



Can Rand Paul appeal to mainstream America?

By Jeff Barnd

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Now that Kentucky Senator Rand Paul is officially in the race for the G.O.P presidential nomination, many pundits wonder how he'll fare in courting the more moderate republicans.

The Kentucky senator has not been afraid to speak his mind on topics rarely discussed by both parties.

Emily Ekins is a political analyst at the Cato Institute. 'Paul talks about things like criminal justice reform, domestic surveillance and drones, says Ekins. "Those are topics that commonly aren't discussed widely by a lot of republicans. And he's doing that and he's attracting a diverse audience as a result."

Insiders say Paul will have to court "regular" grassroots voters; many of whom favored his father, former presidential candidate Ron Paul. The elder Paul also attracted wealthy libertarians who raised millions in cash to fuel his campaign.

"He was able to tap into both of those things," says Ekins. "That could help Rand Paul's campaign."

But to take the White House, polls say the Senator will have to compromise within his party to shore-up the G.O.P. base.

According to a Politico bipartisan survey this week in the early voting states of New Hampshire and Iowa, roughly two-thirds of respondents said Paul can win in those states. But only 16 percent think he could beat Hillary Clinton in a general election.

The Senator already caused controversy with his absence from weighing in on two major issues that occurred last week; the religious freedom bill in the state of Indiana and the framework for an Iran nukes deal. Paul says he was vacationing with family and had no comment.

Even though Senator Paul vaguely addressed those issues in his announcement Tuesday.

"Taking an ambiguous position on controversial issues often is advantageous to you before announcing you're running," says Ekins. "So it probably was a smart political move last week."

"I'm interested to see what he does now that he's announced," Ekins added, "Particularly with young people. He's the most popular Republican candidate among the rising generation."