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Paul Disowns Extremists' Views But Doesn't Disavow the Support

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The American Free Press, which markets books like "The Invention of the Jewish People" and "March of the Titans: A History of the White Race," is urging its subscribers to help it send hundreds of copies of Ron Paul's collected speeches to voters in New Hampshire. The book, it promises, will "Help Dr. Ron Paul Win the G.O.P. Nomination in 2012!"

Don Black, director of the white nationalist Web site Stormfront, said in an interview that several dozen of his members were volunteering for Mr. Paul's presidential campaign, and a site forum titled "Why is Ron Paul such a favorite here?" has no fewer than 24 pages of comments. "I understand he wins many fans because his monetary policy would hurt Jews," read one.

Far-right groups like the Militia of Montana say they are rooting for Mr. Paul as a stalwart against government tyranny.

Mr. Paul's surprising surge in polls is creating excitement within a part of his political base that has been behind him for decades but overshadowed by his newer fans on college campuses and in some liberal precincts who are taken with his antiwar, anti-drug-laws messages.

The white supremacists, survivalists and anti-Zionists who have rallied behind his candidacy have not exactly been warmly welcomed. "I wouldn't be happy with that," Mr. Paul said in an interview Friday when asked about getting help from volunteers with anti-Jewish or antiblack views.

But he did not disavow their support. "If they want to endorse me, they're endorsing what I do or say -- it has nothing to do with endorsing what they say," said Mr. Paul, who is now running strong in Iowa for the Republican nomination.

The libertarian movement in American politics has long had two overlapping but distinct strains. One, backed to some degree by wealthy interests, is focused largely on economic freedom and dedicated to reducing taxes and regulation through smaller government. The other is more focused on personal liberty and constraints on government built into the Constitution, which at its extreme has helped fuel militant antigovernment sentiment.

Mr. Paul has operated at the nexus of the two, often espousing positions at odds with

most of the Republican Party but assembling a diverse and loyal following attracted by his adherence to libertarian principles.

Mr. Paul's calls for the end of the Federal Reserve system, a cessation of aid to Israel and all other nations and an overall diminishment of government power have natural appeal among far-right, niche political groups. Aides say that much of the support is unsolicited and that it is unfair to overlook the larger number of mainstream voters now backing him.

But a look at the trajectory of Mr. Paul's career shows that he and his closest political allies either wittingly or unwittingly courted disaffected white voters with extreme views as they sought to forge a movement from the nether region of American politics, where the far right and the far left sometimes converge.

In May, Mr. Paul reiterated in an interview with Chris Matthews of MSNBC that he would not have voted for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing segregation. He said that he supported its intent, but that parts of it violated his longstanding belief that government should not dictate how property owners behave. He has been featured in videos of the John Birch Society, which campaigned against the Civil Rights Act, warning, for instance, that the United Nations threatens American sovereignty.

In the mid-1990s, between his two stints as a Texas congressman, Mr. Paul produced a newsletter called The Ron Paul Survival Report, which only months before the Oklahoma City bombings encouraged militias to seek out and expel federal agents in their midst. That edition was titled "Why Militias Scare the Striped Pants Off Big Government."

An earlier edition of another newsletter he produced, The Ron Paul Political Report, concluded that the need for citizens to arm themselves was only natural, given carjackings by "urban youth who play whites like pianos." The report, with no byline but written in the first person, said: "I've urged everyone in my family to know how to use a gun in self-defense. For the animals are coming."

Mike Holmes, former editor of The American Libertarian, who has known Mr. Paul from libertarian circles since the 1970s, contended that the newsletters did not "rise to the level of hate speech." He added: "It goes more to the level of social commentary. There was no use of any 'N'-words. It amounted to the style of foul-mouthed punks trying to get inside the gang of paleoconservatives."

Those newsletters have drawn new scrutiny through Mr. Paul's two recent presidential campaigns. The New Republic posted several of them online in 2008 and again recently, including a lament about "The Disappearing White Majority." The conservative Weekly Standard ran an article highlighting the newsletters last week.

Mr. Paul has long repudiated the newsletters, contending that they were written by the staff of his company, Ron Paul & Associates, while he was tending to his obstetrician's practice and that he did not see some of them until 10 years later. "I disavow those positions," he said in the interview. "They're not my positions, and anybody who knows

me, they've never heard a word of it."

But production of the newsletters was partly overseen by Lew Rockwell, a libertarian activist who has been a close political aide and adviser to Mr. Paul over the course of decades. At the same time that he was a director for Mr. Paul's company, Mr. Rockwell called on libertarians to reach out to "cultural and moral traditionalists," who "reject not only affirmative action, set-asides and quotas, but the 1964 Civil Rights Act and all subsequent laws that force property owners to act against their will."

Mr. Rockwell and Mr. Paul came to know each other as followers of the free-market Austrian economists Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich A. Hayek, who argued against socialism and centralized economic planning, a spokesman for Mr. Paul said. They joined with the libertarian theorist Murray Rothbard in the 1970s and 1980s during the early attempts to forge libertarianism into a national party.

Mr. Rockwell was listed in business filings as a director of Ron Paul & Associates from its founding in 1984 through its dissolution in 2001, and was a paid Paul campaign consultant through at least 2002, according to federal campaign records. He was Mr. Paul's chief of staff during the congressman's first period in Congress, which began in the 1970s, and championed his successful bid in 1988 for the Libertarian Party's presidential nomination.

During that nominating battle, a flier produced by Mr. Paul's opponents accused him of gay-baiting by reporting in one of his newsletters that the government was "lying" about the threat of AIDS and that the virus could be transmitted through "saliva, tears, sweat." It said that some "AIDS carriers -- perhaps out of a pathological hatred -- continue to give blood."

Mr. Paul said Friday "that was never my view at all," and again blamed his staff. Still, that same year he was quoted in The Houston Post as saying that schools should be free to bar children with AIDS and that the government should stop financing AIDS research and education.

As the Libertarian standard bearer, Mr. Paul won less than 1 percent of the vote. After the election, as libertarians searched for ways to broaden the appeal of their ideology, Mr. Rockwell and Mr. Rothbard advocated a coalition of libertarians and so-called paleoconservatives, who unlike hawkish "neocons" were socially conservative, noninterventionist and opposed to what they viewed as state-enforced multiculturalism.

In the Rothbard-Rockwell Report they started in 1990, Mr. Rothbard called for a "Right Wing Populism," suggesting that the campaign for governor of Louisiana by David Duke, the founder of the National Association for the Advancement of White People, was a model for "paleolibertarianism."

"It is fascinating that there was nothing in Duke's current program or campaign that could not also be embraced by paleoconservatives or paleolibertarians," he wrote.

Arguing that too many libertarians were embracing a misplaced egalitarianism, Mr. Rockwell wrote in Liberty magazine: "There is nothing wrong with blacks preferring the 'black thing.' But paleolibertarians would say the same about whites preferring the 'white thing' or Asians the 'Asian thing.' "

Their thinking was hardly embraced by all libertarians. "It was just something that we found abhorrent, and so there was a huge divide," said Edward H. Crane, the founder of the Cato Institute, a prominent libertarian research center.

Mr. Crane, a longtime critic of Mr. Rockwell, called Mr. Paul's close association with him "one of the more perplexing things I've ever come across in my 67 years." He added: "I wish Ron would condemn these fringe things that float around because of Rockwell. I don't believe he believes any of that stuff."

Mr. Paul said in the interview that he did not, but he declined to condemn Mr. Rockwell, saying he did not want to get in the middle of a fight. "I could understand that, but I could also understand the Rothbard group saying, Why don't you quit talking to Cato?" he said.

Mr. Paul described Mr. Rockwell and Mr. Rothbard as political provocateurs. "They enjoyed antagonizing people, to tell you the truth, and trying to split people," he said. "I thought, we're so small, why shouldn't we be talking to everybody and bringing people together?"

Nonetheless, Mr. Paul's newsletters veered into language that would most likely appeal to Mr. Duke's followers, including the suggestion in 1994 that Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, was responsible for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

He said he did not discuss the content of the newsletters with Mr. Rockwell because readers never complained. "I was pretty careless about what was going in my own newsletter -- that was my biggest fault," he said.

Mr. Rockwell did not respond to interview requests. Carol Moore, a libertarian opponent of his at the time, said he and his allies had "all evolved" and moderated their views since.

Still, the newsletters had a lasting appeal with the audience Mr. Rockwell and Mr. Rothbard talked about reaching.

Mr. Black of Stormfront said the newsletters helped make him a Ron Paul supporter. "That was a big part of his constituency, the paleoconservatives who think there are race problems in this country," Mr. Black said.

"We understand that Paul is not a white nationalist, but most of our people support him because of his stand on issues," Mr. Black said. "We think our race is being threatened through a form of genocide by assimilation, meaning the allowing in of third-world immigrants into the United States."

Mr. Black said Mr. Paul was attractive because of his "aggressive position on securing our borders," his criticism of affirmative action and his goal of eliminating the Federal Reserve, which the Stormfront board considers to be essentially a private bank with no government oversight. "Also, our board recognizes that most of the leaders involved in the Fed and the international banking system are Jews."

Mr. Paul is not unaware of that strain among his supporters. Mr. Crane of the Cato Institute recalled comparing notes with Mr. Paul in the early 1980s about direct mail solicitations for money. When Mr. Crane said that mailing lists of people with the most extreme views seemed to draw the best response, Mr. Paul responded that he found the same thing with a list of subscribers to the Spotlight, a now-defunct publication founded by the holocaust denier Willis A. Carto.

Mr. Paul said he did not recall that conversation, which was first reported in the libertarian publication Reason, and doubted that he would have known what lists were being used on his behalf. Yet he said he would not have a problem seeking support from such a list.

"I'll go to anybody who I think I can convert to change their viewpoints -- so that would be to me incidental," he said. "I'm always looking at converting people to look at liberty the way I do."