



Rand Paul takes the stage

By: Adam Silbert – February 14, 2013

Sen. Rand Paul is running for president. His remarkable series of actions in 2013 alone raised his profile and marked the de facto launch of his 2016 campaign.

On Tuesday, the Republican junior senator from Kentucky delivered the Tea Party response to President Barack Obama's State of the Union address. That role was previously given to Republican presidential candidates Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., and businessman Herman Cain.

In his well-received speech before the conservative Heritage Foundation last week, Paul laid out a vision of foreign policy "that is reluctant, restrained by constitutional checks and balances, but does not appease."

Paul's legislative activity has already been prodigious this term. His S. 201 bill sought to prohibit selling F-16 fighters to Egypt, according to his Senate website. He introduced the National Right to Work Act, S. 204. He's also preparing a pair of related bills to "privatize the TSA" and to enact a "passenger bill of rights," Politico reported.

His recent theatrics have generated headlines. He told then-Sec. of State Hillary Clinton that he would have "relieved" her from her post, during the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing about the attack in Benghazi, Libya. The move "infuriated" Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., she later told MSNBC. Rep. John Yarmuth, the Kentucky delegation's sole Democrat, told WDRB-Louisville that Paul's prolonged opening statement was "embarrassing" and partisan.

His foreign policy critiques were reserved not only for Democrats. He took shots at Sen. John McCain twice this month: for the "spurious" and "absurd" tabling of Paul's Senate amendment to prohibit sending U.S. military equipment to Egypt, The New York Times noted. And for McCain's earlier statement about a "100 year" occupation of Iraq (though he may have "misquoted" McCain, says the Washington Post's Fact Checker blog).

Not the typical political animal, Paul has distinguished himself from the other 2016 contenders:

He has honed his own foreign policy, an area in which Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla. (who delivered the GOP state of the union response), Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wisc., and Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, are not known.

Paul "could open the door to fresh thinking in the GOP on foreign policy," the CATO Institute's Gene Healy predicted in The Washington Examiner in May 2010 of the then-Senate candidate.

Though he has stopped short of his father's, Rep. Ron Paul's, R-Texas, "noninterventionism," Healy observed.

Second, he has served as a Lone Ranger or watchdog-in-chief — heralding a new era of government scrutiny at home and abroad. He called for audits of the Pentagon and the Federal Reserve. He explained in an op-ed to CNN in June that he is not against military drone technology, but rather its domestic use without a warrant from a court.

In his Washington Times editorial about immigration reform this week, Paul cautioned that past administrations did not live up to their ends of the bargain to beef up funding for border security.

Finally, he is an outsider. He practiced medicine as an ophthalmologist in Kentucky for 17 years before he was elected to office. Clearly, Paul is on the move. Admonishing seasoned pros like Clinton and McCain on foreign policy was either political grandstanding or brilliant politics. With his current slew of Senate bills in tow and an increased public presence, we can only wait to see what else Paul has in store on the road to 2016 and beyond.