



## Critics Question Libertarian Label for 2016 Candidate Rand Paul

By Sean Piccoli

April 6, 2015

As Sen. Rand Paul prepares to launch his presidential campaign on Tuesday, the Kentucky Republican finds one of his political trademarks — his reputation as a free-thinking libertarian in the mold of his famous father — being questioned in light of policy position changes that have moved him farther right and closer to his party's base.

The junior senator prepping his first White House run is still touting himself as a political upstart: his campaign slogan, [unveiled on Monday to Politico](#), is "Defeat the Washington machine. Unleash the American dream."

[A promotional video](#) posted Sunday on his official YouTube channel promises "a different kind of Republican who will take on Washington."

Paul's father, former presidential candidate and retired Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, will attend the campaign announcement on Tuesday in Louisville, Kentucky, [The Wall Street Journal reports](#).

But [as he approaches](#) the 2016 starting line, Rand Paul, who rails at NSA surveillance methods and who filibustered a CIA nominee over U.S. drone strikes, is playing down libertarian doctrine, with its emphasis on limited government and personal autonomy, at least on some issues, [The Washington Post reports](#).

Paul has modified his anti-interventionist views on foreign policy to allow for a bigger Pentagon budget, and he is courting Christian voters with support for their efforts against gay marriage.

His outreach to Christians prompted David Brody of the Christian Broadcasting Network to declare that Paul "is not some 'crazy libertarian' who wants to distance himself from faith-and-government issues," the Post reports.

Meanwhile, [some liberal pundits have argued](#) that Paul is not, and never was, a libertarian, citing his opposition to gay marriage and abortion.

Those perceptions could cost Paul the support of people who enthusiastically backed his father's maverick presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2012. But one prominent libertarian, Cato Institute Executive Vice President David Boaz, [argued in Newsweek](#), "The question of whether Rand Paul is a libertarian is irrelevant."

"Paul doesn't claim to be a libertarian, and he takes positions that many libertarians disagree with," Boaz writes. "But on a broad range of issues, from spending and regulation to government spying, drug wars and military intervention, he has a more libertarian policy agenda than any major candidate in memory."

"Paul was elected to the Senate in 2010 on the momentum of his father's very libertarian campaign," Boaz wrote. "Unlike his father, he's not running for president to educate and mobilize. He is running to win."

Running to win also means limiting his father's visibility on the campaign trail and "trying to get out from under his father's sometimes-controversial shadow," The Wall Street Journal reports.

[Politico reports](#) that Paul will also use the official campaign launch on Tuesday to demonstrate that he is a tech-savvy political leader who can appeal to young, digitally literate voters and make full use of social media and big data to bolster his bid.

When he steps to the podium on Tuesday in Louisville, his announcement will be amplified online by a campaign team using multiple methods to steer the critical first wave of web traffic to Paul's official campaign website, Politico reports.

"Google staffers plan to be with Paul's top aides in Louisville, as well as at a satellite campaign office in Austin, Texas, to help decipher the optimal moments to blast out digital ads and measure their real-time web performance," Politico reports.

"Paul isn't just using social media like Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter to spread the word about his political ambitions. He's also pushing out all-important links to his own website, where he can solicit donations, email addresses and other vital information that will lead to more asks for money, more invitations to attend rallies and more ways for people to engage with his expected upstart presidential bid," Politico reports.