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Rand Paul: ‘It is Time for Hillary Clinton to Permanently Retire’

Rand Paul keeps it tight and libertarian at CPAC.

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Kentucky Senator Rand Paul was supposed to speak at 10:40 a.m. Then, it was 11:40 a.m. As first Sean Hannity, then Donald Trump took the CPAC stage to free-associate about freedom, libertarian fans of Paul—many clad in STAND WITH RAND T-shirts bearing a silhouette of the senator—grew a little restless.

"I came up a half hour ago to see Rand, and it didn't work, so I thought I'd try again," joked Cato Institute vice president David Boaz. (For the record, he was not wearing one of the T-shirts.)

Paul's delay, which was delayed by 20 minutes away in the Capitol, had aftershocks. When Hannity polled the crowd for their views of the 2016 candidates, Paul got a roar of approval. The names of Jeb Bush and Chris Christie drew loud, lusty boos, duly recorded by hundreds of reporters and tweeters. Trump, never a disciplined speaker, ran into the same bear trap when he suggested "boots on the ground" could defeat ISIS and had his hair (figuratively) blown back by jeers.

Finally, closer to 12:30 p.m., Paul took the stage to some of the weekend's loudest applause and the smooth rock sounds of the Edward Winter Group's "Frankenstein." As it had been for Scott Walker's Thursday speech, the Potomac ballroom was filled to the edges.

"There comes a time in the history of nations when fear and forgetfulness cause a nation to hesitate, to waver, and perhaps even to succumb," said Paul. "When that time comes, those who love liberty must rise to the occasion. Will you lovers of liberty rise to the occasion?"

It sounded like a quote from a founding father; it was a Paul original. Paul spoke in high dudgeon about the conflicts in the Levant and the culprits in the rise of ISIS. "Hillary's war made it less safe," said Paul, leading to the growth of "a dangerous and barbaric cult" that perverted Islam.

"We need a foreign policy that encourages stability, not chaos," Paul said. "At home, conservatives understand that the government is the problem, not the solution. As conservatives, we should not succumb to the notion that a government inept at home will somehow become successful abroad." That was not just a whack at the party's hawks. "It is time for Hillary Clinton to permanently retire," said Paul, though that line did not generate as many cheers as the self-criticism of the GOP did.

Paul moved on to a recap of his trips to "Ferguson, Detroit, Chicago," and other blue cities that proved that "liberal policies had failed urban America." In the speech, and in a Q&A, he cited Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of two Americas, "two stark American experiences that run side by side." He "was born into the America that experiences in and believes in opportunity," but he knew what ailed the people in the other America.

"In the coming weeks," said Paul, "I will propose the biggest tax cut in American history, a tax cut on every worker in America. It will cut spending and balance the budget in just five years."

The Q&A, a feature of this CPAC that has taken wildly different forms for different candidates, made up just a few minutes at the end of Paul's time. The questions were friendly -- one asked if "curly hair" was a "gift from God," which allowed Paul to poke fun at himself. Another asked how the GOP could reach out to libertarians who were skeptical of them.

"Nominate Rand Paul!" yelled a man in the crowd.

"Good answer," said Paul.

He delivered his usual argument that true conservatism focused "on the fourth amendment, not just the second amendment," and after a few more questions he walked off the stage to "Frankenstein." Around half of the crowd left with him, as former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum came onstage. The discussion among Paul fans was whether to return just in time for Jeb Bush's Q&A—and then walk out.