

Roscoe Bartlett – The Congressman Who Went Off-Grid

If you want to find the roots of the modern prepping movement, you need look no further than former Congressman and scientist Roscoe Bartlett. While Bartlett can't claim to have single-handedly started the prepping movement, he was one of the earlier modern voices calling for preparedness. While the idea of being prepared actually goes back centuries, we, as a society, needed the sobering call to action that this man brought to Congress.

Roscoe likes to say that he started his life dirt poor on a sharecropper farm. Growing up as a farm boy, he learned how to do many things on his own. Farmers can't always call a mechanic or an electrician, so they just do it themselves. This knowledge served him well in the Navy and has served him in his retirement, as a full-time survivalist.

Bartlett had a very successful career as a scientist and professor, with 17 patents to his name. From there he moved into politics, spending the next 20 years of his life in the US Congress, representing the 6th district of Maryland. It wasn't until 2012, when gerrymandering drastically altered his district, that he was defeated and voted out of Congress. At the end of his time in Congress, he was one of the oldest members at 87 years old.

While in Congress, Bartlett was known as a bit of an oddity, a staunch conservative Libertarian. He spent 20 years preaching about the need to protect the electrical grid, citing the Carrington Event and the possibility of an EMP attack. It was largely through his efforts that the EMP Commission was established to study the effects of such an attack and make recommendations to Congress.

Like many other survivalists, Bartlett depends on having a full survival plan in place, for when the electric grid goes down. Even though he is no longer in Congress, he is still pushing for legislation to harden the electric grid and to force citizens to develop their own emergency survival plans.

Leaving Congress was a liberating moment for Bartlett, who bought 153 acres in West Virginia and started living what he preached. He still uses the first cabin that he built, although he is now in the process of building number six, doing all the work by himself. Age doesn't seem to have slowed him down one bit, as he traipses through the woods, felling trees by hand and growing food in his garden.

For anyone who wants to see what true off-grid living looks like, a visit to Roscoe Bartlett's place in the woods would be quite an experience. The only electricity he has is created by his solar panels and wind turbines. Water is pumped by hand from fresh springs. He uses composting toilets, so there is no need for a septic tank. Everything is self-contained and self-sufficient. If a cyberwarfare attack or an EMP were to take out the electrical grid, he and his family would survive.

How did He do All That?

Looking at pictures of Bartlett's land, cabins and one-acre man-made lake, it is natural to question how he has managed to do it all. To start with, he had a net worth of over \$8 million, before entering Congress. While many of today's batch of lawmakers are getting rich off of campaign contributions, Bartlett didn't need to do that. His story is a literal rags to riches one, which came about through a lot of hard work.

This enabled him to buy his undeveloped land for \$80,000 while serving in Congress. While other Congressmen used their recess time to travel on the taxpayer's dime, Roscoe put on blue jeans and spent his time on his property. He'd cut logs during the day and read legislation at night.

That first cabin only cost him about \$1,000 to build, bringing in much of the material via cart, because the road was too rough for motor vehicles. So it wasn't his money that made his lifestyle possible, rather it was his ability to do things for himself that did. He has built everything himself, rather than depending on what he could buy at the local home improvement center.

This hard work made it so that he was ready when he lost his congressional seat. Retirement was probably a relief for the aged lawmaker, allowing him to spend his time on his passion, rather than on fighting verbal battles in the halls of Capitol Hill.

Bartlett still works hard, at over 90 years of age. A reporter who visited him wrote that he was tired after a day of following the aged farmer around, Traipsing through the woods, climbing into lofts and crawling down into root cellars. Clearly the rugged life of living in the hills hasn't hurt the octogenarian in the least.

While he is busy building his cabins and farming his land, the retired Congressman hasn't forgotten his responsibility to society. Every two weeks or so he shaves off his beard, puts on a suit and makes the drive to Washington, where he still functions as a consultant on cybersecurity for supply chains, EMP and survival preparedness to government think tanks. He is also a frequent speaker at survival and off-grid expos.

What Can We Learn from This Man?

Bartlett got his start in survivalism the same time I got mine, during the Cold War. at that time, he asked a question that few others were asking, "When you come out of the [fallout shelter](#), what then?" Back then, everything was about surviving the nuclear blast and the fallout that followed. But little was discussed or taught about how to survive in a post-

thermonuclear-war world.

This led Roscoe to look further, at what was needed to survive in that world, should such a thing every happen. While a nuclear exchange never happened between the United States and the Soviet Union, such thinking changed his life, and has struck with him until today.

After a lifetime of studying and preaching preparedness, it is clear that Roscoe Bartlett has learned many lessons which are serving him well now. While he had little success in motivating his peers in Congress to see things his way, his voice has not been totally unheard. Rather, it has been the people of the United States, especially those who are concerned about the future of our country, who have heard him the best.

Probably the biggest lesson we can learn from this man is that of being totally self-sufficient. Bartlett has developed a lifestyle more like that of our ancestors in the 1800s, where he is not dependent on the outside world for anything. While he still has modern conveniences available to him, he is fully capable of living his life without them.

Bartlett's message for decades has been about the fragility of our electric grid, the most vulnerable part of our country's infrastructure. But he goes even farther than that, stating openly that the other 16 areas of our infrastructure are all heavily dependent on the grid. So a loss of the nation's ability to generate and distribute electricity wouldn't just shut down our computers and communications, it would shut everything down.

While others have preached this same message, it appears that this gentleman was one of the first to preach it. He has also had the opportunity to preach it in places and to people who the rest of us can't even approach. While they have not necessarily listened to his message, they cannot honestly say

that they weren't warned.

Bartlett regularly counsels families to purchase a year's worth of food, saying that it is the best investment they can make. He follows that up with a second "investment" is a \$1,000 stash of silver coins and jewelry. According to him, this will become the currency for bartering in a post-disaster world.

To this man, self-reliance is a puzzle to be solved, looking for the simplest solution to any problem. At his age, there is a possibility that his wife will outlive him, so he is concerned about her being able to keep things working, if he isn't there. So he strives for simplicity in his designs, seeking to make things both easy to operate and easy to repair. Efficiency is one of his bywords, and shows in the way that he has designed his home to operate.

Surprisingly, Bartlett doesn't own any guns, which puts him at odds with much of the rest of the survival community. But except for hunting, his remote lifestyle greatly diminishes his need for them. Few gangs would bother making the trek out to his land, even if they could find it, in order to steal his food. So his need for being concerned about self-defense is much lower than survivalists in the city.

His simple lifestyle and hard work has served him well. Bartlett has excellent health, even for a man 20 years younger than his advanced age. Other than a little arthritis and acid reflux, he is healthy as the proverbial mule.

But he keeps himself that way by constant physical activity, preferring to walk, rather than drive his John Deere Gator around the property.