

# The Washington Post

## Pro-Rand Paul PAC isn't shutting down, just asking Paul to be more libertarian

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The news broke Tuesday afternoon: A Super PAC that had been built to help Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) win the Republican nomination was effectively finished. According to Politico, Cato Institute co-founder Ed Crane had "stopped raising money" for the Purple PAC, "dealing a damaging blow to an already cash-starved" Paul operation.

Among the people surprised by this news was Ed Crane.

"This reporter from Politico called and said, 'I heard you haven't been raising money,'" Crane said in an interview. "I haven't been raising money all summer! Nothing has changed. The PAC is still operating -- I'm not shutting it down."

In a story that sounded fairly close to what *had* been reported, Crane said he was "about to send out a piece of direct mail" to high-dollar libertarian donors, the sort he spent decades cultivating.

"But this was just at the time when Rand started fading into the background," said Crane. "This is supposed to be the year of the outsider. He's the consummate outsider candidate, and he was perceived as yet another one of the guys. I've got \$1.4 million, I could get a lot more, but I didn't want to ask my wealthy friends to chip in at that juncture."

Crane was open to kickstarting the PAC, but his decision fed into the weakness Paul's campaign had shown since the rise of Donald Trump -- arguably, since the wan fundraising numbers of his campaign and his official super PAC's first reporting period. Last week, the impression that Paul might even leave the race was fed by articles in Politico and the Daily Mail, quoting the same anonymous "GOP strategist" in saying that "the stench of death" wafted from the Paul campaign. (The strategist, whose identity was confirmed by the Washington Post, does work for a rival campaign.)

This week, Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) has announced endorsements from a few county leaders and legislators who endorsed Paul's father in his last presidential bid, trying to feed the idea that "liberty movement" conservatives should make a switch. And Paul's bete noire even sent out a mocking Tuesday tweet predicting that the senator would soon leave the race.

Paul, who spent the morning announcing his opposition to a "clean" government funding bill, ended up devoting much of a CNN interview to debunking a Donald Trump tweet. "It's sort of silly season any time Donald Trump opens his mouth," Paul told CNN's Wolf Blitzer Tuesday afternoon. "He's down about 10 points, and I think there's going to be a time when he's marginalized and seen as the comedian that he is."

Paul's campaign, which did not comment on any of the Purple PAC developments, was unsure of what Crane was actually doing. In 2013, its first political activity consisted of ads on behalf of Robert Sarvis, a Libertarian Party candidate for governor of Virginia who was pitted against a Paul-backed Republican candidate, Ken Cuccinelli. In 2015, Crane, like several libertarian donors who've been pressuring Paul, wanted him to distinguish himself from conservatives. He didn't think for a moment that Paul, who just funneled \$250,000 of campaign cash to his state party, would drop out before early primaries.

"His personality is such that there's no way he's out until after New Hampshire," Crane said. "He just has all this upside potential. But his response to the Iranian nuclear deal was a mistake in my view. It was not consistent, and it didn't distinguish him -- which is amazing, because all of the other candidates besides Rand are enamored of the neocons. He's got a great message, if he wants to use it. I want to run TV ads on that message, but he needs to be using it, first."

The slow fundraising for Paul and some supportive facts has been a source of drama and confusion for libertarians. A stark contrast to the "moneybombs" that fueled former Texas Rep. Ron Paul's campaign, the slow Paul fundraising is attributed partly to Paul's own lack of interest in donor management, and in libertarians worrying that the more pragmatic senator won't make an impact in the race.

"Some very wealthy libertarian donors are still sitting on the sidelines," said Jeff Frazee, president of the Concerned American Voters PAC, an unofficial pro-Paul PAC built by him and by the former president of FreedomWorks. "If this changes, things for Rand pick up very quickly. All the anti-establishment candidates are very flawed, which gives Rand an opportunity to rise again. It's not too late."

"We are still 100 percent committed to electing Rand Paul. More donors are warming and becoming energized as a result of Rand's performance in the last debate. They really want a principled, libertarian voice on issues like foreign policy, tax cuts, and criminal justice reform"

Crane certainly didn't think so. "I'm still 'standing with Rand,' as they say, and there's no one else I can think of supporting," he said. "I did get direct e-mail from the Cruz operation for the first time today. I'm sure that was related to all this."