



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on April 26, 2013

The Republican Civil War

Kentucky Senator Rand Paul (shown) clearly had a good month of March. First, he engaged in a March 6-7 Senate filibuster to ensure that “no American should be killed by a drone on American soil without first being charged with a crime, without first being found to be guilty by a court.” The 13-hour filibuster won plaudits across the political spectrum and raised Paul to a national figure even more than his stunning Tea Party-inspired election over the anointed GOP establishment candidate in 2010.



Even enemies of the constitutionalist movement were driven to say that Rand Paul was engaging in smart politics. Neoconservative columnist Charles Krauthammer acknowledged that “Rand Paul’s now legendary Senate filibuster was a stroke of political genius.” Then in a partial take-back, Krauthammer called the filibuster “both theatrically brilliant and substantively irrelevant.”

On March 16 Rand Paul won the annual CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) Presidential Straw Poll, with 25 percent of the 2,930 votes, enough to best Florida Senator Marco Rubio’s 23 percent. After that victory, everything Rand Paul did became national news, from his comments on immigration to a threat to engage in a new filibuster on gun control legislation. By the first week of April, word that Rand Paul had scheduled a visit to New Hampshire — which just happens to be where the first presidential primary is held — became headline news.

Then the *New York Times*, in a March 26 hit-piece/op-ed on Rand Paul, admitted that the GOP establishment is in full damage-control mode: “Mitch McConnell, who is not only Kentucky’s senior senator but also the Senate minority leader, seems to worry more about Paul, the state’s junior senator, than vice versa.” CNN even posted the headline: “New leader of the GOP: Rand Paul.”

The neoconservative movement has tried backbiting Senator Paul’s public relations coup, to little effect. Neoconservative godfather and political enforcer Bill Kristol slammed Paul’s defense of civil liberties this way: “So if Rand Paul wants to run to the left of the Obama administration, he’s free to try that in the Republican primary.” But Kristol’s attacks on Rand Paul, which included labeling his supporters the “Code Pink faction of the Republican party,” were all but ignored by the larger political and media culture. According to polls thus far, Rand Paul’s stance just may run well in a GOP primary.

A Tea Liberty Movement?

Rand Paul does not perfectly represent either the Tea Party Movement or the Ron Paul Liberty movement, as many libertarian followers of Ron Paul see the younger Dr. Paul (Rand Paul is an ophthalmologist) as not ideologically pure enough to represent their movement. On the other hand, many conservatives and tea partiers who oppose illegal immigration were taken back by Paul’s recent public support for a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigration. But Rand Paul is the clearest anecdote to explain how much of the Tea Party movement of 2009-10 has been subsumed by the Constitutionalist/Liberty Movement, a fact that is as evident in Congress as it is in the grassroots. To a certain extent, the Tea Party has simply gone back to its roots, as Ron Paul’s 2008 presidential



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campaign kicked off Tea Party rallies. Dr. Rand Paul even saw his first high-profile public political appearance at a Ron Paul-inspired Tea Party rally at Faneuil Hall in Boston in December 2007.

The Tea Party movement attained national attention in early 2009, as a reaction against the bipartisan bailouts and deficit spending of the housing bubble/crash era. Small-government conservatism was bolstered by the spontaneous new Tea Party movement, which in turn was able to gain traction because the skids had already been greased by many decades of work by long-existing traditional liberty-minded groups such as The John Birch Society. Also benefiting from the cumulative effects of many years of elbow grease were the Ron Paul revolution and its outgrowths, such as the Campaign for Liberty, which inducted young people into the freedom fight.

Though the effectiveness of the Tea Party has peaked and some of it has become a front for establishment Republicanism, tea partiers have continued to retain organizational strength and a small-government message in areas where they have maintained independence from the Republican Party apparatus. In some areas (particularly blue states) the Tea Party brand has become politically toxic. For example, in Massachusetts, the Tea Party movement that sprang on the national scene with the election of Scott Brown to Ted Kennedy's U.S. Senate seat in 2009 lost all electoral influence before Brown's loss in 2012.

The House Tea Party Caucus founded by Michele Bachmann (Freedom Index score 77 percent) seems to be all but defunct, largely supplanted by the House Liberty Caucus now led by two-term Michigan Representative Justin Amash (Freedom Index score 92 percent). The Tea Party caucus hasn't tweeted since last September, and its membership webpage returns a defunct 404 "Page Not Found" message from the House of Representatives server. But that's a small matter compared to the listlessness of Bachmann's group; it failed to generate any noise against GOP leadership or its budget "solutions" that have pushed higher spending.

In the Senate, the tiny Tea Party Caucus (led in part by co-founder Rand Paul) has become all but synonymous with the liberty movement.

Rand vs. Rubio

Perhaps the most prominent exception to the Tea Party absorption into the Ron Paul liberty movement is Florida Senator Marco Rubio, who was elected in 2010 with major Tea Party support. A contrast can be drawn between Rand Paul and Marco Rubio, one that explains the difference between the constitutionalist/liberty movement and the establishment absorption of elements of the Tea Party movement.

Rubio earned a respectable Freedom Index rating of 81 percent in the last Congress. And though measurably lower than Rand Paul's 95 percent, most of the Florida senator's votes have been for smaller government. The two can be distinguished on several general issue areas, specifically civil liberties, foreign relations, and willingness to propose specific spending cuts.

The two have wound up on opposite sides of civil liberties amendments proposed by the Kentucky senator. Rubio opposed Rand Paul's amendment in April 2011 to prevent the president from unilaterally initiating military action without the explicit consent of a vote of Congress, an amendment brought about after the Obama administration unilaterally deployed U.S. forces in Libya. He also opposed Paul's amendment in May 2012 to prevent FDA officials from banning claims about natural health foods and to stop FDA agents from carrying firearms. And unlike Paul, Rubio voted against the Feinstein amendment in December 2011 banning indefinite detention of U.S. citizens without trial under the war on terror.



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But perhaps the greatest example of the difference between Paul and Rubio, and between the Republican establishment and the constitutionalist movement, was highlighted by the two senators' State of the Union responses. Marco Rubio was chosen to give the official Republican Party response to Obama's 2013 State of the Union address, while Rand Paul gave the Tea Party response (sponsored by the Tea Party Express). The State of the Union response by Rubio perfectly encapsulated the GOP paradigm. Throughout the years, the GOP has posed as the party of vaguely smaller government without ever delivering it during the times it held power. As with Mitt Romney's presidential campaign in 2012, the GOP calls for smaller government but never provides the specifics. Florida Senator Rubio issued pat GOP responses and generalized warnings against big government — but no specifics. Rand Paul's address involved specific spending-cut proposals, such as foreign aid; and the Kentucky senator offered an alternative budget proposal that would balance within five years by spending cuts, without any tax increases.

Thus, Rand Paul's success has neoconservatives running scared. Bill Kristol lamented on WMAL-radio March 19 that Obama "has created Rand Paul." More specifically, he claimed, "Hawks like me, who want to support some of the things that Obama has done, he's never defended them [his actions]. He doesn't explain them. He doesn't put them in context. As a result, there is more support for a Rand Paul-type view. I think it's mistaken, but I understand why people go in that direction when President Obama never explains what the consequences of getting out of Afghanistan would be, where he never explains why we need to spend some serious money on defense and national security. So, in that respect, President Obama, in a way, has created Rand Paul, or the opportunity for Rand Paul."

On a certain level, it is true that Obama made Rand Paul's national success possible because Republican voters are open to nearly any criticism of Democratic presidents — criticism they would ignore if the president were a Republican. Kristol's remarks reveal the hypocrisy of hyper-partisanship that dominates Capitol Hill. When George W. Bush was proposing massive deficits and trampling on civil liberties, Republican Party faithful clammed up, offering no criticism on Capitol Hill — other than Texas Congressman Ron Paul and North Carolina Congressman Walter Jones. On the other side of the aisle, the deafening screeches of the anti-war Left during the Bush era have shrunk to barely a peep since Obama took office.

Rise of the "Wacko Birds"

But it's not just Rand Paul who has bounded to national prominence in the Ron Paul-inspired liberty movement, and in the end he may not be the most important figure. While the elder Dr. Paul — obstetrician/Congressman Ron Paul — worked largely alone in building coalitions for smaller government, there are perhaps a dozen other members of Congress who can be relied upon to vote for less government regardless of party, a fact that has establishment figures such as John McCain worried. During Rand Paul's filibuster, John McCain told the online Huffington Post that "it's always the wacko birds on right and left that get the media megaphone." When asked who he meant by "wacko birds," the senior Arizona senator and the GOP's 2008 presidential nominee said "Rand Paul, Cruz, Amash, whoever."

With those words, McCain had unintentionally raised Michigan Representative Justin Amash to national prominence, along with Paul and Senator Ted Cruz of Texas. Within days of McCain's insult, Amash had become a front-runner for the GOP nomination to replace the retiring Michigan Democratic Senator Carl Levin. Amash — who has yet to declare his intentions for 2014 — embraced the "wacko birds" moniker, and even bought the WackoBird.com website for fundraising purposes.



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Amash has been labeled “the next Ron Paul” by such divergent media sources as the libertarian magazine *Reason*, *The American Conservative* magazine, Politico.com, and Glenn Beck’s TheBlaze.com. A large number of Ron Paul’s presidential supporters view Amash as more ideologically pure than the younger Dr. Paul, as Rand Paul endorsed Mitt Romney for president and has mended fences with Senate Minority Leader and fellow Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell. In that sense, the uncompromising 33-year-old Amash — also initially elected in 2010 with strong local Tea Party support — may become more significant nationally than Rand Paul over time.

The *National Journal* labeled Amash the “Senate Trouble-maker in Waiting” for his battles with House GOP leadership. The Grand Rapids Republican was one of four independent-minded Republicans removed from key House committees in December because of alleged failure to support the House GOP leadership. And he was one of 10 House Republicans who voted against John Boehner as House speaker the following month.

Amash would be a formidable Senate candidate in traditionally Democratic Michigan, as his independent streak and use of social media to explain his congressional votes have won plaudits across the political spectrum. And should Amash run for the Senate, he will have a deep well of funding from Ron Paul movement-aligned donors. The Liberty for All Super PAC has already pledged to commit spending six to seven figures in support of Amash’s candidacy, should he announce a Senate run. And Amash has the highest rating from the Club for Growth, which could also commit substantial funds to a 2014 Senate campaign.

Rush Limbaugh noted a change of political winds toward the liberty movement during a radio show the day after McCain’s remarks, stressing that McCain and many in the establishment were having a dinner at the White House with Obama while Senator Paul was defending the U.S. Constitution in his filibuster:

The new kids in town captivated the nation talking to them about freedom. The new kids in town were, for the first time in I don’t know how long, actually taking it to Barack Obama, and showing how easily it’s done.... [Rand Paul] just wanted Obama to acknowledge in a letter that Obama will not kill Americans sitting in a cafe minding their own business with a drone. And the regime wouldn’t respond.... Meanwhile, the Republican establishment is out playing footsie with Obama at a restaurant. And McCain, Senator McCain just went to the floor of the Senate and blasted Senator Paul saying the filibuster was not helpful. Senator McCain — I tell you, this illustrates the contrast between the new stars of the Republican Party and yesterday’s mashed potatoes.

Rush Limbaugh — hardly an opponent of neoconservatism — explained the reaction by the establishment to Rand Paul’s filibuster. “There is a fear among McCain, [South Carolina Republican Senator] Lindsey Graham, and others who favor an interventionist foreign policy. Think of the neocons. Think of going into Iraq and not just securing Iraq, but building a democracy. Nation building, if you will,” Limbaugh said March 8. “The neocons are worried that they are being undermined by this. I’ll tell you why. Rand Paul made a connection with the American people. These other people do not. He made a connection. Therefore, he has the ability to influence and motivate people.”

The Money War

Influencing people and public relations is not the only front in the war within the GOP, however. Fundraising can be key to many candidacies, and GOP establishment fundraiser Karl Rove has been at the center of funding establishment candidates. Rove’s American Crossroads SuperPac and its sister PAC, Crossroads GPS, were the top non-candidate fundraisers of the 2012 election cycle, spending



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some \$175,706,789 of the \$300 million the twin organizations raised in the 2012 cycle, according to OpenSecrets.org. Rove built up his Crossroads organizations with just a handful of giant donors, including Las Vegas Casino owner Sheldon Adelson (\$23 million) and investor Harold Simmons (\$20.5 million). According to *Forbes* magazine, "Almost one third of the \$104 million Rove's American Crossroads super PAC spent this election cycle came from just five members of the *Forbes* rich list." Almost all of that money was spent in a wasted effort to replace Obama with Mitt Romney as president, plastering the airwaves with slick television commercials devoid of any meaningful information.

Rove established the Conservative Victory Project in March as a means of becoming the gatekeeper to Republican nominations in the intra-party battle between constitutionalists and neoconservatives. Specifically, Rove plans to target Tea Party and other small-government constitutionalists in GOP primaries because of alleged fears that they lose general elections.

Rove's recent mantra has been nearly identical to that of MSNBC's long-standing crude campaign against Tea Party candidates, i.e., that Tea Party and other small government candidates are crazy and lose elections for the GOP. "My posterior was shredded a little bit by donors wondering why we are writing checks for people who then turn around and run such lousy campaigns," Rove said on February 27 in Dallas for the National Center for Policy Analysis, according to the *Dallas Morning News*. Rove was specifically commenting on two failed Tea Party-inspired U.S. Senate candidacies that imploded: Richard Mourdock in Indiana and Todd Akin in Missouri. Mourdock had defeated long-time establishment incumbent Richard Lugar (Freedom Index score 58 percent) in the primary. Indeed, Rove told the Dallas gathering that "it's not a question of ideology," he said. "The quality of candidates matters."

Rove's underlings have repeated the same mantra to eager establishment media outlets. "There is a broad concern about having blown a significant number of races because the wrong candidates were selected," Steven J. Law, the president of American Crossroads, told the *New York Times* for February 2. "We don't view ourselves as being in the incumbent protection business, but we want to pick the most conservative candidate who can win."

"We've given away at least five seats in the last two election cycles, maybe more, because of poor candidates," Rove said. "Our donors said, 'We're happy to write big checks, but we're sick and tired of writing checks for campaigns that can't win.'"

Of course, Rovian establishment candidates won most GOP nominations in GOP primaries in 2012 before being thrashed in the November general election. Rove claimed to be neutral in the Republican presidential primary in 2012, but he attacked all the non-Romney candidates as unelectable. As *Salon*, the online magazine, put it in 2011: "Karl Rove has already begun his independent, well-funded campaign to return a Republican to the White House. Any Republican will do, honestly, but he would strongly prefer a somewhat competent and 'electable' one, thank you very much. So he's attacking all the non-Mitt Romney candidates."

American Crossroads/Crossroads GPS may even be a poster child for the irrelevancy of massive, unlimited corporate spending on elections in the wake of the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision. Of the eight races where Crossroads spent \$500,000 or more in 2012, it lost seven races, winning only the Nebraska U.S. Senate race. That hardly counted as a victory, however, as Republican Deb Fischer never trailed Democratic former Senator Bob Kerrey in the race. Nebraska is one of the reddest of red states, where Republicans control all state offices (turning out Democratic Governor Ben Nelson in the 2012 election), the state legislature, and all federal legislators.



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Contrast this with former Congressman Ron Paul's endorsement record, where an astonishing eight of 11 U.S. House candidate endorsements Paul made won their elections. Or the Ron Paul-aligned Liberty For All Super PAC, which raised \$3 million during the 2012 election cycle — only one percent of the Crossroads fundraising — and won nine of 10 races into which they committed funding. Apparently, money isn't everything, and elections can't always be bought by saturating the airwaves with information-starved attack ads.

Rove's new project has drawn criticism from many conservative quarters, even from Washington conservatives. "This is a continuation of the establishment's effort to avoid blame for their horrible performance in the 2012 elections," Senate Conservatives Fund Executive Director Matt Hoskins told the press after Rove's announcement. "They blew a ton of races up and down the ticket because they recruited moderate Republicans who didn't stand for anything. Now they want to use this new PAC to trick donors into giving them more money so they can lose more races." The Senate Conservatives Fund was founded by former South Carolina Republican Senator Jim DeMint, who now also heads up the Heritage Foundation.

The economically minded Club for Growth — another deep-pockets contributor in 2012 — contrasted its view with that of Rove's in a CBS interview. "The only thing that matters to us is what the candidate believes, and whether they have core beliefs based on pro-growth policy, economic issues only is what we do at the Club for Growth. What Karl Rove and some of the establishment groups only care about is the brand. They only care if someone's a Republican or not. They don't really care what their core beliefs are," Club for Growth President Chris Chocola told CBS news.

But Rove's project did not receive any criticism from Senator Marco Rubio, who responded to the question — "Do you think this Conservative Victory Project is a good idea?" — with the following: "Karl Rove was one of my earliest supporters; even when I was thirty points down in the polls he wrote me a check, he told people he was supporting me, he helped me in my race and I was thirty or forty points down. That's important for fairness to say that. Ultimately, when I was the nominee American Crossroads came in to Florida and spent a lot of money on my candidacy and we're grateful for that. But by the same token, I would not have been elected without Tea Party support."

The abject failure of Rove's deep-pockets money in 2012 does not necessarily mean success or failure in 2014 and beyond. But the Tea Party's attention is being captivated by Ron Paul's "Liberty" movement at the moment, a fact highlighted by Rand Paul's filibuster. Neocon warmonger David Frum noted in a post-filibuster missive on the online Daily Beast, "Most Republican senators don't share [Rand Paul's] nightmarish vision of their country, thank goodness.... Where Rand Paul led, other Republicans followed: some out of conviction, some out of opportunism, and some out of fear. Since 2008, the party has executed a huge about-face on issues of executive power and national security. Yesterday marked an important pivot in that complex maneuver. I worry it won't be the last." Lovers of freedom, however, hope the corrected course will remain straight.

— Photo of Sen. Rand Paul: AP Images

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