

## Rand Paul shatters left-right paradigm, can help grow GOP

By: Jack Hunter – May 6, 2013

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Many continue to ask how the GOP can remain a party that can win elections and govern nationally. They already have an answer.

Sen. Rand Paul has the benefit of being one of the most conservative Republicans in the traditional, limited-government sense, while holding unique ideological positions that make it possible for him to build new coalitions other Republicans cannot.

Beltway critics insist that Sen. Paul's libertarianism limits him. Some say that the senator's positions on foreign policy, civil liberties and drug law reform make him unacceptable. They are wrong. Paul's libertarianism broadens the Republican Party's appeal. In fact, if the GOP is going to have a fighting chance, it will need to become a more libertarian party.

The heart of American conservatism has always been the simple notion that government is the problem — that government must be limited in scope, checked in its power and restrained by the Constitution. This was Goldwater's creed and Reagan's promise. It is what the Tea Party represents today. It is what most conservatives will continue to espouse tomorrow and for the foreseeable future.

This view of the state is also essentially libertarian, something completely missing from the Republican Party the last time it held power, when debt and government doubled. Today, fiscal hawks, values voters, national security conservatives — virtually every part of the Republican coalition — see massive spending as *the* primary threat to our health and survival. Sen. Paul represents this overarching concern and this coalition, perhaps better than any other national GOP leader.

But what about where Paul differs from the GOP? Critics' first target is usually foreign policy, noting that Paul breaks with too many Republicans on this issue. This is true. It is also one of his greatest political advantages.

Amazingly, many Republicans still see the Bush-Cheney foreign policy legacy as exemplary. But not most Americans. For years now, the polls have shown a war-weary country that sees far more cost than benefit in our decade spent in Iraq and Afghanistan. Americans still want a strong defense, but they want decidedly less intervention abroad. Rasmussen recently reported that only 17% of Americans want the U.S. to intervene in Syria.

Still, some insist on mislabeling Paul's foreign policy as outside the mainstream. The truth is that a policy prescription of a strong national defense and less involvement in protracted wars represents the mainstream of America much better than the bellicosity of the neoconservatives.

Independents and America's youth are, in fact, drawn to a common-sense foreign policy that incorporates Eisenhower's reluctance toward pre-emptive war, that understands both the human and fiscal costs of war.

Sen. Paul considers himself a foreign policy realist. There will always be neoconservatives who will continue to label Paul an "isolationist" — but who actually believes this? Does anyone outside the Republican war caucus think this? The Cato Institute's Christopher Preble recently asked: "Are those people who believe that the primary object of the U.S. military is to defend the United States and its vital interests isolationists? Is it 'isolationist' to believe that a government's most sacred obligation is to defend its people from harm, and therefore that other countries should take responsibility for their own security?"

Republican hawks will no doubt continue to contend that they are in the national mainstream, even as public opinion polls suggest otherwise. There was a 50-point swing in public opinion on drone use after Sen. Paul's filibuster. A Fox News poll last week showed Americans feared government overreaction to national tragedies more than terrorist attacks.

After a decade of color-coded terror alerts, airport groping and increased government surveillance, there's a reason most Americans don't want to trade more liberty for security.

Not only are a majority of Americans ready to come home from Afghanistan, so are a majority of Republicans.

It is true that there are Republicans who do not agree with Rand Paul on foreign policy and civil liberties. But those Republicans, now dwindling in number and influence, are out-of-step with the rest of the country.

To be successful, the GOP will need to be able to attract young people, who not only value liberty and have soured on war, but are looking for a way out of paying for debt-driving entitlements they never expect to see anyway. Young Americans, ever attuned to the latest technology, want to see challenges to online privacy and freedom like CISPA, SOPA and PIPA rebuked. Young people would like to see a more tolerant attitude toward non-violent drug offenders.

So would African-Americans. While Sen. Paul received much attention after his speech at Howard University, negative and positive, he was actually attempting the minority outreach to which other Republicans only give lip service. Part of the reason is that Paul, almost alone as a Republican, has policy positions that could find traction in the black community. In an op-ed for CNN titled "The GOP Path to Black Votes," NAACP President Benjamin Jealous writes: "Paul received applause when he told the Howard crowd, 'We should not have drug laws or a court system that disproportionately punishes the black community.' He illustrated using one issue where the GOP can connect with

black voters: criminal justice reform. ... Paul is poised to lead the conversation on criminal justice reform.”

Speaking before the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in March, Paul received a warm reception when he described immigration reform that would address the problem of 12 million undocumented workers, but also conservative concerns over broken border security. Paul, whose libertarian creed values the individual over the collective, tried to relate to the audience members as people, not simply members of a group.

Hispanics, African-Americans and young people would be attracted to a more libertarian Republican Party’s stances on a variety of issues. So would those in blue states and on the West Coast, in areas the GOP has written off. Paul may be the first Republican in some time who has the ability to attract voters from across the political spectrum.

Less government, less war, more tolerance and more liberty is a winning message that slices through conventional partisan, ethnic and generational barriers.

For decades, Republicans have tried to figure out how to break down these barriers. They have failed.

Rand Paul is changing the conversation in the Republican Party. Republicans should listen.