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## Paul's libertarian message finds fans

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Ron Paul has catapulted to popularity in Iowa and New Hampshire preaching libertarianism, demonstrating his commitment to smaller government with a commercial depicting the demolition of the Department of Education.

But while some dismiss Paul's views as fringe, a wide range of voters has embraced them this election cycle, cheering his denunciations of bloated government and foreign interventions. These positions - and the primacy of individual liberty - have been mainstays of libertarianism since it coalesced into an American movement 70 years ago, propelled by the writings of novelist Ayn Rand.

Paul's popularity has trained a spotlight on the political movement, traditionally a small but inveterate band of believers whose leaders have seen little electoral success. The Libertarian Party has run a candidate in presidential contests since 1972 (including Paul in 1988) and has never garnered more than 1 percent of support.

"Their story is more one of persistence than popularity," said John Berg, a government professor at Suffolk University who specializes in American political parties.

Of course, Paul himself, running as a libertarian in Republican cloaking, has won election to Congress 12 times from his Texas district. And in recent decades, libertarian ideas have threaded into popular political thinking. The push for lower taxes and deregulation of industries, arguably, links to libertarian emphasis on limited government and a free market.

Indeed, one champion of the ideas, President Reagan, famously was photographed on an airplane in 1980, his wife's head resting on his shoulder, reading *The Freeman*, the magazine of an early libertarian organization.

Even in Massachusetts, the movement's proposals at times have grabbed hold: A libertarian-backed end to the state income tax came close to passage in 2002, taking 40 percent of the vote. It failed again in 2008 by a wider margin, but voters that year passed

a law decriminalizing the possession of a small amount of marijuana - a darling cause of libertarians.

Libertarians argue that the philosophy's staying power owes to its roots in the founding of the country, when the colonists fled restrictive states and churches in Europe and sought a freer existence.

"We were founded in revolution," said David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. "Americans have always believed in free enterprise, capitalism, and liberty."

Others point to human nature. "When you interact with government, sometimes the interaction yields a benefit. But a lot of times it's the government saying 'you can't do that' and people chafe at that," Berg said.

Libertarians' well-funded backers have also helped.

"Part of their program is government shouldn't interfere with the free market, so enough rich businessmen are willing to support them," said Berg, pointing to David Koch, the Kansas oil and gas billionaire who served as the Libertarian vice presidential candidate in 1980. Koch today sits on the board of the Cato Institute and has played a prominent role in financing the Tea Party.

The libertarian movement's modern form took hold in the 1940s in the wake of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. While most Americans had cheered the government expansion, libertarians like Rand viewed it as an amoral power grab, reminiscent of events unfolding in Europe.

"They were reacting to the growth of totalitarianism in Russia and Germany and the growth of the welfare state and the perception that FDR was ignoring the Constitution," Boaz said.

Rand and other young intellectuals gathered at her Manhattan apartment to muse on a less regulated, freer world where individuals guided their own fates, not "collectives," otherwise known as government.

They found intellectual support in the writings of two Austrian economists, Ludwig von Mises and F.A. Hayek, who argued that economic planning distorted the market and that the only efficient and fair means of allocating goods and services was freeing the forces of supply and demand.

With the publishing of Rand's "The Fountainhead" in 1943, the movement gained a foothold in the national consciousness. The best-selling novel tells the story of a genius architect named Howard Roark who triumphs over convention and groupthink. It captured imaginations across the country, including that of David Nolan, founder of the

Libertarian Party, who studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with the intention of becoming a real-life Roark.

Through the 1960s, libertarianism's adherents were loosely affiliated. "The people and organizations pushing libertarian ideas were small in number, mostly obscure, and mostly considered nuts," said Brian Doherty, author of "Radicals for Capitalism: A Freewheeling History of the Modern American Libertarian Movement."

The 1970s brought formal architecture to the movement. President Nixon's imposition of wage and price controls angered libertarians who viewed the move as government meddling. They also strongly criticized Nixon's decision to take the nation off the gold standard. The monetary policy, combined with the nation's escalating involvement in the Vietnam War, defying libertarian opposition to intervention abroad, spurred Nolan to form the Libertarian Party in 1971.

"It was vivid proof that the Republican Party didn't support the free market," Doherty said.

Paul was angered, too, and entered politics, winning his first congressional race in 1976 and quickly drawing a cult following.

Throughout his political career, Paul has hewed closely to the libertarian tenets. Last week he told an Iowa gathering that he will cut \$1 trillion in federal spending and recall US troops from hundreds of foreign bases.

Paul diverges from libertarians on abortion, supporting the repeal of Roe v. Wade because, his website states, "it would be inconsistent for him to champion personal liberty and a free society if he didn't also advocate respecting the God-given right to life - for those born and unborn."

(Ayn Rand would have had a bone to pick with Paul on this point. In a letter to the New York Times in 1976, she wrote, "I am profoundly opposed to Ronald Reagan. Since he denies the right to abortion, he cannot be a defender of any rights.")

Paul's success in this presidential go-round contrasts sharply with his fizzled bid in 2007-2008. His message was much the same then - shutting down the Federal Reserve, cutting spending, and ending the wars in the Middle East. The difference is the times, some say.

"Back in 2007 everyone thought the Federal Reserve was doing a good job, Republicans weren't ready to look at spending because there was a Republican in the White House, and [Senator John] McCain said the surge in Iraq was working," Boaz said. "Now, there's a Democrat in the White House so Republicans want to talk about spending, the Federal Reserve doesn't look as good as it did . . . and even Republicans are getting tired of the war in Afghanistan."

Whatever the electoral outcome this year, Paul's unexpected success in capturing national attention may have cemented his legacy as Rand's successor.

"In 10 years, you may find that Ron Paul has become the answer to the question of: 'How did you get into libertarian stuff?' " Doherty said.