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Republicans voted to condemn the NSA last month. Now at CPAC, they're silent.

By Brian Fung, Updated: March 7 at 12:12 pm

Earlier this year, the Republican National Committee issued a major rebuke of the NSA, condemning the spy agency's collection of bulk telephone records from American citizens. The party's resolution [roundly criticized](#) the program as "an intrusion on basic human rights" and set conservatives on a path to draw civil libertarians into the fold.

But surprisingly, at the largest conservative confab of the year, the issue of NSA surveillance is nowhere to be found. The [agenda](#) for this year's CPAC doesn't once mention President Obama's signals intelligence program. Nor are there any booths on the convention floor blasting the secret FISA court, attempts to break into tech companies' server links or the sharing of NSA data with domestic law enforcement agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration.

There is, however, a Star Wars-themed booth decrying the injustice of the personal income tax.

Not all Republicans are opposed to the spying, to be sure. Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Mich.) is just one prominent defender of the NSA. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) has also warned against undercutting the surveillance programs, and the RNC's vote [drew criticism](#) from other Republicans, too. Not everyone has experienced a change of heart like the RNC has — and highlighting those fault lines at CPAC could be divisive.

Still, given the story's persistence in the headlines since last summer, and considering the zeal with which Republicans have gone after Obama for other perceived constitutional violations, it's a small mystery why the anti-NSA sentiment is completely absent here. Meghan Snyder, a spokesperson for the American Conservative Union (which organizes CPAC) did not reply to multiple requests for comment.

The GOP has an opportunity to expand its base by going after young libertarians who might be responsive to messaging on the NSA. A 2010 analysis by the [libertarian-leaning Cato Institute](#) notes that a solid majority of young libertarians broke away from Obama in 2008, and that disaffection with the president could cause the pendulum to swing toward the Republicans.

It's certainly a strategy that's been embraced by Sen. Rand Paul, who is pushing [a class-action lawsuit](#) against the government over the surveillance. Yet if other Republicans have feelings on the issue, they're not speaking up.