

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1604



March 6, 2014

SXSW, LLC
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Austin, Texas 78768

To the Organizers of SXSW:

I share your passion for educating the American public on the intersection of civil liberties and technology, but I am deeply troubled to learn that you have invited Edward Snowden to address SXSW on privacy, surveillance, and online monitoring in the United States. Certainly an organization of your caliber can attract experts on these topics with knowledge superior to a man who was hired as a systems administrator and whose only apparent qualification is his willingness to steal from his own government and then flee to that beacon of First Amendment freedoms, the Russia of Vladimir Putin.

Mr. Snowden's appearance would stamp the imprimatur of your fine organization on a man who ill deserves such accolades. Rewarding Mr. Snowden's behavior in this way encourages the very lawlessness he exhibited. Such lawlessness—and the ongoing intentional distortion of truth that he and his media enablers have engaged in since the release of these documents—undermines the very fairness and freedom that SXSW and the ACLU purport to foster. I strongly urge you to withdraw this invitation.

In case you did not have access to the full facts in making your initial decision to extend your invitation, I want to call a few undisputed facts about the actions taken by Mr. Snowden to your attention:

- **The overwhelming majority of the materials stolen had nothing to do with the privacy of U.S. persons**

Only a tiny sliver of the materials stolen by Mr. Snowden had anything to do with United States telecommunications or the privacy rights of Americans. Rather, the majority of the material taken, now in the hands of other countries, provides detailed information about America's intelligence sources and methods. By divulging this information, Mr. Snowden has put the lives of our soldiers, sailors and airmen at risk—in addition to the lives of the people who will attend your conference.

- **Mr. Snowden cares more about personal fame than personal privacy**

Mr. Snowden's continued pursuit of the limelight has little to do with online privacy and everything to do with ensuring that he stays in the good graces of his new home nation. Once he stops doing interviews attacking America's ability to collect intelligence lawfully, he stops being useful to the Kremlin. This helps to explain why, since arriving in Moscow, he has yet to say a

single word about the number of political dissidents jailed in Russia or about Russia's suspected state-sponsored cyber-attacks against other countries and private entities.

- **Mr. Snowden gives real whistleblowers a bad name**

Mr. Snowden had—and was fully aware of—multiple opportunities to correct what he perceived as unlawful practices, but he chose not to go to his superior, to Congress, to the Inspector General, or to anyone save for Russia and Team Greenwald. This fact proves that his goal was not to fix what he saw as wrong, but rather to inflict harm upon the very nation that provided him with the rights he chose not to exercise. He is no more a whistleblower than were Alger Hiss, the Rosenbergs, or Benedict Arnold.

When I served in the Army along the Iron Curtain we had a word for a person who absconds with information and provides it to another nation: traitor. We also had a name for a person who chooses to reveal secrets he had personally promised to protect: common criminal. Mr. Snowden is both a traitor and a common criminal.

While reasonable people can and should disagree on major policy issues in a free society, Mr. Snowden has, through his own actions, demonstrated he has no interest in contributing to a free society, choosing instead to live in Russia—a country in which political dissidents are jailed and individual rights have not been respected since at least 1917. The ACLU, which is moderating this panel, would surely concede that freedom of expression for Mr. Snowden has declined since he departed American soil.

As the Russians work to reestablish their empire by seizing neighboring territory and aiding the bad actors of the world such as Syria's Bashar al-Assad and Hezbollah, they will no doubt take comfort in the ample information Mr. Snowden can provide them—information Mr. Snowden swore an oath to protect. Because of Mr. Snowden, our adversaries—terrorists and state actors alike—have access to our intelligence sources and methods. This security breach has degraded and will continue to hamper America's and our allies' efforts to fight terrorism, cybercrime, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Snowden has absconded with sensitive national security information that goes well beyond programs potentially related to privacy, yet the American press makes it sound as though he only sought to reveal a few NSA programs. Even more damning is his willingness to put American soldiers' lives at risk, as he may have revealed where our troops are stationed. Surely that privacy interest deserved respect too.

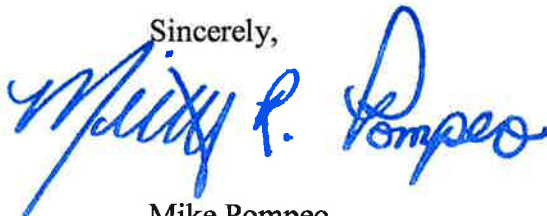
We must protect the very things that make America so special—most certainly including our civil liberties. But we cannot do so without strong national security *and* a thoughtful and informed discourse. This discourse is undermined when a music, film, and interactive conference and festival provides a venue to an at-large criminal who has refused extradition to answer for his crimes in court. His presence will not advance the debate; it will merely create a circus. Mr. Snowden doesn't need a softball interview. What Mr. Snowden needs is to present himself, in the finest tradition of American protest and courage, to a court of law that will adjudge his actions.

As your organization makes its decision about how best to exercise its cherished First Amendment freedoms, it may choose to proceed with granting Mr. Snowden this undeserved opportunity to pretend to speak for “the protection of American privacy.” If so, I hope you will at least do what no journalist has yet had the courage or competence to do and ask Mr. Snowden a few pertinent questions:

- If Mr. Snowden’s primary concern is American civil liberties, why did he also steal purely military secrets, both tactical and strategic, that have no relationship to the data collection he assertedly finds so appallingly inappropriate? What has he done with that material?
- What is Mr. Snowden’s relationship with Russia, financial or otherwise? Has he ever received money or other compensation from Russia, in cash or in-kind, and will he provide bank statements to support his answer to this question?
- Why, instead of going to the Inspector General at his agency or a Member of Congress, did Mr. Snowden go to Russia with several stolen laptops full of Americans’ data?
- If he believes he did the right thing, why is he not willing to come back to the U.S. to face the consequences for his actions?
- Why should the audience at SXSW find credible a man who broke his oaths and deliberately deceived not only his employer, but his country, in order to commit a theft?

Thank you for considering this request to withdraw your invitation to Edward Snowden. I would be happy to speak with you further about why I have made it, at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike R. Pompeo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mike Pompeo
Member of Congress