

**Return to the [referring page](#).**

**Photos:** [Ron Paul](#) | [Supporters cheering](#) | [Ron Paul and Haleigh Thompson](#)

---

## **Las Vegas SUN**

---

July 15, 2007

# **HE HAS CROWD APPEAL**

**Libertarian presidential candidate Ron Paul is reaching across many lines**

**By Michael J. Mishak**

Las Vegas Sun

The punk band members, with spiked hair, tattooed arms and pierced everythings, stood with a crowd of more than 300 and cheered at the rock star on stage, especially when he called for abolishing the Federal Reserve - you know, the banking system that for nearly a century has helped stabilize the U.S. economy, give or take a Great Depression.

Presidential candidate Ron Paul didn't stop with the Fed. The devout and suddenly popular Libertarian-running-as-a-Republican also wants to repeal the Patriot Act. (More cheering.) And the IRS and NAFTA-like trade deals. (Loud applause.) And bring home American troops, all of them, from Iraq and from every last spot on the globe. (Standing ovation.) And that national ID card, forget about it.

The crowd's thunderous approvals might be expected in Nevada, especially the rural counties with their strong Libertarian streak.

But this wasn't Elko or Winnemucca. This was Paris Las Vegas on the Strip one morning a week ago. The crowd was young, urban, and what you might even call hip.

Property Six, a rock/hip-hop outfit from Phoenix, was there. As were a carload of 20-something women who had driven the previous night from Reno (448.52 MapQuest miles) to greet the Texas congressman at McCarran International Airport.

What they all heard was the testimony of a carved-in-granite Libertarian who disdains the a la carte politics and deal-making of mainstream party candidates, a physician by training whose political beliefs exist at that whiplash point on the political spectrum where the far right meets the far left.

Abolish the IRS, the Fed, the Patriot Act? Is that Libertarian or a lefty anarchist?

The crowds he's drawing across the country often mirror the unusual mix of 20- and 30-something lefties and righties at the Paris event.

Some are drawn to his beliefs. But many said that they admire him most for sticking to a clear set of principles, even if they disagree on some issues.

"He's consistent," said Jennifer Reilly, a 23-year-old photography student at the College of Southern Nevada who attended the Saturday rally. "I actually believe everything he says."

Thus Ron Paul has become the early surprise of the 2008 presidential campaign.

Beyond the consistency, he is filling a void in a Republican field dominated by mainstream candidates who are reluctant to break ranks with President Bush. He's the only Republican who opposes the war in Iraq. ("We just marched in. We can just march out.")

Paul describes himself as a strict constitutionalist, but his views can be traced to the late Barry Goldwater, the 1964 Republican nominee for president and father of the modern conservative movement.

As Paul puts it: "Freedom is popular."

Jennifer Terhune, a 22-year-old dental hygiene student at Truckee Meadows Community College who drove from Reno to meet Paul

at the airport, deemed herself a true believer. "I agree with his message of freedom and limited government," she said. "People are dependent on the government for everything, and they need to start standing up for themselves. The country is getting so far away from that."

Much of that enthusiasm is being generated independent of the campaign, through Web sites such as Meetup.com, which played a critical role in the campaign of Democratic presidential contender Howard Dean in 2004. The online social network unlocked a virtual treasure trove of small donations for Dean, and is now doing the same for Paul.

(The campaign boasts that Paul has the second largest number of YouTube views of all the presidential candidates, just behind Democratic Sen. Barack Obama.)

The Texas congressman raised \$640,000 in the first quarter of the year, a paltry sum compared with the tens of millions raised by his party's front-runners. But when the second quarter closed last month, Paul announced that he had \$2.4 million cash on hand, besting Arizona Sen. John McCain, whose high-spending campaign was rocked by the departure of top campaign aides this week.

"I think we've proven that we've gained a lot, and they've proven they can waste a lot," Paul told the Sun on Saturday. "It looks like there's a lot more support out there than I ever dreamed, because the campaign is very spontaneous. We have a hard time keeping up."

For now, that might be best. Saturday's rally was organized not by the campaign, but by Paul's Las Vegas Meetup.com group, comprising about 175 people. And champagne room No. 4 at Paris was standing room only.

All of this seemed unimaginable in March when Paul quietly announced his presidential candidacy during a taping of "Washington Journal" on C-S PAN. The New York Times gave it three paragraphs. Paul was dismissed as a sideshow curiosity and his campaign appeared destined to go the way of 1988, when Paul ran for president on the Libertarian Party ticket. He got four-tenths of 1 percent of the vote.

Paul's fortune changed during the Republican presidential debate in South Carolina in May, when he suggested that U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East invited the 9/11 attacks. "They attack us because we've been over there," he said, answering a question about 9/11. "We've been bombing Iraq for 10 years."

Rudy Giuliani pounced on him. "That's an extraordinary statement," the former New York mayor said. "And I would ask the congressman to withdraw that comment and tell us that he didn't really mean that."

The crowd roared. Paul thought he was doomed. But then the instant polls started coming in - and Paul was on top. Despite furious rebukes from conservative pundits like Sean Hannity and howls by Republican powerbrokers for his exclusion from future debates, Paul was on the rise. His debate remarks quickly made the rounds on the Internet and daily donations, by Paul's estimation, tripled.

"In that week I got more publicity than I've gotten in 30 years of being in politics, and it's been building ever since," Paul said. "Pretty soon we're going to plant people to attack me."

He's kidding, of course. Besides, it clearly won't be necessary. In the span of a month, he appeared on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show" and "The Colbert Report," in addition to HBO's "Real Time With Bill Maher," all shows with liberal audiences.

Last month Paul was excluded from a presidential forum in Des Moines, Iowa. He and hundreds of supporters showed up anyway. Their rally attracted more media attention than the forum. Last week the chairman of the Spartanburg County Republican Party in South Carolina said he would boycott Paul's planned visit to his city. The result: more news media coverage.

Paul has always been a thorn in the side of the Republican Party. He ran for Congress in 1974, as he puts it, "to get a few things off my chest," namely his outrage at President Nixon for abandoning the gold standard and imposing temporary wage and price controls. He won, but left Washington a decade later after losing the Republican Senate primary in Texas.

There, Paul, an obstetrician, returned to his medical practice.

But the lure of 1994's so-called Republican revolution proved too strong to resist. He ran again for Congress and won, without support of party leaders.

Returning to Washington in 1997, Paul quickly earned the nickname "Dr. No" for being the one and only no vote on so many issues - more than any other member. One reason: Paul opposes any government spending not explicitly authorized by the Constitution.

With the Republican candidates towing the line on Iraq, Paul sees an opening, and hopes to capitalize on the sense of betrayal felt by many in the conservative movement.

"The party is in shambles," Paul said. "They have lost their way. I think they've cheated the people who voted for them."

The early voting states, and Nevada in particular, provide Paul a chance, but it's a slimmer one than in years past. So many states have moved their primaries to the first three weeks of campaign season that the advantage for well-financed candidates is even greater. Only they can afford to be on the air nearly everywhere at once.

"The switch in moving up all these primaries is an attack on a candidate like myself," Paul said. "Nevada is now high on our list. It's a great state. People in Nevada aren't that anxious to have the government bearing down on them."

*Michael J. Mishak can be reached at 259-2347 or at [michael.mishak@lasvegassun.com](mailto:michael.mishak@lasvegassun.com).*

---

**Return to the [referring page](#).**

**Photos:** [Ron Paul](#) | [Supporters cheering](#) | [Ron Paul and Haleigh Thompson](#)

[Las Vegas SUN main page](#)

---

**Questions or problems? [Click here](#).**

*All contents copyright 2005 Las Vegas SUN, Inc.*