



[The view from the right]

## The Revolution continues

Ron Paul supporters look to shake up the local GOP from the inside

[T.R. Witcher](#)

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SATURDAY, JULY 7, 2007 - Presidential candidate Congressman Ron Paul, R-Texas, greets fans after speaking to approximately 300 supporters during a campaign rally at Paris.

Photo: Sam Morris

Nothing wakes one up like a good shellacking,” says Pat Kerby, a libertarian from Pahrump who supported Texas Congressman Ron Paul during the recent election season. Clearly, the Republicans got some kind of beat-down—losing the White House, seats in Congress and control of the Nevada Legislature—although the extent of the drubbing is still open for debate. Still, in a year where Republican nominee John McCain didn’t stir up much passion among Republicans, the quixotic primary campaign of Ron Paul certainly did, at least in Nevada.

So where do we find the Republican Party? Nationally, the GOP, under the Bush administration, has championed any number of principles that seem decidedly unconservative, including mammoth increases in government powers and spending and Herculean nation-building efforts across the world. Locally, Gov. Jim Gibbons is holding the line on not raising taxes, but facing a \$300 million budget deficit, the usual right-leaning shibboleths—tax cuts lead to economic growth which generates enough revenue to pull us out trouble—seem increasingly dubious.

“We need to return to our basic roots, and not try to be everything to everybody all the time,” says Bob Larkin, the chairman of the Board of County Commissioners in Washoe County. “Those roots are fiscal responsibility. Discovering what government ought to do, then funding that so that it can excel.”

Most Republicans across the state seem to echo this line—that the GOP, rather than getting caught in the compromised waters of centrism, of keeping up against the Democrats, needs to tack right and return to limited government. And the party needs to amp up the quality of its campaign work. The Democrats didn’t just win on the back of a charismatic new leader (or off resounding dissatisfaction with the outgoing party, though both of these played their roles), but also with an organizational savvy that simply outworked Republicans at every level.

Which brings us back to the energetic and libertarian campaign Ron Paul ran here in Nevada. On paper, moving toward the so-called “Liberty Republicans” might be just the tonic the GOP needs to reenergize its base, get back to its roots and move forward.

Paul finished a strong second in the Nevada caucus, with 14 percent of voters, behind Mitt Romney. Robert Terhune, an organizer for Nevadans for Ron Paul, thinks the number of Paul supporters is larger than that, as caucus numbers were skewed for Romney thanks to a disproportionate turnout of Mormon Republicans. “Nevada is probably one of the biggest Ron Paul states around.”

Though no one expected Paul to last through the primary, the energy his candidacy created here has not dissipated. In fact, it may be crucial to a Republican Party looking to rebound. “A lot of people in the Ron Paul movement were kind of dissatisfied with the political situation before Ron Paul ran,” says Terhune. “I would say Ron Paul’s candidacy woke a lot of people up. It got ’em energized.”

Sounds great—until you remember that little snafu at the Republican state convention this past spring, when Paul supporters won a procedural ruling that allowed them to outflank McCain supporters at the convention—and potentially earn more delegates to the national convention than anyone expected. The GOP responded by pulling the plug on the raucous convention, and giving itself a giant black eye.

“The convention debacle sent people in two directions,” says Terhune. “Either they hate the Republican Party ... then there are a lot of people trying to see if they can get anything accomplished. They see an opportunity. A lot of Republicans think we’re crazy and trying to divide the party, but we’re not.”

Still, lingering hard feelings may make it difficult for so-called Liberty Republicans and GOP mainliners to cooperate. Bernie Zadrowski, chairman of the Clark County Republican Party, criticizes the mind-set of Paul supporters who want to come in and take over rather than work with the rest of the party. But he’s just as critical of those mainline Republicans whose attitude was, he says, “We built this, this is ours, you’re not coming in to take it.”

“The leadership we have to pretty much get rid of,” says Pat Kerby. “They didn’t get it in 2004. They didn’t get it in 2006.” While Republican Senator John Ensign has vowed to try to bring the party back together again, Kerby doesn’t sound too impressed. “Ensign says he’s going to concentrate on rebuilding the party, and here’s a guy who voted for the Patriot Act and the bailout”—not exactly moves that libertarian-minded Republicans approve of.

And the skepticism is mutual. “Those [Paul supporters] that choose to embrace Republican conservatism are certainly welcome,” Larkin says. “We’re not going to reverse 100 years of the Federal Reserve. We’re not going to cut off ties with other nations.”

Still, Larkin sounds cautious about letting the Paul crowd get too involved. “They’re not right yet for leadership roles,” he says. “They need to learn to convey their ideas succinctly without pointing fingers.”

“My personal opinion is that the party should be very inclusive of the libertarian-minded Republicans,” says Zadrowski. “It’s traditionally been our base of support. When Republicans started losing their way and started acting out like Democrats, libertarians say, ‘I’m not leaving the party, the party is leaving me.’”

Arden Osborne, a delegate to the Republican national convention in Minneapolis and a chairman of the Nevada Liberty Alliance, says that most Paul supporters are “trying to work with the party. The more radical element that wanted to muck things up, they’ve kind of excluded themselves already.”

Osborne worked for the Paul campaign as a sort of local press contact. “People like me are more reasonable. You have a large number of people eager and ready to hit the streets.” The trick, says Osborne, is for the Paul crowd to “find a way to be useful ... run candidates. ... If you want change, you can’t do much from the outside.”