



Rand Paul Flexes 2016 Muscles On Florida Trip, Campaigns Against DC Political Class

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NAPLES, Florida — Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY), a contender for the 2016 GOP nomination, flexed his potential presidential campaign muscles during a trip here this weekend—showing off his pull with grassroots voters and his ability to win over donors.

After arriving late Friday night after a speech in Montgomery, Alabama—Paul was the keynote before the Alabama GOP’s annual winter dinner—Paul on Saturday morning kicked off his day by holding a roundtable discussion with local doctors about healthcare policy.

“I think it’s very helpful to have someone familiar with healthcare here both inside the beltway and outside the beltway,” Dr. W.G. Eshbaugh, a reconstructive and cosmetic plastic surgeon from the Naples area said. “He’s had a private practice and is able to articulate many of the challenges we face. It was a real pleasure to have that discussion with him.”

Eshbaugh was a year behind Paul at Duke Medical School—where Paul studied to become an ophthalmologist. Paul and his wife Kelly then moved to Bowling Green, Kentucky, where Paul practiced for more than a decade before he scored a surprising Senate primary win against the Mitch McConnell-backed Trey Grayson in 2010. As a U.S. Senator, he’s now one of the leading Republicans—along with Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush—potentially vying for the GOP nomination in 2016.

Sergio Gor, Paul’s energetic communications director, explained to Breitbart News that Paul plans to highlight the fact he is a doctor on the campaign trail, and Paul has frequently held such roundtable type meetings with doctors nationwide on many occasions.

“Part of Sen. Paul’s appeal both inside of politics and outside of politics is he was a doctor and surgeon for so many years,” Gor told Breitbart News as Paul wrapped up the meeting.

So you’re able to get a lot of doctors and surgeons from all over the country who are interested whether it’s their first time [meeting with a politician] or they’re regularly

politically involved. You get a lot of doctors upset about Obamacare, about new regulations from Washington.

While everyone can be against Obamacare, doctors understand the exact intricacies and the small details that someone like Dr. Paul would understand. When they're involved in day-to-day practice, they're able to relate to what he's saying. He knows it in and out.

One of the things we do is almost everywhere the senator travels we'll invite a group of physicians and they'll invite some of their other physicians and this happens all across the United States.

On Paul's trip, both Cato Institute president John Allison and Rep. Curt Clawson (R-FL) hinted that they believe Paul may very well win. Clawson said that while he'll back whoever wins the GOP primary in the general, he plans on backing Paul in the primary. And Allison predicted that given the current political environment, Paul will become the next president of the United States of America.

That's what Paul is projecting himself as: The conservative Republican who can go the distance, battle former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush in the primary then defeat Hillary Clinton—or whomever else Democrats may nominate should they decide against coronating the former Secretary of State—and get elected to the White House.

Paul is doing that by painting himself as the perennial outsider, the man of the people—and a grassroots champion for liberty and the values of ordinary Americans. Paul has, in recent weeks, amassed an impressive array of campaign operatives. He outmaneuvered potential rivals Cruz and former Texas Gov. Rick Perry to get Texas state GOP chairman Steve Munisteri to join his campaign-in-waiting and picked up Chip Englander—a young data-and-ground-game-savvy GOP operative who led newly elected Republican Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner's campaign in 2014—to run his presidential effort should he run.

While in Naples on Saturday, Paul also held a meeting with grassroots activists where he spoke then took questions—a meeting that occurred across the hall from the doctor roundtable. It was there that Clawson—a businessman before his election to Congress—introduced Paul, and Paul praised outsiders like Clawson while railing against the political class in Washington, D.C.

“It's good to have people like Curt in Congress—we have very few people who have any business sense at all,” Paul said.

We've got a few community organizers. Maybe one too many. But nobody has any sense about it. People say why is government so messed up? Why do we make so many bad decisions in government? It's because government is not like business at all.

If I asked you to give me \$10,000 today and we're going to collect it all and form a business, my guess is you're going to want to know my business plan before you give me any money.

My guess is you're going to think about it and ask well, my gosh, is this a good investment and could I lose \$10,000? What kind of work did it take me to get that \$10,000?

But if you ask a politician to spend \$10,000 or \$10 million or \$10 billion, do you think it bothers them? Do you think they lay awake at night saying "oh gosh, I lost \$10 billion on that one because that one didn't work out so well?"

Paul's decision to focus on this corner of Florida is telling. With Bush and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) both likely also in the race, one of those two—or one of the other more liberal Republicans—is likely to win Florida's GOP primary in 2016. Paul may have a shot there, but this event seemed more focused on the general election.

"We have had, in 2012, we turned out 88.7 percent of the Republican voters in the county—the highest in the state," Collier County Republican Party chairman Mike Lyster told Breitbart News in a brief interview before Paul spoke at the grassroots event Saturday morning.

In 2014, which nationally was an off-year election, we turned out almost 72 percent which again was the highest in the state for any county that has 100,000 voters. Our grassroots folks really work the grassroots and get the vote out. We just saw that as an opportunity to start reaching out to the candidates and bringing them in and giving them an opportunity to talk to our grassroots folks.

Lyster added that he tells everyone he knows in Republican politics that "Collier County is the county that offset some of those east coast counties that vote Democrat."

"Every vote counts," he said, detailing the county's sophisticated GOP operation that will help whoever wins the nomination in 2016 in the general election. "We have a number of people who are today motivated to—I get demands probably once a week by people saying they want a list of every voter in their neighborhood so they can start finding out who they are and start engaging and interacting with them. We couldn't do it without all those volunteers that step up and carry the load."

Jan Glassman, another grassroots activist who sits on the executive committee of the Collier County Republican Party—and splits her time between Florida and New Hampshire, another early primary state—spoke highly of Paul as well and noted similar things about the GOP influence Collier County has in the general election in the all-important state of Florida.

"Number one, I think candidates come here to raise money," Glassman told Breitbart News. "But number two, Collier County turns out the greatest percentage of Republican votes in the state—a very, very Republican county. It can make all the difference. George Bush won by 537 votes I think it was? Something like that—very, very small."

Glassman spoke highly of New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and Paul. About Paul, she noted she met him when he

endorsed former Sen. Scott Brown's campaign against Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) at the University of New Hampshire last cycle.

"I saw him at UNH last summer," Glassman said. "He's a great guy. He resonates. His dad always resonated with young people."

Paul showed off his fundraising appeal later in the day, attending a finance meeting with several high-level donors from the area but the most interesting thing is he seems to be able to walk in both worlds: Appeal to the donors, and appeal to the grassroots.

In fact, during that finance meeting as Paul was speaking to the donors on the outdoor balcony of a function room at the spacious Ritz Carlton that day, a young man walking by on the pathway down below from one area of the resort to another overheard him and stopped to listen to his full speech. Matt DeBernardo, the young man who supported Paul's father before was just on vacation from Connecticut down in Naples staying at the resort, told Breitbart News he stopped to listen to Paul speak to the donors because he loved what he heard.

"It was an awesome experience—it was so unexpected," DeBernardo said. "Everywhere you go you try to find people who like you or have the same beliefs, so it's funny that in passing you meet someone who you follow and whose father you support."

Perhaps even more importantly than being able to appeal to broad sects of the GOP, many in the grassroots seem to agree with Paul's positions on when America should go to war and aren't being influence by mainstream media and Washington-based foreign policy establishment community efforts to paint him as an isolationist.

"Sen. Paul, I'm a veteran. We have never won a war in my lifetime. And I'm talking about in Vietnam, we lost 15,272 troops. I'm sick and tired of us going into somebody else's empire and trying to build our own. I think we should bring those soldiers home and put them on the southern border and do something to protect our country. That's what I'm in favor of. How do you feel," Jon Larsen Shudlick, a veteran who served as a Provost Marshal Investigator for the U.S. Army based in Korea during the Vietnam era, asked of Paul to kick off the question-and-answer session of the grassroots meeting.

"I couldn't agree more," Paul responded.

When we do have to be involved, we do it to defend ourselves and American interests and we vote on it in Congress. The one thing about the Constitution is it didn't give this power to the president. It isn't a unilateral power of the president.

We have a debate in our country, an open debate, and we decide how to defend our country and what we have to do to defend ourselves. The only reason I say we have to do something now is because I think our embassy in Baghdad and our consulate in Erbil need to be defended.

I've criticized Hillary Clinton nonstop for not defending Benghazi and I think we do have to defend ourselves. But I have said I'm not sending one American GI to take Mosul if the Iraqis are not willing to fight for it. They need to fight. There are going to need to be boots on the ground. But the boots on the ground need to be Arab boots on the ground. Frankly, I'd like to see 10,000 Saudi Arabians leading every march into battle.

The entire room rose in applause for Paul, one of his many standing ovations he got throughout that morning event.