



Rand Paul to become second Republican to enter US presidential race

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LOUISVILLE, USA – Rand Paul, a conservative libertarian and precursor of the Tea Party branch of his party, will become the second major Republican to join the 2016 presidential race when he announces his candidacy on Tuesday, April 7.

Rand has summoned supporters and reporters to a speech at 1600 GMT in Louisville, Kentucky, where he has served as senator since January 2011.

Paul will follow Texan Ted Cruz, who launched his candidacy two weeks ago with an appeal to the religious right, among others.

Jeb Bush, brother of former president George W. Bush, leads in opinion polls for the primary elections, although he has yet to announce his candidacy officially.

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton has a team and campaign machine in place, suggesting she will announce in the coming weeks.

In recent days Rand Paul's team has left little doubt as to his presidential ambitions. A video released recently and hinting at a campaign slogan said "One leader will stand up to defeat the Washington machine and unleash the American dream."

It was by defying the Republican "establishment" that Paul, now 52, launched his political career in 2009. This was at the start of the anti-tax and small-government movement that would come to exercise a powerful influence within the Republican Party and come to be known as the Tea Party.

And it is by billing himself as a different kind of Republican leader that Paul will look both to rally ultra-conservatives during the primaries and then broaden the base of his party among young people, independents and minorities. It will be a true high wire act.

His father Ron Paul was a "libertarian" candidate for the presidency – conservative on economic issues but liberal on social issues.

Rand Paul prefers the term "libertarian conservative" to describe himself, or a "constitutional conservative", taking care to break with libertarian positions considered too strict or even marginal.

He has pushed against the surveillance programs of the National Security Agency and has promoted criminal justice reform to end mandatory jail term minimums, endearing himself with libertarians.

On foreign policy, he has long been in favor of US disengagement, going as far as proposing an end to all US foreign aid.

Better to take on Hillary

But Paul has nuanced his positions on some issues. He recently proposed a rise in the Pentagon budget. And on gay marriage and abortion, he has moved toward the traditional Republican position against both.

"So yes, he has taken some positions that libertarians are grumbling about. But it's still the case, that if you look at the big picture, while he may not be a libertarian, he is the most libertarian of the candidates," said David Boaz, executive vice president of a libertarian think-tank, the Cato Institute.

"He's doing a balancing act, first to win Iowa and New Hampshire, then to win the nomination, then to win the general election," said Boaz, who wrote a book entitled "The Libertarian Mind."

Democrats and some of Paul's rivals say instead that he is just an opportunist.

"Unfortunately for Paul, it doesn't matter how many times he tries to reinvent himself. His policies are entirely outside the mainstream," said Michael Tyler, a spokesman for the Democratic Party.

But in Kentucky, Paul's longtime supporters within the Tea Party are avid about this self-proclaimed anti-establishment candidate.

"I like him a lot," said John Hodgson, president of the Louisville branch of the Tea Party.

"He has modified some of his statements to be less isolationist, and I think that is a more practical view of the world," Hodgson added.

In order to insist to his critics that he can break out of the Tea Party mould and rise, Paul has repeatedly cited polls that describe him as the best Republican candidate to take on Clinton.

"Nobody is doing better against Hillary Clinton than myself," he said recently on Fox News.