

The Hypocrisy of Ron Paul

By David Catron on 9.13.11 @ 6:09AM

"Doctor No" is no man of principle.

Just before last week's Republican debate at the Reagan Library, Ron Paul released an attack ad targeting his fellow Texan and presidential aspirant Rick Perry. It shows a young Congressman Paul posing with the Gipper in a series of photos and features a portentous voiceover claiming that, while Paul "stood with Reagan," Perry was a perfidious, Gore-pimping liberal. This ad is brazenly deceptive, but it does provide an edifying glimpse into the true character of a slippery Beltway operator posing as a man of principle fighting the good fight against the corrupt "prags" of the GOP establishment. It reveals that Ron Paul is a fraud of the first order. The sordid reality is that his loyalty to Ronald Reagan lasted only so long as it was politically expedient and his vaunted libertarian principles have proven to be remarkably elastic.

As to Reagan, the young Congressman who had once been so anxious to be photographed with him scampered like a Texas jackrabbit when the going got tough. In 1987, when Reagan truly needed his supporters to stand by him, Ron Paul suddenly disappeared from the man's side. In fact, he resigned from the Republican Party and blamed Reagan for his disillusionment with the GOP. In a letter that echoed the prevailing Democrat talking points of the day he wrote, "The chickens have yet to come home to roost, but they will, and America will suffer from a Reaganomics that is nothing but warmed-over Keynesianism." That letter was not merely an act of breathtaking betrayal -- it actually compares Reagan to Josef Stalin -- its characterization of Reagan's economic policies is utterly absurd.

Moving on to the Perry smear, Paul left an important fact out of his ad: Rick Perry was a Democrat when he supported Gore 23 years ago. And, if that puts you off, remember that Ronald Reagan himself was once a Democrat. Perry and Reagan eventually realized that the Democrat party was drifting ever leftward, abandoning the principles that had once claimed their loyalty. The party of Scoop Jackson had morphed into the party of George McGovern, so both joined the GOP because it more closely matched their ideals and those of the nation's founders. As to "Dr. No," having received fewer than half a million votes as the 1988 Libertarian presidential candidate, he came crawling back to the party he had so vehemently denounced and was eventually reelected to Congress under the GOP banner.

This pattern of hypocrisy is by no means limited to party loyalty. Paul has consistently represented himself as a principled libertarian, and never tires of reminding us that he is a physician whose medical experience has taught him to be wary of government intrusion in health care. However, the good doctor's voting record shows that he has frequently supported such government intervention. Shortly after the Democrats returned to power in the House in 2007, they introduced a bill calling for the government to "negotiate" the

price of prescription drugs bought for Medicare Part D. In this context, "negotiate," is nothing but a euphemism for price-fixing, something that a genuine free-market libertarian would reject out of hand. Nonetheless, Rep. Paul voted in favor of the measure.

This is not the only vote Dr. Paul has cast in favor of government meddling in health care. He has also voted for another price-fixing scheme that every libertarian worthy of the name has denounced -- reimportation of pharmaceuticals from foreign countries with rigid price-control regimens. This, as Roger Pilon of the Cato Institute has pointed out, "would import foreign price controls on drugs." Even worse, the Congressional Budget Office has said that drug reimportation would not significantly reduce prescription drug spending. Nor can Dr. Paul's vote be justified in terms of free trade. As Nina Owcharenko at the Heritage Foundation explains, "Such policies would not create a 'freer' market for pharmaceuticals, but would regulate the market even further."

Sadly, the hypocrisy of "Dr. No" doesn't end with deceptive campaign ads about his record and the betrayal of his purported libertarian principles. He is also a downright fraud when it comes to big-government spending. While representing himself for decades as the sworn enemy of overspending, the good doctor has had his snout deep in the earmark trough. In 2007, the Wall Street Journal reported, "The Congressman disclosed his requests this year for about \$400 million worth of federal funding for no fewer than 65 earmarks. They include such urgent national wartime priorities as an \$8 million request for the marketing of wild American shrimp and \$2.3 million to fund shrimp-fishing research." And this is the man who had the effrontery to berate Ronald Reagan for deficit spending.

Considering this affinity for earmarks, combined with numerous congressional votes that cannot be reconciled with his professed principles, one would think that most libertarians would by now have said "no" to "Dr. No." And some have. Libertarian economist Arnold Kling became disenchanted several years ago: "Many well-meaning libertarians signed on to the 'Ron Paul revolution.' At first, this only required accepting his pro-life and anti-immigrant stances as libertarian, contrary to the leanings of many libertarians.... But to dismiss all doubts about his judgment and his character would be to succumb to a cult." And character is, at bottom, the real problem with Ron Paul. That's what his disingenuous attack ad against Rick Perry tells us. It is the work of a typical Beltway trimmer, devoid of principle or shame.