



[Ron Paul](#)

[Ron Paul Can't Get Any Respect](#)

By [Alex Altman](#) Thursday, August 25, 2011 |

Texas Congressman Ron Paul is running [within two points](#) of Barack Obama in this week's Gallup poll. In a Rasmussen survey, he trails by [one](#). He's rising against his primary rivals and raking in money, netting \$1.8 million in a trademark "money bomb" over the weekend to mark his 76th birthday. And yet, as I write in a story for this week's magazine ([available to subscribers on tablets and the web](#)), his candidacy isn't earning plaudits from the pundit class, whose virtual coverage blackout of Paul's second-place finish in Ames prompted Jon Stewart to wonder why the media was treating Paul's campaign like "the 13th floor of a hotel."

On the campaign trail in New Hampshire, Paul harvests these slights as fuel for the revolution. "The media coverage on Sunday morning was less than perfect for us," he told the crowd last week at the opening of his campaign headquarters in Concord, griping about how he was stonewalled from speaking slots on the morning news shows after Ames. "But you know what, in this day and age, they just aren't as relevant as they think they are." The Rodney Dangerfield routine in a crowd pleaser; the media makes a reliable target. And in some ways he has a valid complaint.

For the most part, the reporters covering the Republican primary confine their coverage to the reliably credible contenders, and to hyping the surging wild cards (a practice which leaves the door open for a follow-up story, in which the wild card is torn down). And for all the enthusiasm of his supporters, and despite the GOP's ideological shift in his direction on a host of issues, Paul is probably not a credible contender for the nomination. He garnered 1% of Republican delegates in 2008. His foreign policy of nonintervention is a nonstarter among neoconservatives. His view that social issues like abortion and gay marriage should be left up to the states causes social conservatives to blanch, even though Paul doesn't personally favor either practice (particularly abortion). He's a fiscal conservative, but his crusade for commodity-backed money and warnings about the looming dangers of hyperinflation aren't exactly simpatico with the deficit hawks' concerns. At 76, his age could be a factor, and he hasn't shaken the fringe rep he was tagged with in 2008. "Ron Paul is not going to be president of the United States," conservative commentator Charles Krauthammer said recently. "We're not a libertarian country. It's a very important strain of conservative thought but it's not the dominant one."

But Paul isn't really running for president, at least not entirely. He is waging a "campaign of ideas," as Jesse Benton, his campaign chair, told me. And his ideas — about the problems with the Federal Reserve, the need to cut spending and shrink the size of government, the pointlessness and prohibitive cost of some of our foreign engagements — are catching on, among both his colleagues in Congress and on the campaign trail. "He hasn't moved toward the center of the party," says libertarian scholar David Boaz of the Cato Institute. "The center has moved toward him."

Paul's meandering speeches and homespun mien are a stark juxtaposition with the bumper-sticker rhetoric common on the campaign trail, and they prompt some people to write him off. But the stylistic differences also play to his advantage. In a world of artifice he has none, and voters sick of political chameleons are drawn to that. "I respect the man for being the lone dog in the fight for liberty," says Donna Trzaski, who voted for John McCain in 2008 but recently read Paul's book *The Revolution: A Manifesto* and drove 150 from her hometown of Coventry, Conn., to Concord on a whim, two pre-teen daughters in tow, to catch a glimpse of Paul in person.

It's well-documented how fervently Paul's fan club believes in him. But when you talk to people seeing the congressman for the first time, a common theme is his humility, the refreshing absence of canned rhetoric or demagoguery and the fully formed policy platform. Politicians tend to pummel rivals without positing alternatives. Paul has a unified theory of how the world works, kooky as it may seem to some. "He isn't about aggrandizing his own ego," says Karen Bachelder, a New Hampshire sales executive and registered independent who voted for Obama in 2008 but isn't sure if she will again. Bachelder showed up at a pair of Paul's events in Concord, quietly scribbling notes and coming away impressed. "Right or wrong, he's trying to find a solution."

So how will Paul fare? "My guess is he's going to do better than he did four years ago," says Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, who is nonetheless skeptical that Paul can make a major splash. "You know the intensity of support that he has, but it's hard to see it rising anywhere near the level necessary to win individual primaries, much less the nomination. I could see him winning some caucuses."

Paul's camp says he's in it to win it. "Winning validates the ideas," Benton says. But the candidate can seem less interested in winning the nomination than winning the ideological battle. Right now that fight is trending his way.

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