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## Is 2012 Ron Paul's Time to Shine?

by **Lindsey Boerma**

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Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas, will announce his third presidential bid on Friday. Has his time finally come?

It's official: Rep. **Ron Paul**, R-Texas, is running for president —again.

The libertarian hero [announced Friday morning on \*Good Morning America\*](#) that he will seek the 2012 GOP nomination, marking his third run for the White House: In 2008, he ran as a Republican, and in 1988, he earned less than one percent of the vote in the general election as the Libertarian Party nominee.

This time, experts say, could be different. "Folks who thought he was a distraction in 2008 might now realize that he was a harbinger of something," said Stephen Hess, a Brookings Institute scholar who has studied presidential campaigns since President Eisenhower.

"Make no mistake—this is a person who is not going to win the nomination," Hess continued. "But it's not an inconsequential hat in the ring, which is the case for a lot of others like Rick Santorum, who tend to just muddy the waters for the big fish. This guy has to be accounted for."

David Boaz, executive vice president of the libertarian Cato Institute, took it a step further, suggesting that Paul's not even in it to win it. "He can really make an impact," Boaz said, "but just like four years ago, his main interest is not acquiring political power; it's using the debates and attention to move the dialogue in [what he believes to be] the right policy direction."

But the policy focus has shifted in Paul's direction, Boaz says: "While Ron Paul was talking about excessive spending in 2007, 2008, the rest of the country was talking about the wars" in Iraq

and Afghanistan. Four years later, Republicans wary of Paul's anti-war sentiment in the previous cycle will take comfort in his anti-spending message.

That shift means the tea party endorsement, which brought "fiscally responsible," dark-horse candidates to fame during the movement's first election in 2010, could be one of the hottest commodities on the trail. Rep. **Michele Bachmann**, R-Minn., boasts it; former Gov. Tim Pawlenty wants it; Paul earns it effortlessly.

Though not yet committed to endorsing a candidate, FreedomWorks—a powerful tea party PAC led by former House Majority Leader Dick Armey—is closely eyeing Paul, according to Brendan Steinhauser, the group's director of federal and state campaigns.

"He was actually the first chair of Citizens for a Sound Economy, which is what we previously were, in 1984," Steinhauser said. "So we're glad he's in. He's been right all along about a lot of things that have happened with the economic crisis. He was talking about how the Federal Reserve was manipulating currency, and how we're going to have an economic bust, years before anyone else."

Unreconstructed in his hands-off government ideology, Paul has garnered what has proven to be unshakable loyalty among his base, some supporters [going so far as to move to New Hampshire](#) in a "free state" movement that, while not overtly intended to help Paul, could certainly have collateral benefits in the first-in-the-nation primary state.

What's more, his diehard support has led to a nearly unmatched online fundraising prowess that has [already made Paul a formidable player](#) in the 2012 money game—something that could translate into a reprise of his 2008 performance, when his seemingly bottomless bank account and stubborn idealism left him the last Republican standing alongside ultimate nominee Sen. **John McCain**, R-Ariz. (One possibility strategists can absolutely discount this time around, according to Jesse Benton, Paul's political director, is a third-party run.)

Still, Boaz points to some new liabilities for Paul: At 75, Paul is easily the oldest contender in the field; and then there's Gary Johnson, the former governor of New Mexico who threatens to eclipse at least some of Paul's libertarian star. "So far he hasn't gotten a lot of attention," Boaz said, "but neither had Paul at this point in 2008. And while Paul is a House member—and House members just don't get presidential nominations—Johnson has the experience of being a two-term governor and is just the right age."

But Paul, a doctor, is a larger presence than ever. Fresh off his appointment as the chair of the House Financial Services Domestic Monetary Policy Subcommittee—"what he's always dreamed of," according to Boaz—he has also enjoyed a [mutual bolster](#) from the unlikely success of his son, **Rand Paul**, who last year won the

junior Senate seat in Kentucky. “He’s not the same candidate he was in 2008,” Hess said.

A speech in Exeter, N.H., at 10 a.m. on Friday will officially kick off the campaign.

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