



## Paul's apart: Rand's tricky road to 2016

May 14th, 2014

In America, there is an understanding among political analysts that the Senate comprises a hundred politicians (two from each state), all of whom think they could be a better president than whoever is currently in office. Typically, there are several divergent types of politicians who get elected to that prestigious national legislative body.

First, there are those who seek to become senators because they know they will change things. They can fix what's wrong with a mendacious Washington, and they believe they are uniquely positioned to extirpate the rot and corruption of that place, veritably chasing the moneychangers out of the temple while they are about it.

A second group comprises those who seek election because they want to make a difference. They want to write laws that will make the country better (whatever that might mean), kinder, gentler, stronger or whatever. But, eventually, they become so enamoured with the rituals and activities of this exclusive club, it becomes the place where they want to spend the rest of their lives – at least as long as voters send them back every six years. They fall in love with its complex legislative processes and rules, its sense of historical majesty, and the chances to become legendary masters of all this mystery in the way West Virginia's Robert Byrd was during his decades of service as a senator.

And then there is a third kind of politician, he's the one who labours to become a senator in Washington but who sees becoming a senator as a way to stand in the national limelight, thereby building and sculpting a broad national constituency, all the while becoming a public seer and statesman. From there it is inevitably onward to the presidency – and Air Force One, the White House, the finger on the button, the whole patootie.

Flamboyant, sometimes-angry, eager crusaders like Texas Senator Ted Cruz and Kentucky's Rand Paul initially would seem to be charter members of that first breed of senator. Long-time Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy became a masterful example of the second species (once he gave up his presidential ambitions after a young woman died in his submerged car that he abandoned and remembered to report to the police only the following day, that is). And Massachusetts Senator John Kennedy and Illinois Senator Barack Obama were almost visibly of the third kind, right from the moment they first stepped onto the floor of the Senate Chamber. The complexity for all this, of course, is that once a crusader or tactician becomes a senator, sometimes a strange metamorphosis takes over if a raging presidential fever strikes them.

Interestingly, while being a senator can seem like a natural stepping-stone to the presidency, more presidents have actually come from among the ranks of the nation's governors or former governors, than directly from among the corps of senators. And there is the occasional president who moves upwards from some other field, like being a victorious general such as with William Henry Harrison, Ulysses S Grant or Ike Eisenhower, or from the vice presidency, as with George HW Bush, Richard Nixon, Theodore Roosevelt or Lyndon Johnson. In that latter category, though, becoming president from the vice presidency, it is more usually the case that it happens when a president dies in office and the vice president steps in.

Of course, it is still more than two years from the 2016 election, but the pushing and shoving among would-be challengers is already pretty obvious. Among Republicans, Senators Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and Rand Paul all seem to have been thoroughly infected with presidential fever, along with governors like Bobby Jindal in Louisiana, Mike Pence in Indiana and Scott Walker in Wisconsin. Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan – last time's vice presidential nominee – also seems to have at least one eye on the prize as well. Then there is also Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey, of whom much has been heard. But, he may well already spun out of the race, given those legal (and possibly state and federal criminal) hurdles, stemming from charges of bizarre actions to blockade bridge traffic and disaster relief grants, granted or withheld seemingly for short-term political gain. And these potential challengers can't ignore former governor Jeb Bush and several holdovers from previous races for the White House.

This website has already taken some early looks at potential candidates as a setup for the nomination steeplechase in 2016. Primarily this is because anyone seriously interested in becoming the president – or at the very least the party's candidate for the job – is already crisscrossing the nation to speak at various gatherings of the faithful – on what is sometimes called the “rubber chicken circuit” in honour of the cuisine served.

In addition, besides trying to find the phrases and ideas that may truly resonate with the faithful and so can be sharpened and more precisely chiselled, candidates-in-waiting are beginning to set in motion the machinery necessary to raise the huge gouts of cash needed to make a real run for the nomination, as well as getting a head-start on creating the cash-consuming mechanics of supporter mobilization. (Something Hillary Clinton is already doing over on the other side of the aisle.) Nowadays, this ranges from old-style, face-to-face campaigning to efforts to reach out to (and convince) supporters by means of social media, email – and even the lowly telephone message. Particularly in vogue are what is now called the “push survey call” – a conversation that has built-in prompts in the dialogue to trigger an understanding of and appreciation for a particular candidate's positions – and the denigration of other candidates' views, all in the guise of a legitimate opinion survey.

Simultaneously there is already a run at securing the support of powerful backers who can furnish much of the money needed for all this, as well as the veteran strategists and operatives who become crucial for a good showing all the primaries and caucuses – votes that will begin in a year and a half. In fact, politics American-style for the presidency has virtually become a full-time, extraordinarily complex vocation that now begins years before the actual campaign itself.

In recent weeks, beyond Christie's travails, this website has profiled another would-be, could-be, might-be candidate, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush (yes, the brother of former President George W Bush and son of that earlier Bush president), as there are some signs that the so-called GOP establishment has already settled on him as their preferred candidate.

But it is time to take a proper look at Senator Rand Paul.

Paul is the son of long-time Texas Republican Congressman Ron Paul. In Ron Paul's congressional career (as well as through his several abortive tries for the presidential nomination), the congressman had taken the stance more of a Cato Institute-style libertarian, rather than the more standard-issue, old-style, establishment, business-friendly Republican like Mitt Romney, John McCain or Robert Dole. Ron Paul had been a military doctor, before being elected from his rural Texas district, and his son, Rand, had practiced as an eye specialist (including NGO-style, public service eye clinics) before running and winning his race in Kentucky for his Senate seat, less than four years ago.

According to his own bio, Paul sees himself as "an outspoken champion for constitutional liberties and fiscal responsibility, and a warrior against government overreach. Among his first legislative proposals: cutting \$500 billion in federal spending and a plan to balance the federal budget in just five years." His website argues that he "has been a vocal advocate for term limits, a balanced-budget amendment, a Read the Bills Act, and an audit of the Federal Reserve. He has gained prominence for his independent positions on many political issues." His bio does not point to any particular legislative successes, however.

This writer confesses he has never actually figured out what this hypnotic fixation right-wing Republicans and libertarian types have with the Federal Reserve Banking system means and why they think the bank has a closet of terrible, dark secrets that must be ferreted out in some additional audit process beyond the usual audits of its activities. The bank routinely and statutorily reports to Congress; it issues voluminous documentation; and Reserve Bank chairmen frequently testify – in excruciating, mind-numbing detail – to congressional committees.

Perhaps some day, somebody will explain what they hope to find out about the Fed – and why they think it will have any impact on the country's economic circumstances once they get that hoped-for audit. Is someone really prepared to argue the country does not need an independent, tightly managed central bank to regulate the money supply and help rein in inflation? The British, the Germans, the French, the South Africans, pretty much every nation, even the Russians and Chinese, have just such institutions.

For the nonce, however, we'll just slide this conundrum over into that pending tray until Rand Paul is a declared candidate and his views on the Fed are properly interrogated. (In the meantime, however, no hate mail, and no rants about how the Rothschilds own everything, in cahoots with the House of Morgan, please.)

Right, back to Rand Paul and his presidential dreams – and those late night conversations he must be having with himself while he contemplates a decision that could totally upturn his universe. Already, however, in this nascent, pre-candidacy stage, Paul is already finding out that

it is a tad tougher than it looks to carry out the straddle successfully – the art of saying one thing to one audience, shading the comment a bit for the next bunch, and then sorting out the gradations and contradictions as soon as national media (and his opponents) point out the inconsistencies.

For example, as Rand Paul warbled around the hot button issue of voter ID restrictions, the Washington Post's resident conservative columnist wrote, "On Friday he [Paul] said, 'Everybody's gone completely crazy on this voter ID thing. I think it's wrong for Republicans to go too crazy on this issue because it's offending people.' (He previously had criticized voter identification laws in an appearance with [former Democratic strategist] David Axelrod.) On Monday, he was slammed on the Heritage Foundation [a conservative think tank] Web site.... 'Senator Paul is wrong. It is leaders of the Democratic Party and their allies that have gone crazy over voter ID, not Republicans who have simply been trying to improve election integrity to protect all voters,' Hans von Spakovsky, a senior legal fellow at The Heritage Foundation, told The Foundry. Generally, 'voter ID' refers to laws and proposed laws requiring citizens to present a specific form of valid identification before they are allowed to vote.

" 'It is the absurd claims of voter ID opponents that are insulting – and Paul is apparently unaware that polls show that Americans no matter their race overwhelmingly support voter ID as a common sense reform,' said von Spakovsky, who manages Heritage's Election Law Reform Initiative.

So then it was time for Rand Paul to beat a hasty retreat. His closest adviser, Doug Stafford... insisted, 'In the course of that discussion, he reiterated a point he has made before that while there may be some instances of voter fraud, it should not be a defining issue of the Republican Party, as it is an issue that is perhaps perceived in a way it is not intended.' He argued, 'In terms of the specifics of voter ID laws, Senator Paul believes it's up to each state to decide that type of issue.' (But if so why is he raising the issue in the first place? Why did he say that only after he was bashed from the right?)"

The particular problem for a candidate from the right, as with Rand Paul, is in figuring out a way to do the dog-whistle to the right, even as he isn't forced into saying things that release a storm of protest from everybody else and then have to change his comments. Rubin went on to add, "Von Spakovsky was not impressed with the clarification. He told Right Turn, 'Paul now says he meant that voter ID should not be the defining issue of the Republican Party but only the leadership of the Democratic Party and their allies who are opponents of this common sense reform try to make that claim.' He continued, 'He says correctly that it should be up to states to make a decision on this issue yet then says he wants to have a federal law restoring felon voting rights despite the fact that the Constitution specifically gives the states full authority over that issue, too.' "

The views of the Republican Party's community of true believers offer a variety of tripwires – voter ID is one, but so are things like immigration reform and climate change – and the policy requisites that stem from dealing with those issues.

Or, as Rubin concludes, “Rand Paul’s bobbing and weaving plainly evidence the tension between the authentic Rand Paul, who speaks his mind and rejects a number of conservative views in favor of an eccentric brand of libertarianism, and the Paul who wants to be president. Unfortunately, the impulsive statements uttered by Rand Paul (e.g. [civil rights laws infringe on private property](#), [Vice President Cheney took us to war because of Halliburton](#), the [United States provoked Japan in WWII](#), we should not rule out [containment of Iran](#)) are inconsistent with the goal of becoming a mainstream candidate acceptable to the GOP electorate. That is why he, on one hand, advances anti-interventionist policies and on the other claims to be a devotee of Ronald Reagan. But, alas, the circle can’t be squared.”

Several months earlier, talking to a Republican group in Houston, Texas, Paul had tried to demonstrate a degree of support for reaching out to the minority communities who generally feel most threatened by voter ID moves. Paul had argued, Texas “will be a Democratic state within 10 years if you don’t change. That doesn’t mean we give up on what we believe in, but it means we have to be a more welcoming party. We have to welcome people of all races. We need to welcome people of all classes – business class, working class.... We need a more diverse party. We need a party that looks like America.”

Needless to say, the route to victory in future in a general election may well lie in drawing in more Hispanics to the Republican cause, given that the state’s Hispanic population is nearly 40% of the voters there. Texas is crucial for any Republican victory strategy. It is worth recalling that Mitt Romney only carried 27% of the Hispanic vote in his bid for the presidency and he just barely registered with African Americans – gaining a measly 6%.

Commenting on Paul’s voter ID positions, Salon noted, “Paul may be ahead of the rest of his party in this regard – ‘progressive’ or ‘libertarian,’ depending on your point of view – but black voters and their leaders remain sceptical. Any support he’s expressed for well-established civil rights laws has been qualified by his libertarian bent toward states’ rights. And before Cliven Bundy sounded off about ‘the Negro’ in racist fashion (suggesting that African Americans may have been better off under slavery), Paul voiced support for the renegade Nevada rancher who refuses to pay federal grazing fees.”

Bundy was briefly a figure of populist notoriety and reality TV fame – at least until it became known that his views on African Americans is bordering on lunacy.

Meanwhile, Rand Paul has tried to generate some heat on the White House and enthusiasm among the civil liberties crowd for his putative candidacy (both from the left and the right) by insisting in an op-ed published in the New York Times that the Obama administration release the specific texts of memoranda justifying the use of a drone strike to kill a US citizen. And if the memos were not forthcoming, Paul has threatened to oppose the nomination of David Barron, the man who had actually written some of those memos, to the United States Court of Appeals for the 1st Circuit. (The Senate must advise and confirm all presidential appointments to federal judgeships.)

In his widely commented upon op-ed in the New York Times, Paul had written, “I believe that all senators should have access to all of these opinions. Furthermore, the American people

deserve to see redacted versions of these memos so that they can understand the Obama administration's legal justification for this extraordinary exercise of executive power. The White House may invoke national security against disclosure, but legal arguments that affect the rights of every American should not have the privilege of secrecy."

Paul was actually writing about the death of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born, alleged al-Qaeda propaganda chief and leader killed by a drone strike three years earlier. Again edging into a straddle, Paul went on to write, "I don't doubt that Mr. Awlaki committed treason and deserved the most severe punishment. Under our Constitution, he should have been tried — in absentia, if necessary — and allowed a legal defense."

Paul went on to say, "If he had been convicted and sentenced to death, then the execution of that sentence, whether by drone or by injection, would not have been an issue. But this new legal standard does not apply merely to a despicable human being who wanted to harm the United States. The Obama administration has established a legal justification that applies to every American citizen, whether in Yemen, Germany or Canada."

That position may well have some serious resonance with many potential supporters on civil liberties grounds, and it certainly is a real dent in the Obama administration's civil liberties rep, but Paul's position has rankled the feelings of the Republican Party's neo-cons and national security hawks. And these remain a considerable portion of the party's intellectual elite, its financial backers and a significant electoral support.

And still other stumbles seem to be giving Paul other early hiccups. Beyond his stumble over Bundy (along with Ted Cruz who also initially gave Bundy a thumbs up), Politico noted that several years ago Paul had questioned the basic premise of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and pointed to the fact that one of Paul's former aides had worked as a radio host who labelled himself the 'Southern Avenger' — while wearing a Confederate flag mask. Ugh.

As Politico also noted, "there have been other incidents that have gotten him in trouble. He went from annoying GOP national security hawks with his warnings about drones to disappointing some supporters by suggesting they [drones] could be used against [liquor store robbers](#). And last year Paul had to promise to [be more careful](#) after a series of speeches used language that appeared to be borrowed from other sources without citing them."

Still, all of this is early days. A year from now, Paul may well have figured out just how to let loose those hot button, dog whistle-style statements that rev up the faithful on both the conservative right as well as the libertarian quadrant of the GOP, even as they don't drive the rest of the party to hair-pulling distraction and get the media slathering after his trail. And if he figures this out, he may even generate an appeal to some in the independent middle of the political spectrum and among conservative Democratic circles in some swing states. On the other hand, his would-be Republican challengers for the nomination will undoubtedly be keeping careful track of all his "yes, but", "on the other hand" clarifications as they come from his lips over time, and they will be ready to crucify him with anything that looks like an effort to be on multiple sides of an argument in order to draw in potential voters.

The problem remains that questions like immigration reform (a particular problem now for another would-be challenger, Marco Rubio), voter ID regulations, climate change policy, and civil rights and privacy just aren't side issues for many Republicans – and especially the ardent types who vote in the primaries and caucuses. For them, these are among the core questions of their basic argument with Democrats. If Paul is unable to sort out how to deal with this without looking like a walking bundle of contradictions, talking from all sides of his mouth, and regularly backtracking from earlier positions, primary voters may will move on to someone else – in an effort to find that elusive winning formula and victorious candidate for 2016. **DM**