



Is Surging Ron Paul a Reluctant Candidate?

By **Erin McPike** - November 16, 2011

Ron Paul is **just shy of the lead in Iowa** less than two months before the Republican presidential caucuses, and has risen to second place in New Hampshire. But even as the GOP keeps searching for an alternative to front-runner Mitt Romney, just about no one in politics thinks it will be the 76-year-old congressman from Texas.

He doesn't seem to either.

When RealClearPolitics asked Paul Wednesday morning, after a speech sponsored by the Cato Institute, if he actually wanted to be president, he shrugged and said, "Sure."

Asked by RCP later in the day, as he was leaving a health care-related event in the Rayburn Building in Washington, why he wanted to be president, Paul responded, "I think that's a silly question."

Pressed on the matter, he answered, "It's obvious."

Asked what the obvious answer is, Paul said, "Well if it's not obvious, I think there's a problem with the question. . . . It doesn't make any sense to me."

At the morning event, other reporters present gasped in apparent disbelief that such an inquiry could be made of a man who just delivered a meaty speech on monetary policy and the Federal Reserve, which Paul considers useless. Then again, none of the reporters who cover the presidential race on a daily basis was present -- perhaps an indication that his candidacy isn't being taken seriously by many news organizations.

A Daily Caller reporter asked the three-time presidential candidate if he was surprised to find himself leading in the new state polling. Paul replied, "Not entirely," because, he said, he's willing to challenge the status quo.

Though Paul should expect such questions about his surge -- which could tilt votes away from the other leading candidates and change the race's outcome -- he seemingly doesn't. Paul was decidedly disinterested when a Washington Post reporter informed him that he would soon be featured in a profile on the paper's front page and asked if they could talk. Paul ultimately wandered into a cab and left the conference at the National Association of Home Builders headquarters in downtown Washington.

Given the fervent support of Paul's die-hard backers, few reporters were surprised that Paul finished a close second to Michele Bachmann at the Iowa Straw Poll in August, and the stories that followed were mostly about Tim Pawlenty (who withdrew from the race) and Bachmann, as well as Rick Perry, who entered the race on the same day. Few news outlets

devoted space to Paul, earning heavy criticism from his supporters and a critical note from the Post's ombudsman.

Paul's fans continue to harangue the media for refusing to pay much attention to him, but whether the candidate wants it remains a mystery. (The same can't be said for how he feels about his libertarian-leaning ideas.)

Paul wasn't anywhere near the cornfields of Iowa or the covered bridges of New Hampshire when he addressed the Cato crowd, but even when his presidential rivals swoop into the nation's capital for a speech, they tend to remind their audiences that they are running for president. It's something most people in this position simply can't stay quiet about. But more important, addressing a conference is an opening to get to more donors and support from activists or coalitions.

And yet, Paul didn't emulate Mitt Romney, who likes to tell listeners he is running for nation's highest office, perhaps so they can get used to the idea; or Rick Perry, who said he'll bring what he did in Texas to Washington. Paul never asked for a vote, never asked for the support of the people in the room, and never talked about what his administration would do come 2013.

Still, his campaign is churning out a hefty volume of press releases noting that he is on the rise. His team drew attention to a new **Public Policy Poll (D)** of voters nationally that shows him leading President Obama among independent voters.

Despite that claim, it would be a challenge to find anyone who says Paul has a viable chance at becoming the Republican presidential nominee, let alone the next president.

He doesn't look like a president, nor does he sound like one. His speeches don't accelerate, slow or build. Paul eschews sound bites and meanders through his points.

Perhaps that is because he knows them so well. Paul feels passionately about disbanding the Federal Reserve. In his speech Wednesday morning, he said, "There is no doubt the Federal Reserve is immoral, unconstitutional and a disaster. We don't need it."

While he hammered Congress for failing to supervise the institution more closely, Paul said he is convinced that tremendous progress has been made since the financial collapse of 2008. And he pointed to a bill that passed by Congress calling for a partial audit of the Fed as a good sign. Nonetheless, he said, "on the Hill, there's not a whole lot of enthusiasm for what I've been talking about."

Where Paul sees progress for his point of view is on college campuses.

"They think this is a big issue, and they think it's part of the spending issue," he told the Cato crowd, adding, "The revolution is rising." He noted that 3,000 people attended a rally he held at the University of Michigan following a debate during the last race.

Fast-forward four years from that time, during which we've seen the rise of the Tea Party and concern about the national debt, and Paul still acts surprised by the attention his message is getting, reflected by a growing crew of eager young backers and an influx of millions of dollars into his campaign.

In his remarks, though, he worried that the congressional super committee for deficit reduction isn't anywhere close to meeting its goals. And he blasted Congress for the plan to cut \$1 trillion over 10 years -- Paul believes that amount should be cut in the first year alone.

He answered a series of questions from the audience, who wanted to know the details of monetary policy, the gold standard and currency manipulation. He fielded none about the battle for the GOP nomination.

He said he was glad Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke has to hold press conferences and face questions; complained that while politicians blast **China** for manipulating its currency, the U.S. does the same; cheered currency competition; said the **United States** is 10 times worse off than it was in the 1970s because of the debt situation and related factors; and said, "any reform that ignores monetary policy is not a reform."

Paul's second "major speech" of the day, as his campaign called it, centered on health care policy. The small room at the Rayburn Building was stuffed with the kind of young voters who have ferociously backed Paul's presidential runs.

At the event, the candidate delved into the minutiae of drug policies and gave scant attention to the contours of the presidential race, although he did obliquely reference Rick Perry, who forgot **during a debate last week** one of three federal agencies he'd try to eliminate if elected president. (Paul first said he didn't want to cite the ones he would cut for fear he might not remember them all, but then listed them: Energy, Education, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development and Interior.)

He offered his young audience lines like, "The FDA does more harm than good" and, "The FDA has kept a lot of good drugs off the market." He also said something some of his Republican rivals would never dream of uttering: "We as a country have lost faith and confidence in freedom."

Justin Monk, a 25-year-old insurance agent from Baltimore voted for Paul in the 2008 primary, and told the congressman he was a huge fan just before he asked a policy-based question. But as Monk described his strong support for the Texan, Paul neither smiled nor flinched.