



# *Ron Paul: The invisible candidate*

## **A Different Drum**

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Unless you've been following the Republican primaries very closely, there is one candidate you might have missed. You probably haven't read about him in this or in most other newspapers.

His name is Ron Paul.

The media blackout on Paul is well documented. A study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism found that Paul was the lead in only 2 percent of news stories about the primaries, despite polling numbers at several times that amount.

Jon Stewart of the "Daily Show" documented the media bias in a hilarious segment all the way back in August at the time of the Ames, Iowa straw poll. Paul had finished a close second, but the media largely skipped over him, telling viewers that the "top tier" of the party had been selected, noting that that top tier included poll winner Michele Bachman, and third and fourth place finishers Mitt Romney and Rick Perry.

"The Daily Show" montage showed that reporters went even further to isolate Paul, promoting Rick Santorum, Jon Huntsman, and non-candidate Sarah Palin as more deserving of viewers attention.

Ron Paul is a Republican, but his appeal cuts across party lines. He identifies not as conservative or liberal, but rather libertarian.

I should state my own bias. I like much, though not all, of what libertarian ideology has to offer. The focus on civil and personal liberties appeals to me. Unfortunately, libertarians in the United States tend to focus far more on economic liberties. This may be due to their sources of funding, which largely lies in wealthy individuals and corporations.

Ultimately, libertarianism is like socialism, capitalism and many of the other 'isms. While from a theoretical point of view, it has much to offer, as an all-consuming ideology, it is impractical in addressing the problems facing the modern world.

When asked in one of the debates to describe himself in one word (a ridiculous question to be sure) Paul used the word “consistent.”

With his focus on ideology over party, consistent is a good descriptor. Paul has voted consistently against numerous bills and congressional resolutions if he thought they violated his belief system. The number of items in which he is the lone dissenting vote is quite large.

Recently, Paul even declined secret service protection, equating it with welfare and saying if he needed protection, he'd pay for it himself.

The media blackout has been increasing as the primary campaign has gone on. There are now no network reporters travelling with Paul (NBC apparently lasted the longest).

The problem hasn't just been about news coverage. It has even extended to the debates, where Paul is asked fewer questions than other candidates and treated dismissively by debate moderators.

I suppose this year is a step up from 2008 when opposing candidates tried to get him kicked out of debates for his opposition to the Iraq war.

News producers justify their exclusion of Paul by saying he isn't a viable candidate. Their promotion of candidates with much lower poll numbers gives lie to that claim.

But the lack of viability can also be a self-fulfilling prophesy. By refusing to cover Paul and his ideas, they help drive home the point of view that he cannot win regardless of whatever appeal he may have.

That isn't to say that their claim doesn't have some merit. Like many candidates who focus on ideological purity, Paul isn't likely to garner enough support to be the Republican nominee, especially with political narratives driven by conservative/liberal divides.

Because Paul has opposed his party on a number of issues, particularly interventionist foreign policy, some conservatives won't consider him.

But that's exactly why he appeals across party lines. Liberals differ with Paul on many issues as well, especially his opposition to civil rights legislation. But he appeals to those who worry about government encroachment on civil liberties.

Republicans have long worried that Paul could go rogue, running either with the Libertarian Party or as an independent candidate and thus depriving their nominee of votes. There's no indication he plans to do that.

But if he did, Paul would likely draw support from both sides of the aisle, perhaps ensuring that whoever won the presidency would not have a majority. It's possible, especially given his long tenure with the Republican Party, that Paul would draw more votes from their candidate, but it's not guaranteed.

Paul isn't perfect, even as a symbol of libertarianism. There have been disturbing reports of racism in his newsletters.

This shows the limitations of a two-party system that must place candidates in neat and easy categories. Paul's supporters may be small in number, but they are devoted and their voices deserve to be heard.

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While on the subject of libertarianism, its adherents may want to watch the unfolding controversy regarding the leading libertarian think tank, the Cato Institute. Charles and David Koch, the billionaire financiers of the Tea Party movement, are engaged in a bid to take over the Institute. If they're successful, it's likely that Cato will move from a non-partisan libertarian research organization to a Republican propaganda outlet.