

THE DAILY CALLER

Libertarian Republicans deserve to fail if they can't write their own damn copy

By J. Arthur Bloom

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Buzzfeed's Andrew Kaczynski has been on a tear the last two days, [revealing instances](#) of two libertarian-leaning Republican senate candidates plagiarizing their position statements.

In several cases, Greg Brannon, running in North Carolina, and David Clements, running in New Mexico, took their "on the issues" blurbs directly from Rep. Justin Amash, a congressman from Michigan who is head of the House Liberty Caucus. In another, Brannon cribs a post on executive war powers from Cato Institute scholar Doug Bandow.

In general we should take it as a hopeful sign that there are so many up-and-coming Republicans that even *want* to ape someone like Amash, who has clashed repeatedly with leadership in the last year over civil liberties and spending. And one could snark that they've simply carried the libertarian view on copyright a bit too far. But plagiarizing — even plagiarizing an ally — is self-defeating, and these incidents speak to a broader difficulty for libertarian Republicans as they attempt to make their case to the mainstream.

If you recall, the most prominent libertarian politician in America today, Senator Rand Paul, has a similar problem. In addition to the more sordid tale of Bruce Fein being [edged out](#) in favor of Ken Cuccinelli to argue Paul's NSA lawsuit, he was dropped as a *Washington Times* columnist in November — the paper actually said they had "mutually agreed" to the split — after the paper [found](#) he "failed to properly source material."

A senator writing a weekly column is unusual enough; it's an extra strain on an overworked staff and a packed schedule (though if any are reading this and they'd like to try, do get in touch). *Bloomberg's* Brendan Greeley, commenting on Paul and Fareed Zakaria's plagiarism, had this astute [observation](#) about why they might be doing it:

They wanted us to see them as something more than they were, a host and a senator. That they were too busy to be less sloppy doesn't explain the problem. It is the heart of the problem: Plagiarism, ultimately, is about wanting to be something you are not.

But it's obvious that Paul has no interest in being a professional columnist. So why take on the gig in the first place?

Paul is, for better or worse, the spokesman for a movement larger than himself, and one that is on the losing end of a serious media asymmetry. It would be pointless for Lindsey Graham or John McCain to have a similar weekly column. Both are regular guests on the nauseating Sunday morning network cattle calls — McCain has been on “Face the Nation” [more than any other guest](#). Either could place an op-ed with the neoconservative-leaning *Wall Street Journal*’s editorial page at a moment’s notice. But they wouldn’t even necessarily need to — the back bench of “terrorism experts,” former Bush administration officials, and hawkish politicians is deep.

This is what libertarian-leaning pols are up against. It means they have to work harder to get their views a hearing, and they have to be smarter about it.

Even more crucially, a populist uprising (or a [libertarian populist](#) uprising) is no good if it doesn’t speak in its own voice. New Mexicans are probably happy to hear that David Clements agrees with Justin Amash, or at least they’re more amenable to those views than his main opponent, a defense contractor. But nobody likes a clone.

I’d venture to guess that a lot of this has to do with the professionalization of politics in general, and the libertarian movement more recently as pollster nabobs tell us of the growing popularity of their views. Ron Paul or Pat Buchanan probably never needed to consult Cato Institute blog posts to come up with their position on executive war powers. A 23 year-old with a degree in “political communications” might have to do a significant amount of googling. And if the position statement that comes out of it reads more like a focus-grouped attempt to appeal to a supposed “libertarian moment,” or if it’s outright stolen, people can tell.

(I can’t resist pointing out that the plagiarism in Paul’s office occurred after Jack Hunter departed, on the heels of a hit piece from the Free Beacon, a neoconservative opposition research shop chaired by a registered foreign agent. Hunter is a [big Russell Kirk fan](#), and if there’s any profession that prepares you to regurgitate lots of words, it’s radio. He probably wouldn’t have made these mistakes.)

Issues like war powers, the structural imbalances of our entitlement programs, and the second amendment, or even more apparently trivial things like localizing agriculture and education, matter a great deal. And Americans don’t like it when politicians aren’t being sincere, even about something as silly and easily discarded as a position statement.