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Ron Paul, Tea Party's intellectual father, also applies for the biggest job



Veteran Texas Congressman Ron Paul has taken the political half-step prior to a formal announcement of a run for the Republican presidential nomination in the US. Paul ran hard for the nomination in 2008, but this time he seems poised to harvest the political anger of the amorphous Tea Party his energies first helped to spawn a couple of years ago. By J BROOKS SPECTOR.

Just after Easter, Paul launched his exploratory committee that allows him to act like a candidate, but without all those pesky laws, rules and regulations that declared candidates must follow religiously.

For some, Ron Paul is the avenging angel of government overspending, imperial overreach and the poisonous influence of the American nanny-state, liberal-lefties on domestic social policy, hell-bent on hollowing out the republic. For others, he is just a little too close to Howard Beale, the newscaster in “Network” whose on-air rant gave us

“I’m mad as hell, and I won’t take it anymore!” Or maybe Ron Paul is the uncle who whispers knowingly that he understands how the world really works and he’s giving you fair warning this time that things are not what you think they are. And, of course, his son Rand Paul, flying on the wings of the Tea Partiers, swept into the US Senate as Kentucky representative in 2010 mid-term elections.

Paul may not be crazy, but there are clearly some things he says he can’t take any more - and that he really is a serious contender for the Republican Party nomination. Announcing his exploratory committee, he has seized a march on almost all the other putative candidates, ensuring he will be a part of every Republican Party candidate debate from now on. Paul is also angling to make sure his ideas become the coin of the realm for discussions within the party. Along the way, of course, his public exposure in these debates will generate more enthusiasm for his candidacy and will then pull in more pledges of support and campaign contributions in a kind of political virtuous circle that feeds on itself.

Congressman Paul may be a latter-day Don Quixote in his belief he can capture the nomination, but he is no dummy. Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, he went to Duke University Medical School, became a US Air Force flight surgeon, moved west and has now been elected a congressman from the area south of Houston, Texas, for 15 two-year terms – first winning election in a district that had never voted Republican before. Along the way his politics hardened into a libertarianism that is significantly different from the garden-variety, right wing conservatism.

Paul laboured for the party’s nomination in 2008, ultimately losing out to Senator John McCain, but a decade earlier he was the Libertarian Party’s nominee as well. Yes, that party does contest elections in some, but not all, of America’s 50 states and innumerable electoral races. (Last time we checked, some 30 different people actually ran for president across the country – but not all of them in all of the states.) Paul’s losing effort in 2008, however, helped energise a nascent “Tea Party” movement, so named after the 1773 Boston protest against British taxation on tea imported into the American colonies that helped ignite the American Revolution.

By effectively coming out as a candidate, Paul is attempting to position himself as the candidate of ideas, thereby shouldering out other potential candidates on the right such as Newt Gingrich, Sarah Palin, Rick Santorum and even the Donald the Hairpiece Guy. Campaigning this way is also an effort to ensure that the eventual nominee – someone, say, like Mitt Romney, a notional centrist – ultimately has to bow in the direction of Paul and his supporters’ ideas.

But what, exactly, are Ron Paul’s ideas? Michael Shear, writing in The New York Times just after Paul announced his exploratory committee, quoted Drew Ivers, a member of the Iowa Republican Party state central committee (and a committed Paul supporter) as: “Ron Paul finds himself right in the epicentre of the three or four or five most critical and controversial issues in our nation today. The spending. The war. The financial

crisis....That's how snowballs develop, you know. They start small, and they get bigger as they roll downhill.”

Shear goes on to note the potential power of a Ron Paul campaign as a candidate of ideas, “Paul’s issues are no different than they were [in 2008], but they have risen to a place of prominence in the national debate. In the 2008 campaign, Paul’s message of fiscal discipline, harsh spending cuts and dire warnings about the deficit seemed out of sync with the relative affluence through most of 2007.

“By contrast, the debate consuming Washington right now is all about the issues that Paul cares about — the debt, the deficit and the consequences of failing to shrink the size of government. And Paul’s long-standing warnings about the cost of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have resonated with Republicans in 2011 more than they did in 2007.”

Doug Bandow, outlining Ron Paul’s foreign policy ideas for the libertarian Cato Institute think tank, has written: “It has been nearly a decade since President George W Bush chose arrogance over humility as the basis of American foreign policy. The intervening years have not been good for the US or the Republican Party. As the GOP seeks to take back the White House it needs to conduct a serious foreign policy debate. Republicans should start by listening to Ron Paul.

“Paul observed that conservatives, like liberals, enjoyed spending money, only ‘on different things. They like embassies, and they like occupation. They like the empire. They like to be in 135 countries and 700 bases’.”

Bandow argued that Paul believes Washington's policy of “promiscuous intervention” means the government has become incapable of providing for America's actual “common defence”. Rather, most of America's military forces are employed to remake failed societies, impose Washington's meddlesome dictates around the world, and subsidise populous and prosperous allies. As Bandow, paraphrasing Paul, asks: “Do the Europeans want someone to stop a civil war in Yugoslavia? They leave it to Americans. Do the Georgians want someone to protect them after they start a war with Russia? Tbilisi begs Washington... Do the Japanese want to concentrate on economic development while leaving the protection of regional security to another country? They turn to the US Do the Israelis want someone else to disarm Iran? They call on Washington...And in every case the Republican elite willingly answers ‘yes’, spending Americans' money to provide for most every other nations' defence.”

If this didn’t resonate in 2008, the Paulistas are clearly hoping it will play better with voters in the wake of Libya - and may well tap into that deeply felt American belief about the virtues of isolation that remains important with many who still see America as a the continental nation standing apart from the squabbles of the old world. This is a world view that harks right back to the beginning of the nation.

Ron Paul, by Bandow's analysis, argues the US pays and pays to defend nations around the world even as other countries make their infrastructure investments in the future. Curiously, this is a stand that could be positioned as eerily in sync with that of the incumbent president. With such views, however, Paul has placed himself in firm opposition to Republican neoconservative interventionists - and candidates such as Mitt Romney - who continue to argue for a strong national defence and the Pentagon's first call on the national treasury. As Bandow describes it, Paul's foreign policy argues, "Moreover, intervention and conflict beget intervention and conflict....Fear of aggressive Islamic fundamentalism caused the Reagan administration to back Saddam Hussein in the 1980s after he invaded Iran. That encouraged Baghdad to invade Kuwait. Then came the first Gulf War and Washington's stationing of troops in Saudi Arabia. Those forces later were targeted in the Khobar barracks bombings; the US presence also inflamed hostility from the likes of Osama bin Laden."

Seen in this light, Ron Paul is a real break with the interventionist consensus within the Republican Party forged in Dwight Eisenhower's presidency in during the Cold War and has persisted, more or less, since the early 1950s. But it might well be a perspective that taps into citizen disaffection with a foreign policy that remains rooted in force projection - even as it is now carried out in a thoroughly multilateral manner and via more limited efforts on behalf of democratic ideals that are the hallmarks of the Obama administration.

On economic issues, Paul has idiosyncratic ideas that distinguish him from more standard Republican approaches. In a recent interview on MSNBC, when asked about the federal income tax, Paul answered: "Well, the best would be zero. I mean, we lived most of our history with zero income tax. But you would have to have the proper-sized government. You would have to have the proper role for government. You can't be the policeman of the world and not have an income tax. So I would not have all my troops around the world. I would be bringing the troops home. And I wouldn't have a military industrial complex that demands so much, but I wouldn't have a welfare state either.

"And under those conditions, you don't need an income tax. And I think that's the way it should be....I think when people take money from you and give it to somebody else, that's the equivalent of stealing from you. I don't want to take any of your money. I want you to invest it and create jobs."

And discussing the budget deficit, just before announcing his exploratory committee, Paul wrote: "Last week the financial markets were roiled by Standard & Poor's announcement that they will change their outlook on the fiscal health of the United States over the next two years from 'stable' to 'negative'....Even the most conservative budget that has been proposed by Republican leadership requires raising the debt ceiling by an additional \$9 trillion by 2021. This demonstrates absolutely that no one in power right now has any real intention of addressing our spending problems or paying down the debt. They simply expect to continue to borrow and run up more debt forever, without limit. Yet they always imagine our dollar will have value no matter how many we print. This

expectation is foolish and naïve. I guarantee that those buying our debt are not foolish and naïve enough to go along with this charade forever.”

Going further, on the gold standard and the role of the Federal Reserve Bank, the latter a particular *bête noire* of Paul’s, the would-be candidate has argued: “From my viewpoint, what we need is a world-class dollar, you know, a dollar that is sound, not a dollar that continues to depreciate and not a system where we perpetually just resort to inflation and deficit-financing to bail out everybody. And this is what we've been doing.... The handwriting on the wall is, there's a limit to how many times we can bail the dollar out, because conditions are so much worse today than they have ever been. You know, we talk a lot about predatory lending, but I see the predatory lending coming from the Federal Reserve – interest at 1%, overnight rates, loaning to the banks, encouraging the banks and investors to do the wrong things, causing all the malinvestment[sic].”

And in a colloquy with Fed chairman Ben Bernanke, after the great financial collapse a few years ago, this exchange is also enlightening:

Paul: “So where do you put the blame, on the market or on crony capitalism that we've been living with probably for three decades?”

Bernanke: “Congressman, I certainly do not reject capitalism. I don't think this was a failure of capitalism per se.... It is nevertheless the case that we've seen over the decades and the centuries that financial systems can be prone to panics, runs, booms, busts. And for better or worse, we have developed mechanisms like deposit insurance and lender of last resort to try to avert those things. Those protections, in turn, require some oversight to avoid the build-up of risk....”

Paul: “Isn't that what creates the moral hazard, though? Isn't that the problem, rather than the solution?”

Watch: Ron Paul Responds to Fed Press Conference: (CNBC)

Commenting in USA Today the other day, however, Cal Jillson, a political scientist from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, noted that, while more people will listen to Paul these days because of his stance on fiscal issues, he’s still going to need support from socially conservative voters, not in sync with Paul’s views on rolling back the nanny state on personal, private issues, but crucial in the early presidential nominating states such as Iowa and South Carolina if he's to do better than in 2008. As Jillson observed, “He is a second-tier candidate [but] he's more in the middle of the debate than he has traditionally been, but he's still an outlier in the Republican Party.”

All of this makes Ron Paul a very different kind of Republican – one particularly uncomfortable with Wall Street – and thus a candidate far, far removed from Mitt Romney, with his key claim to fame as a job maker via his leadership at a venture capital firm like Bain Capital.

One can almost see Ron Paul, portrayed by Robert Redford or Sam Shepard, squinting towards the horizon and contemplating with horror and disdain the encroachments of those hated bankers on honest farmers and ranchers – except that Paul is a particularly media-savvy kind of guy as well. And he is politician who is very well-acquainted with the uses of the Internet and social media for building support and fund raising. Social media's not just for lefties, after all. **DM**

For more, read:

- Can Ron Paul convert enthusiasm into votes in 2012? in [USA Today](#);
- Ron Paul forms GOP presidential exploratory committee in [The Washington Post](#);
- Could Ron Paul 2012 Outperform Ron Paul 2008? in [The New York Times](#);
- Tea Party remains movement with a mission in the [BBC](#);
- Doug Bandow on Ron Paul Challenges GOP's Foreign Policy Agenda from the [Cato Institute](#);
- The roar of Ron Paul: Five of his unorthodox views on the economy in the [Christian Science Monitor](#);
- Why Republicans May Be Skipping 2012 Presidential Run in [The New York Times](#);
- Field Not Set for First Republican Debate in [The New York Times](#);
- As Ron Paul Weighs Presidential Run, His Issues Are Already Being Debated in [The New York Times](#);
- Ron Paul in [Wikipedia](#).

*Photo: US Representative Ron Paul (R-TX) delivers remarks at the Conservative Political Action conference (CPAC) in Washington, February 11, 2011.
REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst.*

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