



Romney, the GOP, and Paul Supporters

Not unlike any other politician, Republican presidential challenger Mitt Romney can use every vote that he can get.

As the events of last week's Republican National Convention amply demonstrate, Romney and his party are reaching out to demographic groups — independents and moderates, single women, blacks, Hispanics, "the youth vote" — whose members ordinarily lean more heavily toward Democrats. But, interestingly, there is one group that currently resides within the Republican Party that they are in danger of losing.

That group consists of Ron Paul supporters. And what an energized, enthusiastic bunch it is.



The only problem for Romney and his running mate, Paul Ryan, is that these Paul supporters aren't in the least enthusiastic for the GOP ticket. In fact, they are reaching — or have already reached — the verge of voting for a third party candidate.

Ironically, the Texas Congressman's devotees, though encompassing all age groups, are comprised predominantly of young voters — i.e. exactly that demographic that the Republican Party is laboring indefatigably to attract.

Yet these voters and other Paul constituents seem poised to jump the GOP ship — a move, they say, that their own party has provoked them to make.

For one, the party establishment caused quite a ruckus among not just Paul's supporters but its base when it decided not only to disenfranchise some of Ron Paul's delegates but also to [rewrite delegate rules](#), effectively diminishing Ron Paul's influence at last week's convention or the influence of any other candidate not favored by the establishment at future conventions.

In other words, Paul supporters are miffed at the GOP for the same reason that radio talk show hosts Rush Limbaugh, Mark Levin, and others were miffed: In rewriting its rules, the GOP establishment succeeded in suppressing those voices — Paul supporters, Tea Partiers, social conservatives — within its ranks that threatened its objective to woo moderates.

Secondly, although Paul was apparently offered an opportunity to speak at the convention, the offer had conditions attached. The speech would have to be approved by the convention planners, but, just as importantly, it would include an unqualified endorsement of Romney on Paul's part.

The retiring Paul passed on it.

Finally, while the RNC honored Paul with a video tribute, this decision generated controversy among establishment Republicans, leading the establishment conservative movement's flagship publication



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National Review to publish a denunciation of the video. In an article appearing in its on-line edition (National Review Online), "[The Problem with Paul](#)," Jamie M. Fly and Evan Moore write that it was "a mistake" to honor Paul.

Referencing the truncated convention schedule, the authors lament what they perceive to have been a "missed ... opportunity" for the convention planners "to reverse the ridiculous and regrettable decision made by the Romney campaign to feature a video tribute" to Paul.

Fly and Moore concede that because of the number of delegates that Paul won, and because of his supporters' propensity to be particularly "vocal," it is not unreasonable that the Romney campaign should strive to avoid giving offense. "Concessions have already been made to them [Paul supporters] on extraneous issues during the drafting of the platform," and "a speaking slot has been given to" Paul's "son, Senator Rand Paul." However, Paul's critics conclude, "paying tribute to Representative Paul is a step too far."

Fly and Moore, as if to disabuse Paul and his supporters of all doubts regarding their fellow partisans' feelings toward them, add that "instead of honoring Paul on the way out, the delegates in Tampa should be cheering his departure." They explain that Paul "has left a legacy of extremism and falsehoods that need to be driven from the party, not embraced by it."

"It's important to remember how far outside the mainstream Paul and many of his supporters are," the authors continue. The views of Paul on which the authors set their sights, as Paul's supporters and their opponents have by now come to expect, pertain to foreign, not domestic, policy.

It is Paul's foreign policy vision that has elicited the ire of the Republican Party and its spokespersons in the media (like National Review Online). Fly and Moore are incensed specifically about Paul's position on the issue of Iran.

Paul accuses the GOP of once again "beating the war drums" in its rhetoric regarding a nuclear-armed Iran. Neither the CIA nor the IAEA, according to Paul, have said that Iran is on the verge of obtaining a nuclear weapon, and under the rules of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran is permitted to have nuclear weapons anyhow. He ridicules the degree to which Republicans particularly remain "obsessed with Iran and the idea that Iran is a threat to our national security."

Fly and Moore criticize Paul for allegedly painting "a picture of a peaceful and benevolent Islamic Republic that has never actually existed." They also refer to his argument as an "apologia for the ayatollahs" and judge it to be "as absurd as it is dangerous." Furthermore, they contend, "it is wholly irresponsible for anyone who aspires to national leadership" to take the position that Paul takes.

Paul's objectors also allude to his "trail of similar factual errors and conspiracy-mongering on issues ranging from the defense budget to America's position overseas, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and even the origins of the attacks of September 11, 2001."

Fly's and Moore's charge to the contrary notwithstanding, it has now been years that poll after poll has shown that Paul's views on these foreign policy-related matters are very much *within* the mainstream. Moreover, inasmuch as Republicans persist in their belief that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are worthwhile endeavors, that our interventionist foreign policy had nothing to do with the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and that we should remain on course with interventions in Iran, it is they who appear to be "far outside the mainstream."

In 2006 and 2008, Americans voted Republicans out of power in overwhelming numbers. President



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George W. Bush retired from his second term with an approval rating hovering at about 30 percent. While multiple factors doubtless accounted for their fatigue with the GOP, key among them was their weariness with what an ever growing number of Americans came to see as two regretful, avoidable wars in the Middle East.

Current polls establish that they have not changed their minds on this score, for foreign policy registers low among their concerns.

If this year's RNC was any indication, none of this is in dispute: The 2012 Republican National Convention was the first such convention in 60 years that excluded all explicit references to war.

It would be premature to conclude that Ron Paul's promise that his movement would one day "become the tent" of the Republican Party is now coming to fruition. In any case, though, his influence is felt.

Romney, not unlike any other politician, may want to place some stock in that.



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