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John Brennan won. Did the meaning of America survive?

By: Nat Hentoff – March 20, 2013

Our continually hurtling media in all its forms makes it hard for memories to sustain past news shocks. How many Americans are bothered that the new head of the CIA, John Brennan — after many years of deep involvement there in the agency's torture policy, all documented by many reporters, including this one — is now tracking Americans for "association" with terrorists while continuing secret CIA "renditions"?

Old news.

And despite the tremendous national impact of Sen. Rand Paul's 13-hour filibuster speech, how much of its startling details even registered for long? Meanwhile, the Republican from Kentucky was teaching many of us what we never realized — on just how subservient we are becoming to the state.

As I wrote last week, Paul said he was concerned that Americans targeted for suspected terrorist ties would be destroyed in America itself. He revealed in an editorial in *The Washington Times*: "The president said, 'I haven't killed anyone yet, and I have no intention of killing Americans. But I might'" ("Rising in defense of the Constitution," Rand Paul, washingtontimes.com, March 8).

I have a complete transcript of Paul's 13-hour speech, including his follow-up to this presidential contempt for the separation of powers: "What if the president were to say, 'I haven't broken the First Amendment yet; I intend to follow it, but I might break it.'"

Later, Paul said: "Presidents, Republican and Democrats, believing in some sort of inherent power that's not listed anywhere ... For a hundred years or so, power's been gravitating to the president — and the executive branch."

And dig this from Rand Paul: "One of the complaints that you hear a lot of times in the media is about there is no bipartisanship in Congress. (But) if you look at people who don't really believe in much restraint of government as far as civil liberties, it really is on both sides."

So, "Republicans and Democrats (also) vote overwhelmingly against the Constitution giving Congress the power to declare war.

"The Constitution gave it to us (the people)," Paul emphasized, "but we are giving it back."

Also, on the question of bipartisanship, he adds: "The bipartisanship that we have now, which many in the media fail to understand, they see us not getting along on taxes and

on spending, but they fail to understand that on something very important, on whether an individual has a right not to be restrained indefinitely, there is quite a bit of partisanship, usually in the wrong direction.”

How about a Citizens’ Teacher of the Year Award to Rand Paul? Or at least something that gets teachers who know enough about constitutional rule of law to discuss his illumination of Americanism in their classrooms.

An awful lot keeps getting debated about Obamacare — in bars, restaurants, by hospital patients and among doctors — but during those 13 hours, Paul added this very troubling dimension to what is going to affect the health care of more and more of us, whether young or an octogenarian, as I am:

“When we passed Obamacare, it was 2,000-some-odd pages. There have been 9,000 pages of regulations written since. Obamacare had 1,800 references that the Secretary of Health shall decide at a later date. We (the people) gave up that power. We gave up power that should have been ours, that should have been written into the legislation. We gave up that power to the executive branch ... many of whom we call bureaucrats, unelected.”

Since some of those bureaucrats, who have never examined us as patients, will soon be telling us that our doctors’ treatment of us is too expensive, how angry are we at giving away our power to maybe live longer?

How many voting Americans know and care about this Rand Paul regeneration of the Constitution, as it can affect our very lives?

He told us: “Your government was given a few defined powers (by the Constitution), enumerated powers ... But your liberties are many ... When you read the Ninth and Tenth Amendments, it says that those rights not explicitly given to government are left to the states and the people. They’re yours, not to be disparaged.”

How many Americans are familiar with the Ninth and Tenth Amendments — or have read them at all?

Perhaps you remember this from a congressman to Paul during his 13-hour speech:

“They say the United States is the battlefield (against terrorism) now ... This battlefield being here at home means you don’t get due process at home ... Is that what we’re moving toward?”

Paul got more penetratingly specific: “The question is, if the government is going to decide who are sympathizers (with terrorists), and people who are politicians with no checks and balances are to decide who is a sympathizer, is there a danger really that people who have political dissent could be included in this?”

The answer is in the database records of the FBI and state and local police intelligence divisions.

The ACLU and other non-partisan civil liberties and human rights organizations should set up continuing debates around the country that are rooted in Paul’s revival of the Bill

of Rights and other now-somnolent parts of the Constitution.

But also, the growing number of active civics classes I've been reporting on in schools around the country should bring Paul into the lives and intentions of these students who are learning to be authentic, informed Americans.

And Rand Paul himself, in addition to now campaigning for the presidency in 2016, should start visiting schools and getting students to learn how this patriot suddenly regenerated American values that they can continue strengthening throughout their lives as citizens.