

In Las Vegas, Rand Paul laments dangers of a ‘surveillance state’

By: Andrew Doughman - July 12, 2013

U.S. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., warned of a “grand spymaster” during a speech he delivered in Las Vegas Friday evening.

He delivered his remarks to a crowd of thousands of people gathered at Planet Hollywood for Freedom Fest, a libertarian-oriented conference and film festival.

Paul, a potential 2016 presidential candidate, devoted his brief speech to the concepts of security and liberty. He assailed the federal government, and especially the National Security Agency.

“What if you were a minority by virtue of the color of your skin or the color of your ideology? Will the ends justify the means?” he said. “What if the frightened majority pleads security as they rifle through your mail? What if the grand spymaster uses the least untruthful of his lies to send you to prison but he claims he does it for your own good?”

Alluding to comments that Director of National Intelligence James Clapper made when he claimed to have delivered the “least untruthful” answer on the recently revealed NSA Internet and phone spying programs, Paul called security the “siren song” of America after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City.

“The surveillance state quietly avoids the fact that their leader lied to Congress, a felony punishable by up to five years,” Paul said, presumably of Clapper. “Not a peep about any prosecution from the one who lied, only vim and vigor for the blood of the leaker.”

Edward Snowden, the former NSA contractor who revealed aspects of domestic and international spying programs, is currently stuck in an airport in Moscow. Unable to find asylum in another country, he is avoiding extradition to the United States. Federal prosecutors last month charged Snowden with violations of the Espionage Act.

Speaking to a receptive audience, Paul quoted the Revolutionary War hero Patrick Henry’s famous line of “give me liberty or give me death” in rejecting the federal government’s arguments that security concerns legitimize the NSA spying programs.

“Hawks in both parties say we must surrender our liberty or we’re all going to die,” Paul said. “Even if we completely destroyed the Bill of Rights, even if we gave up all of our liberty for our security as many seem eager to do, not even a total police state could guarantee our security. Where is the outrage? If you are outraged, cry out in a loud and anguished voice that you’ve had enough.”

Sure enough, the crowd cried out, applauding the senator, who shouted “louder” to an audience that enthusiastically raised their voices a few decibels.

Attendees at the conference had gathered from around the country, making the libertarian gathering a ripe place for Paul to make connections with voters who may comprise his base in the 2016 Republican presidential primary.

“If you can get 2,000 free-market, libertarian, conservative folks, that’s a good place to give a speech,” said David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, a conservative think tank.

Like Boaz, Bonnie App of Cypress, Texas, saw the senator deliver his brief speech.

She said she was impressed, noting that she’d also liked his father, Ron Paul, a Texas congressman who failed to gain the Republican nomination for president in 2012.

“He’s my kind of guy because he’s conservative and interested in maintaining our liberties and keeping our spending down,” she said of Rand Paul.

The senator closed his brief speech with remarks that alluded to a presidential bid.

“Only when we march to a drummer above and beyond the empty partisan, only when we rid Washington of politicians drunk with power will America thrive again,” he said. “Be part of that. Thank you.”

Paul did not linger for questions or handshakes, instead making a quick exit from the stage.

He is scheduled to speak again Saturday at a Nevada Republican Party fundraiser.