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## *Why Ron Paul Matters*

**Among all the GOP presidential candidates, he's the only one who stands for constitutionally limited government.**

By **EDWARD H. CRANE**

The controversy surrounding decades-old newsletters to which GOP presidential aspirant Ron Paul lent his name is regrettable. First, it is regrettable because the sometimes bigoted, intolerant content of those newsletters is inconsistent with the views of the congressman as understood by those of us who know him. Yet, while Mr. Paul disavows supporting those ideas, he refuses to repudiate his close association with their likely source, Lew Rockwell, head of the Alabama-based Mises Institute.

Second, the New York Times editorialized recently that these unsavory writings "will leave a lasting stain on . . . the libertarian movement." That is wishful thinking on the part of the Times, but it adds to the background noise surrounding Mr. Paul's candidacy, obscuring the real libertarian policy initiatives that have made his candidacy the most remarkable development of the 2012 campaign.

Ron Paul's libertarian campaign has traction because so many Americans respond to his messages:

- *Tax and spending.* If ever there were sound and fury signifying nothing, it has to be the recent "debate" over the budget. Covered by the media as though it was negotiations on the Treaty of Versailles, the wrestling match between Republicans and Democrats centered on the nearly trivial question of whether the \$12 trillion increase in the national debt over the next decade should be reduced by 3% or 2%.

Mr. Paul would cut the federal budget by \$1 trillion immediately. He can't do it, of course, but voters sense he really wants to. As Milton Friedman once explained, the true tax on the American people is the level of spending—the resources taken from the private sector and employed in the public sector. Whether financed from direct taxation, inflation or borrowing, spending is the burden.

- *Foreign policy and military spending.* As the only candidate other than Jon Huntsman who says it is past time to bring the troops home from Afghanistan, Mr. Paul has tapped into a stirring recognition by limited-government Republicans and independents that an overreaching military presence around the world is inconsistent with small, constitutional government at home.

The massive cost of these interventions, in treasure and blood, highlights what a mistake they are, as sensible people on the left and right recognized from the beginning. Of course we want a strong military capable of defending the United States, but our current expenditures equal what the rest of the world spends, which makes little sense. It is futile to try to be the world's policeman—to try to create an American Empire as so many neoconservatives promote. And we can't afford it.

- *Civil liberties.* Libertarians often differ with conservatives over issues related to civil liberties. Mr. Paul's huge support among young people is due in large part to his fierce commitment to protecting the individual liberties guaranteed us in the Constitution. He would work to repeal significant parts of the so-called Patriot Act. Its many civil liberties transgressions include the issuance by the executive branch of National Security Letters (a form of administrative subpoena) without a court order, and the forbiddance of American citizens from mentioning that they have received one of these letters at the risk of jail.

The Bush and Obama administrations have claimed the right to incarcerate an American citizen on American soil, without charge, without access to an attorney, for an indefinite period.

President Obama even claims the right to kill American citizens on foreign soil, without due process of law, for suspected terrorist activities. Meanwhile, the Stop Online Piracy Act moving through the House is a clear effort by the federal government to censor the Internet. Mr. Paul stands up against all this, which should and does engender support from limited government advocates in the GOP.

- *Austrian economics.* Mr. Paul is often criticized for references to what some consider obscure economists of the so-called Austrian School. People should read them before criticizing. Nobel laureate Friedrich von Hayek and his mentor Ludwig von Mises were two of the greatest economists and social scientists ever to live.

Modern Austrian School economists such as Lawrence H. White, now at George Mason University, and Fred Foldvary at Santa Clara University predicted the housing bubble and the recession that followed the massive, multitrillion-dollar malinvestment caused by government redirection of capital into housing. Mr. Paul, like Austrian School economists, understands that we would be better off with a gold standard, competing currencies or a monetary rule than with the arbitrary and discretionary powers of our out-of-control Federal Reserve.

Mr. Paul should be given credit for his efforts to promote these ideas and other libertarian policies, all of which would make America better off. He'd be the first to admit he's not the most erudite candidate to make the case, but surely part of his appeal is his very genuine persona.

Which is not to say that Mr. Paul is always in sync with mainstream libertarians. His seeming indifference to attempts to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, his support for a constitutional amendment to deny birthright citizenship to children of illegal aliens, and his opposition to the Nafta and Cafta free trade agreements in the name of doctrinal purity are at odds with most libertarians.

As for the Ron Paul newsletters, the best response was by my colleague David Boaz when the subject was raised publicly in 2008. About them he wrote in the Cato Institute's blog:

"Those words are not libertarian words. Maybe they reflect 'paleoconservative' ideas, though they're not the language of Burke or even Kirk. But libertarianism is a philosophy of individualism, tolerance, and liberty. As Ayn Rand wrote, 'Racism is the lowest, most crudely primitive form of collectivism.' Making sweeping, bigoted claims about all blacks, all homosexuals, or any other group is indeed a crudely primitive collectivism. Libertarians should make it clear that the people who wrote those things are not our comrades, not part of our movement, not part of the tradition of John Locke, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Ludwig von Mises, F. A. Hayek, Ayn Rand, Milton Friedman, and Robert Nozick. Shame on them."

Support for dynamic market capitalism (as opposed to crony capitalism), social tolerance, and a healthy skepticism of foreign military adventurism is a combination of views held by a plurality of Americans. It is why the 21st century is likely to be a libertarian century. It is why the focus should be on Ron Paul's philosophy and his policy proposals in 2012.

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