



# *For Loyalists, Is It Ron Paul Or Nothing?*

By Scott Neuman  
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Benom Plumb, a 31-year-old music industry executive from Nashville, thinks the country is on the wrong path, and that Ron Paul is the only candidate who can turn things around.

As for the other Republicans, Plumb doesn't mince words: Mitt Romney? Too slick. Rick Santorum? Too religious. Newt Gingrich? Untrustworthy. "They are all liars and cheaters, if you ask me," he says.

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*- Cary Covington, political science professor at the University of Iowa*

While the other GOP contenders have seen their fortunes wax and wane with voters, Paul has enjoyed steadfast, if relatively low level, support from an obsessively loyal base of backers. But if his long-shot bid falls short, will they throw their votes to one of his rivals?

## **The Anti-Establishment Factor**

It could prove a difficult sell, political observers say, because Paul's supporters are famously leery of the Republican establishment.

"The kind of voter that likes Ron Paul does not fit neatly into any of the other candidates' profiles," says Cary Covington, a political science professor at the University of Iowa.

"Not only is he into limiting government, but he's also talking about a less interventionist foreign policy — getting out of the war in Afghanistan, relaxing laws on drugs, and those kinds of things," Covington says. "Those ideas do not appeal to most Republicans."

Taylor Romero, 28, chief technical officer at a Denver-based mobile software applications startup, says he and his fellow Paul supporters have a tough time relating to the other GOP candidates.

"I have a theory that the Republican Party has been hijacked by theological elements," he says. "Until they finally reaffirm the importance of the separation of church and state, I can't see supporting the mainline party."

Romero says he caucused for Paul in 2008 but reluctantly decided to vote for Barack Obama in the general election over GOP nominee John McCain.

This time, it's Paul or nothing. "I'm tired of having to play the lesser of two evils game," Romero says, adding that if the Texas congressman isn't the nominee, he'll just write him in come November.

### **A Delicate Balance**

That anti-establishment sentiment among his supporters presents a challenge for Paul: how to influence the party without being seen as a sellout if his bid fails.

When Paul bowed out in 2008 and declined to run as an independent, he skirted the problem by endorsing Constitution Party candidate Chuck Baldwin instead of McCain.

This time around, Paul still isn't likely to run as a third-party or independent candidate, but he has enough clout to try to use his influence to get a spot on the convention speech roster — and some sway over the GOP platform on issues such as the Federal Reserve, says Francis Neely, a professor of political science at San Francisco State University.

"If Paul gets the concessions he's after, I think he will be inclined to throw his support behind the nominee," Neely says.

He's also got his son's future in politics to think about, says the University of Iowa's Covington.

"I think he sees a political future for his son [GOP Sen.] Rand Paul, possibly even running for president someday, but certainly being a strong voice in the Republican Party," Covington says.

"A third-party candidacy right now would put his son in the position of either not supporting his dad, which would be unseemly, or betraying his party, which would poison the well in the future."

## **Forging An Alliance?**

If Romney wins the nomination in August, it might make it easier for Paul to work with the Republican establishment, says John Samples, director of the libertarian Cato Institute's Center for Representative Government. He says that ideology aside, Paul and Romney are personal friends, which could smooth the way for a truce, if not an alliance.

There have been rumors in recent weeks that the Romney and Paul campaigns have opened back-door negotiations in anticipation of a possible Romney nomination.

But a Santorum nomination could prove a roadblock.

"Santorum, especially his foreign policy, is pretty anti-libertarian," Samples says.

The thought of Paul endorsing Romney — or Santorum or Gingrich, for that matter — is tough to swallow for supporters Romero and Plumb.

"If it were to happen, I would lose respect for Paul," Romero says.

Plumb thinks Romney and Paul are too far apart on too many issues. "I don't see how it could happen," he says. "If it did, I still wouldn't vote Romney."

Instead, Plumb says he probably would vote for Obama. "But I think the majority of Ron Paul supporters will simply stay home in November."