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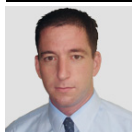
ON SECURITY AND LIBERTY



Sen. Ron Wyden: NSA 'repeatedly deceived the American people'

About the Snowden disclosures, the Oregon Democrat told the NSA chief: 'the truth always manages to come out'

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Glenn Greenwald
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James Clapper decried the release of the information and said media reports about it have been inaccurate Photograph: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

(updated below)

The Senate Intelligence Committee yesterday held a hearing, ostensibly to investigate various issues raised about the NSA's activities. What the hearing primarily achieved instead was to underscore what a farce the notion of Congressional oversight over the NSA is.

In particular, the current chair of the Senate Committee created in the mid-1970s to oversee the intelligence community just so happens to be one of the nation's most steadfast and blind loyalists of and apologists for the National Security State: Dianne Feinstein. For years she has abused her position to shield and defend the NSA and related agencies rather than provide any meaningful oversight over it, which is a primary reason why it has grown into such an out-of-control and totally unaccountable behemoth.

Underscoring the purpose of yesterday's hearing (and the purpose of Feinstein's Committee more broadly): the witnesses the Committee first heard from were all Obama officials - Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, NSA chief Gen. Keith Alexander, Deputy Attorney James Cole - who vehemently defended every aspect of the NSA. At the conclusion of their testimony, Feinstein announced that it was very, very important to hear from the two non-governmental witnesses the Committee had invited: virulent NSA defender Ben Wittes of the Brookings Institution and virulent NSA defender Timothy Edgar, a former Obama national security official. Hearing only from dedicated NSA apologists as witnesses: that's "oversight" for Dianne Feinstein and her oversight Committee.

Democratic Sen. Mark Warner stated the obvious to Gen. Alexander: "a lot of Americans have lost trust in what you're doing." But of course they all spent the entire afternoon blaming Snowden and "the media" for this development rather than taking any responsibility themselves. The very idea that meaningful reform of the NSA will come out of this annexed, captured, corrupted Committee is ludicrous on its face.

But there are two members of that Committee who actually do take seriously its oversight mandate: Democrats Ron Wyden and Mark Udall. Those two spent years publicly winking and hinting that the NSA under President Obama was engaged in all sorts of radical and abusive domestic surveillance (although - despite the absolute immunity protection they enjoy as Senators under the Constitution - they took no action, and instead waited for Edward Snowden (who had no such immunity) to bravely step up and reveal to the American people specifically what these two Senators kept hinting at).

Wyden spoke yesterday for 6 minutes - part of it as monologue and part of it questioning Gen. Alexander - and it's really worth watching the video, embedded below. The Oregon Democrat condemned what he called "the intrusive, constitutionally flawed surveillance system" the NSA built. About Snowden's whistleblowing, he said that NSA officials should have known from "a quick read of history, in America, the truth always managed to come out." And his primary point was this: **"the leadership of NSA built an intelligence collection system that repeatedly deceived the**

American people."

Indeed, if I had to pick the single most revealing aspect of this entire NSA scandal - and there are many revealing ones about many different realms - it would be that James Clapper lied to the faces of the Senate Intelligence Committee about core NSA matters, and not only was he not prosecuted for that felony, but he did not even lose his job, and continues to be treated with great reverence by the very Committee which he deliberately deceived. That one fact tells you all you need to know about how official Washington functions.

Related issues

This is an insightful, and quite hilarious, Op-ed in the New York Times this morning by the Brazilian journalist Vanessa Barbara about how Brazilians are using humor to mock and subvert the NSA's surveillance schemes.

Finally, in case there are any people left who thought that exploiting Terrorism and fear-mongering over it for power was a unique by-product of the Bush era (and really: could there really be any people left who believe that at this point?), Gen. Alexander this week "warned that if Congress hampers the NSA's ability to gather information, it could allow for terrorist attacks in the United States similar to last week's massacre in a mall in Nairobi, Kenya", while Feinstein's deputy Chair, GOP Sen. Saxby Chambliss (who revealingly sounds like every Democratic NSA defender I ever hear) said that the recent NSA disclosures "caused huge damage to the US" and "would ultimately claim lives."

UPDATE

Anyone who has any interest in understanding how the US media works: please read this article about what Seymour Hersh said in a speech yesterday regarding government-subservient, "chicken shit" US journalists, editors and media outlets. It is hard to put into words just how comprehensively accurate his remarks are.

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