

Ron Paul says GOP will be more open to libertarian-minded nominee in 2012

By [Alex Pappas](#) -- The Daily Caller 06/21/10 at 12:46 AM

Ron Paul says he hasn't decided if he'll challenge President Obama for re-election in 2012, but he does predict that Republicans will be more open than they were in 2008 to nominating a libertarian-minded candidate.

"I think there's no doubt about it," Paul said in an interview with The Daily Caller.

This year, libertarian-Republican candidates for the U.S. Senate — like Paul's son Rand Paul in Kentucky and Sharron Angle in Nevada — have won Republican primaries with the help of the Tea Party support. Noting the "big libertarian influence in the Tea Party movement," Paul says libertarian beliefs are making their way into the lexicon of traditional Republicans.

"I think even the issue of the Federal Reserve — that issue is almost mainstream," he said. "And I think things have shifted because of the financial crisis as well as the bogging down of our foreign policy. So the American people are looking for some different answers."

Paul, whose anti-Iraq war views won him jeers at some Republican events in 2008, says a libertarian-minded GOP candidate will be better received when Obama runs for re-election. But he cautioned that he himself has not decided to run. "It's too early for me to talk much about that because I haven't made a decision. I haven't ruled it out, but I'm not on the verge of making a decision anytime soon," Paul said.

Asked to name other potential presidential candidates he could support, Paul replied, "I guess the best one would be Johnson from New Mexico — Gary Johnson."

Johnson, an ultra-marathon runner who was governor from 1995 to 2003 and endorsed Paul in 2008, is beloved by libertarians for his many vetoes and privatizations while in office, and for championing school choice and drug decriminalization.

David Boaz, the executive vice president of the libertarian Cato Institute, said that while he thinks the 2010 elections will sweep in some more libertarian-minded Republicans in Congress and the governor's mansions, he's less optimistic about such a candidate being nominated by Republicans in 2012.

"You can't nominate just anybody, you have to nominate somebody," Boaz said. "And plausible libertarian-minded candidates are hard to find. Ron Paul may make some noise, and may run, but House members don't get nominated for president. Gary Johnson has a great libertarian record, but he doesn't yet have much national recognition."

Boaz did say that “a governor with a good record, like Mitch Daniels or Chris Christie, might be a candidate who could attract support from conservatives, libertarians, and independents,” if they could get around Romney.

While Paul is pro-life, some libertarians are not and hold liberal views on social issues. Larry Sabato, professor of political science at the University of Virginia, said he’s skeptical that someone who is not “comprehensively conservative in both fiscal and social matters” could be nominated as a Republican.

“On the other hand,” said Sabato, “the Tea Party energy may be injecting some flexibility into the picture at the state level — at least in some states. Taxing, spending and debt are so dominating the debate on the GOP side that less attention is being given to the candidates’ social positions.”

Paul argues that independents would be drawn to a libertarian-Republican candidate. “Not that I’m pumping my own campaign because I don’t have one, but I think somebody did a poll that showed that when it comes to independent voters and they put my name up against Obama’s, I can beat him by 18 percent. So I think the independents are much more open to fiscal responsibility and personal liberties and a different foreign policy,” he said.

Tom Jensen, the director of Public Policy Polling, said Paul is more popular with independent voters than he is with Republican primary voters. Jensen’s most recent national 2012 poll of Republicans show Paul only bringing in 6 percent of the vote, behind other potential Republican candidates Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich. “So if he really wants to make an imprint on the 2012 contest, it would be running as an independent rather than just going from state to state finishing fifth or sixth in Republican primaries,” he said.

And then there’s the media problem.

Shortly after his nomination as Republican candidate for the Senate in Kentucky, Rand Paul’s libertarian beliefs seemed to offend many in the national media when he criticized the Civil Rights Act for interfering with private businesses. Democrats have used the episode to try to paint libertarians as extreme, or racist. Angle, appearing to learn from Rand Paul’s experience, has largely ignored the national press, fighting the narrative that her beliefs are extreme too.

So how can libertarians fight the media narrative that they are too far out of the mainstream? Turn the question back around, Paul said. “So I would say that’s extreme? What’s extreme about a balanced budget and smaller government and a foreign policy that makes a lot more sense than policing the world? So I think they are the ones who are the extremists,” he said.

But not all media are dismissive to libertarianism, Paul noted, pointing out that judge Andrew Napolitano on Fox News “now has a very libertarian TV show.”

As for what it would take to get him to run in 2012, Paul said it all depends on if the economy is still in shambles and troops are still bogged down in Afghanistan. He said he hopes he's wrong, but thinks that will still be the case.

"I suspect the economic crisis is going to get a lot worse," he said. "If it is, than the country becomes even more open to free-market alternatives. And I think that is going to stir my interest."

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