



Rand Paul and Edward Snowden Will Speak at the Same Conference This Weekend

By David Weigel

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On Saturday night, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul will give a video address to the International Students for Liberty Conference in downtown Washington, D.C. One night earlier, self-exiled whistleblower Edward Snowden -- who has a little less mobility inside the United States than Paul -- will address ISFL "via videoconference," according to organizers. Paul's consistently spoken out for Snowden, calling his actions "civil disobedience," and saying that if Snowden faced justice he should "share a jail cell" with Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. Not every potential 2016er could appear on the same virtual dais as Snowden. Paul will be right at home.

"There seems to be a generational divide in opinion on Snowden, with young people more broadly supportive of his conduct," says Alexander McCobin, the president of Students for Liberty. "I think it's largely a result of young people having a different worldview these days, one that emphasizes individual empowerment and skepticism of the efforts of long-established institutions reforming themselves." (Disclosure: McCobin interned at *Reason* magazine when I was a reporter there.)

Paul's appearance is as good a reason as any to explain the difference between the sort of libertarian youth groups that are giving him hope for a broader, larger GOP. *Students for*

Liberty was founded in February 2008 by McCobin, from an idea germinated in the Charles-Koch funded Institute for Humane Studies summer program. Young Americans for Liberty was founded roughly six months later, when Texas Rep. Ron Paul ended his campaign for president, and "Young Americans for Ron Paul" was re-branded. Both are 501(c)3 organizations; both are still run by the former students who founded them. (Jeff Frazee, a veteran of the 2008 and 2012 Ron Paul campaigns, is executive director of YAL.)

To outsiders, the groups sound nearly identical. They are not; they were born out of a schism between the Paul wing of libertarianism and the Koch wing. By and large, the libertarian donor class that seeded IHS, the Cato Institute, the Reason Foundation and similar institutions saw them as the way to popularize the philosophy. The Ron Paul movement, which is now basically called the "liberty movement," found that young people who were anti-war (be it on drugs or Iraq) were also natural readers of Mises and Hayek.

Divisions between the old generations of libertarians had been stark. The divisions between YAL and SFL are not. The groups are basically collaborative, with the difference that YAL is understood to be a permanent ally of Ron Paul's campaign, and SFL (with international partners) is not as political. YAL is co-sponsoring SFL's conference. Ron Paul fans sometimes share a meme of the congressman waving his arms amid neon lights and the tag "It's Happening!" SFL's promo material for the weekend, advertising an event with Paul and Judge Andrew Napolitano, winks at the meme.

Is there still some static? Of course there is. In 2014, after Russia invaded Ukraine, Ron Paul defended Crimea's sovereign right to secede and join the occupying Russians. McCobin issued a statement, informing the media that while Paul's "views are interpreted by many as wholly representative of the libertarian movement," the Students for Liberty disagreed.

That was then. Everyone in either wing of the young libertarian movement can agree on Snowden.