

## Here's Who Was Wrong About Rand Paul

A brief oral history of the Rand Paul bubble

February 3, 2016

He was supposed to change politics forever. Rand Paul's slow fizzle this campaign season and burnout Wednesday morning when he dropped out of the presidential race would have been unthinkable just two years ago—when commentators, pundits and, ahem, national political magazines like the one you're reading thought the young Kentucky senator was ushering in an entirely new status quo. Paul, who soared to national prominence with the help of a 13-hour anti-drone filibuster, seemed to tap into a powerful strain among Americans, both conservative and liberal: Intervention-weary and inclined toward isolationism, concerned with civil liberties—and convinced that the GOP's future hinged on its ability to reach out to minorities and win more urban votes. As the chattering class reminded us over and over, it was Rand Paul's moment.

So what happened? Was the media full of it? After all, the press did spend a lot of time covering a budding libertarian movement that never really existed. But it could also be that the United States did have that moment—and now it's gone. Railing against the national security state sounded a lot better before ISIL-inspired attacks killed more than 200 in Paris and a dozen in California. U.S. drone policy and NSA overreach seemed like a bigger problem before a boisterous billionaire revealed that, in fact, some of us were still very afraid, and willing to do just about anything in the name of homeland security.

POLITICO MAGAZINE took a look back at what we were all saying before the Trump boom, when 2016's latest casualty was going to remake American politics for good.

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“Senator Paul is currently, according to polls and pundits, the frontrunner for the Republican nomination to be president of the United States.” (Damon Thayer, a Republican Kentucky state senator, Kentucky Senate floor, March 20, 2014)

“He is objectively one of the three most likely people to get the nomination.” (Steve Munisteri, the New Yorker, Oct. 6, 2014)

“Rand Paul will win the whole thing because he can win Iowa, New Hampshire, he can win South Carolina, and he's the only candidate you listed there that can win all three.” (Chris Matthews, Real Clear Politics, November 2, 2013)

“If he announces, he'll be considered a first-tier candidate.” (James Carville, Vogue, September 16, 2013)

“While his father may have been an also-ran, national polls show Rand Paul as one of the top contenders for the GOP nomination.” (Julia Ioffe, the *New Republic*, June 17, 2013)

“Call off the Iowa caucuses. Cancel the New Hampshire primary. Let’s all head to Cleveland to name the 2016 Republican presidential nominee right now. The race is over. Rand Paul has won. There is no way he can be denied. How can I say that before a single vote has been cast, before most of the field has even declared? Simple: [Author and commentator] Dick Morris has predicted Paul can’t win. Morris’ predictions are almost always wrong. Ergo, Rand Paul is now a heavy favorite to clinch the nomination.” (W. James Antle, *Daily Caller*, April 9, 2015)

“I believe very strongly that he could be the nominee.” (Justin Amash, the *New York Times*, Aug. 7, 2014)

“If the GOP want to defeat Clinton next fall, they should turn to the only Republican whose buzz rivals hers: Rand Paul.” (Brian O’Connor, the *New Republic*, April 13, 2015)

“Senator Rand Paul is the Republican presidential candidate best positioned to defeat Hillary Clinton. (Cynthia Lumis, *Breitbart*, July 28, 2015)

“Rand Paul and Hillary Rodham Clinton would frame the debate.” Ralph Benko, *Forbes*, February 10, 2014)

“It is fair to say, I think, that Rand Paul is one of the most interesting major contenders for the Republican nomination in 2016, and by extension for the presidency.” (Ross Douthat, the *New York Times*, May 15, 2014)

“I’d lay money on Rand Paul being the next president of the United States.” (Cenk Uygur, *Young Turks*, September 2014)

“The next president of the United States of America.” (John Allison, president of Cato Institute, February 24, 2015)

“Yes, it’s absurdly early. But Paul looks like a better bet than anyone else to finish in the top two in both Iowa and New Hampshire. If he did, he’d establish himself as the leading anti-establishment candidate in the GOP field.” (Peter Beinart, the *Atlantic*, Jan. 22, 2014)

“But Rand Paul, John, is the most interesting candidate in this race, because he is the pristine example of what’s happening in America. It is anti-Washington. It is anti-establishment, Republican as well as Democrat.” (Patrick Buchanan, *The McLaughlin Group*, May 21, 2010)

“Meanwhile, the politics of the 2016 Republican nomination look increasingly favorable to Paul. He is one of the top fundraisers in the field, has a readymade base of support from his father’s presidential networks, and has proven his savvy political instincts with a made-for-TV drone filibuster and NSA lawsuit. The newly compressed Republican presidential calendar should benefit a Paul candidacy, since he’s got the grassroots support to play in the small states and the money to fight forward in the big media market states that follow.” (Josh Kraushaar, *National Journal*, Feb. 25, 2014)

“And, even though it's still early, I think that there's a good case that Paul's early support may turn into something real. In other words, he's a legitimate frontrunner.” (Eli Lehrer, Huffington Post, March 17, 2014)

“He's not a clear front-runner. But, if you are looking for a candidate who can (a) raise the money, (b) has a clear and compelling message and (c) has an obvious edge in an early state (Iowa), then Paul is the only person in the top three who checks all three boxes.” (Chris Cillizza, the Washington Post, Sept. 13, 2013)

“The fact that Ronald Reagan and George Bush were elected presidents of the United States means it is not all that farfetched to wake up and discover that Rand Paul could be our next president.” (Egberto Willies, Daily Kos, March 23, 2014)

“He has a number of assets. ... He has terrific fundraising potential. He has an army of supporters who will run into a burning building to vote for him.” (Stu Rothenberg, NPR, April 7, 2015)

“A big reason Rand Paul will win the general election in 2016 is his message resonates with more than just conservatives or libertarians. Even apolitical young people who have traditionally voted for Democrats will respond to the message of liberty as Obamacare's generational theft kicks into high gear.” (Brent Hatley, Daily Caller, March 10, 2014)

“Rand Paul is the most intriguing—and for Democrats, perhaps the most frightening—figure in today's Republican Party. The Kentucky senator, who is more than flirting with a 2016 presidential run, is making a smart play for the millennial generation that was key to President Obama's twin victories and that his own party has convincingly repelled.” (Ruth Marcus, the Washington Post, March 21, 2014)

“Senator Rand Paul may not be the GOP front-runner for the 2016 presidential nomination, but he stands alone among Republican candidates at almost every level with his ability to attract and energize young voters.” (Jake Novak, CNBC, April 8, 2015)

“He's a once-in-a-lifetime character. He's perfectly suited for this moment.” (David Adams, GQ, Sept. 21, 2010)

“The first eight-plus months of 2013 have convinced us of one thing: Rand Paul acts and the rest of the potential 2016 Republican presidential field reacts.” (Chris Cillizza, Washington Post, Sept. 13, 2013)

“I think [the Republican establishment is] nervous about him; that's the one thing about him I kind of like. ... They think he's got some real clout out there with the grassroots, which is why I'd say they've bent over backwards to be nice to him.” (Bill Kristol, the New Republic, June 17, 2013)

“Republicans from both inside and outside the establishment wing of the party say that [primary] calendar will provide a huge advantage to Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul and his legion of Tea Party acolytes.” (David Freedlander, The Daily Beast, May 14, 2014)

“It’s no secret that the Republican Party is in need of revitalization. ... Everyone agrees that we need to do more—but I only see one candidate for president who is actually DOING it. And that is Rand Paul.” (Paul Dame, Vermont Digger, Sept. 9, 2015)

“Win or lose, the neo-libertarian stands to change the DNA of the Grand Old Party.” (Adele Stan, the *American Prospect*, Fall 2014)

“The Republican I find most interesting is Rand Paul, and the reason I say that is he is the only Republican who seems to know about what their long-term structural problems are and trying to do something about it. I think he’s the only person who is sort of honed in on a message that could be appealing to the next generation.” (Dan Pfeiffer, BuzzFeed, Sept. 25, 2014)

“I think Rand Paul is actually raising profound questions that go right at the heart of the American establishment. Rand Paul is touching on a nerve here, which every conservative ought to take seriously.” (Newt Gingrich, CNN, March 23, 2014)

“The most interesting man in politics.” (*Politico Magazine*, September/October 2014)