

## Paul Sparks New Controversy After Race Flap

(May 21) — Republican Senate candidate Rand Paul of Kentucky today called President Barack Obama's outspoken criticism of BP after the oil spill "un-American" and accused him of putting "his boot heel on the throat of BP."

Paul, a rising star of the tea party movement who beat out a GOP favorite to win Kentucky's Republican primary Tuesday, also defended remarks he made about the Civil Rights Act of 1964, saying he's being "trashed" by Democrats who want to ruin his campaign.

After criticizing the president for attacking BP, Paul moved on to reference the April 5 disaster at a West Virginia mine, which killed 29 people and sparked calls for increased regulation.

"We had a mining accident that was very tragic," he told ABC's George Stephanopoulos. "Then we come in and it's always someone's fault. Maybe sometimes accidents happen."

Referring to the Deepwater Horizon accident in the Gulf of Mexico, Paul told Stephanopoulos: "What I don't like from the president's administration is this sort of, 'I'll put my boot heel on the throat of BP.' I think that sounds really un-American in his criticism of business."

Paul called the focus on his statements regarding civil rights "red herrings."

"I've been trashed up and down," he told Stephanopoulos. "This is a lot about politics."

Paul came under fire this week after he insinuated in multiple interviews that the landmark civil rights legislation may have gone too far by forcing private businesses to follow federal anti-discrimination laws. But he says the uproar is about politics, not racism.

"I'm in favor of everything with regards to ending institutional racism," he told NPR's Robert Siegel earlier this week. Paul continued to insist that he finds racism abhorrent, but he refused to answer questions about whether he would have voted for the legislation had he been alive.

On Wednesday, he told MSNBC's Rachel Maddow that he's not in favor of "discrimination in any form," but his comments seemed to suggest he would not support having the federal government force a business owner to follow the Civil Rights Act.

When Maddow asked him point-blank whether he thought private businesses should be able to refuse service to black customers, Paul said he did.

“Does the owner of the restaurant own his restaurant or does the government own his restaurant?” he asked Maddow.

By Thursday, the firestorm had only intensified, and Paul issued a statement saying he supports the Civil Rights Act.

“Let me be clear: I support the Civil Rights Act because I overwhelmingly agree with the intent of the legislation, which was to stop discrimination in the public sphere and halt the abhorrent practice of segregation and Jim Crow laws,” he said.

Critics say Paul’s views are extreme, and he has even attracted the ire of some conservative voices.

Brink Lindsey of the libertarian Cato Institute told AOL News this week that Paul was wrong on the Civil Rights Act. “Paul’s grievous error is to ignore the larger context in which individual private decisions to exclude blacks were made,” Lindsey said.

“In my view, at least, truly individual, idiosyncratic discrimination ought to be legally permitted; for example, the ‘Soup Nazi’ from ‘Seinfeld’ ought to be free to deny soup to anybody no matter how crazy his reasons (they didn’t ask nicely, they mispronounced the soup, etc.),” Lindsey said. “But the exclusion of blacks from public accommodations wasn’t like that — not even close.”

But Paul says Democrats are simply seizing on his remarks for political means.

“When does my honeymoon period start?” he asked Stephanopoulos.

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