that her life was threatened by continued incarceration.

In March 2019, Manning was sent to jail by Judge Trenga for 63 days and then again in May for the balance of the past year for refusing to testify before two secret federal grand juries. The purpose of the grand juries—which was leaked to the press but never officially acknowledged by the court—was to gather "evidence" in the ongoing frame-up and attempted extradition of Assange from London to the US.

As both judicial experts and her legal team have repeatedly argued, Manning's imprisonment for contempt was a violation of her fundamental rights. According to US statutes, the purpose of jailing a witness on a contempt citation is to compel them to testify. Once it becomes clear that "the coercive purpose" of the contempt order is not going to force cooperation, the witness is to be released. Otherwise, coercion is transformed into punishment and persecution.

From day one of her ordeal with Judge Trenga, Manning made it clear that she would not cooperate with the grand jury. Before being jailed the first time on March 8, 2019, Manning told the press, "In solidarity with many activists facing the odds, I will stand by my principles. I will exhaust every legal remedy available. My legal team continues to challenge the secrecy of these proceedings, and I am prepared to face the consequences of my refusal."

Manning never wavered in her stance and she repeated again and again over the past year, including in numerous written statements to the court, that she

would not testify. In the days after Assange was charged with violating the Espionage Act, Manning's team filed a motion for her release on May 30, 2019 to which she submitted a letter that said, "I refuse to participate in a process that has clearly transformed into something that violates the spirit if not the letter of the law. I object to this grand jury in particular as an effort to frighten journalists and publishers, who serve a crucial public good."

Assange, whose life is also in danger from prolonged confinement and persecution by the US and UK governments, is facing the resumption of his extradition hearing in London on May 18 at Westminster Magistrate's Court. In the first part of this hearing on February 24, Assange's rights were repeatedly violated as he was handcuffed 11 times, stripped naked twice and kept inside a glass box in the courtroom away from his lawyers.

The effort to railroad Assange into US custody, where he cannot receive a fair trial, is an attempt to punish the WikiLeaks journalist for publishing information and documents of the greatest public importance. It is due to the fact that Assange and WikiLeaks stood for the principles of journalism and published the documents that were released by whistleblower Manning that the people of the world have evidence of significant war crimes committed by the US and its allies in the first decade of the 21st century.

A measure of the thuggish modus operandi of Judge Trenga against Manning is evident in the way that he imposed court fines upon her. On May 17, 2019, when she was being returned to jail after one week of freedom with the convening of the second grand jury, Manning said to reporters outside the courtroom, "I will not cooperate with this or any other grand jury." Judge Trenga responded by ordering that Manning be fined \$500 per day for 30 days and \$1,000 per day thereafter.

Manning taking a stand for her principles over personal interest has resonated with the public all over the world and is behind the outpouring of financial support to cover her fines and living expenses. Likewise, it is precisely Manning's self-sacrifice and determination that has earned the hatred and brutal treatment by the US government.

The response to the GoFundMe campaign over the past few days was similar to the one launched

following Manning's release from Fort Leavenworth Disciplinary Barracks, where she had been abused and held in solitary confinement for more than six years, in May 2017. Upon her release, Manning was called a traitor by Donald Trump and other political and military figures claimed without substantiation that she "put American lives at risk" through her exposures.

Despite the attempts at vilification, which was magnified by the corporate media, that fund drive showed significant public support for Manning and raised more than \$175,000 from 4,200 contributors within three months.



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