



Mark Levin, Ron Paul, and Conservatism

Mark Levin is a talk radio show host who, like his colleague and friend Sean Hannity, prides himself on being a “Reagan conservative.” From as far as I can determine, it is with justice that he describes himself as such. The problem, however, is that a “Reagan conservative” isn’t a real conservative at all; for all practical purposes, “Reagan conservatism” is just another name for neoconservatism.

This is an attack against neither Ronald Reagan, “Reagan conservatives,” nor neoconservatives. That Reagan never succeeded in eliminating a single government program, much less an agency, and that federal spending increased exponentially under his watch are just a couple of the considerations that some have invoked to argue, quite persuasively, that Reagan was *not* a real conservative. At the very least, if he was a conservative, his presidency didn’t prove to be all that successful *as far as his conservatism was concerned*.



But Reagan aside, judging from the policy prescriptions endorsed by Levin and all self-avowed “Reagan conservatives,” the verdict that “Reagan conservatism” is evidently synonymous with neoconservatism is inescapable. Levin, for example, expresses zero regrets for having lent his enthusiastic, unqualified support behind George W. Bush’s mission to transform the Middle East into a bastion of “democracy” via the Afghan and Iraq wars — a project that, few people can now seriously deny, was fatally flawed in both conception and design. For that matter, Levin had been a virtually uncritical supporter of Bush’s agenda generally, an agenda that no one remotely familiar with conservatism could honestly characterize in those terms.

Why does all of this matter? Well, Levin, you see, is not too terribly fond of Ron Paul, and he spares no occasion to dismiss the Texan congressman as a crank. Recently, he reiterated his claim that Paul is neither “a real conservative” of any kind nor “the Father of the Tea Party.” My objective here is to show that whether Levin’s remarks on Paul’s relationship to conservatism and the Tea Party are sound or not, given his commitment to precisely that vision of the world and concomitant style of governing against which traditional conservatives and Tea Partiers are now railing, he hasn’t the authority to pass these sorts of judgments.

To put it more simply, *Levin* is the one who is not a real conservative. And he certainly is not a Tea Partier. If Levin were a real conservative or Tea Partier, he would have been outraged over the foreign



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on August 18, 2011

and domestic policies of George W. Bush and his Republican-controlled Congress. In the real world, though, Levin endorsed many of these policies. If Levin were a real conservative, he would have long ago recognized the irresolvable conflict between simultaneously championing “limited government,” on the one hand and, on the other, an interminable “War on Terror,” for the latter theoretically justifies every conceivable instance of government intervention both here and abroad.

Ron Paul, though, *has* steadfastly opposed the very same governmental activism that Levin has always supported — and he did so before opposition to it became popular among Republicans. Paul was a Tea Party of one before the Tea Party movement emerged.

As recently as 2008, many may recall the derision with which Ron Paul was met when he warned audiences and his colleagues about the impending economic crisis. He was roundly ridiculed when he sounded the alarm over the ruinous practices of the Federal Reserve, and mocked just as loudly when he remarked — repeatedly — upon our inability to sustain the stratospheric costs in treasure and blood exacted by our “War on Terror.”

The political tides have turned in just three years, and this is indeed a good thing. Yet in spite of the fact that time has vindicated Paul, and in spite of the fact that by every objective criteria — fund raising, poll results, influence with “independents” and “moderates” — Paul is a serious presidential candidate, his fellow Republicans and other “Reagan conservatives” like Levin haven’t so much as apologized for the unjust treatment to which they subjected him before circumstances proved that he was right and they were wrong.

Far from admitting the error of their ways, they continue to treat Paul disrespectfully by suspending their negligence of his accomplishments just long enough to insult him. Coverage of this year’s [Ames Straw Poll](#) is a classic instance of this tendency.

Although Congresswoman Michele Bachmann just barely beat Paul for first place, and although Tim Pawlenty came in a distant third, [there was scarcely a word](#) mentioned on Fox News or in so-called “conservative” talk radio about [Paul’s high showing—or about Paul at all](#). Bachmann, in contrast, has been all of the talk and Pawlenty, who many of the same talking heads had just the previous week described as a “formidable” or “appealing” candidate, performed so poorly that he dropped out of the race altogether! Even Rick Santorum, who finished in the Ames poll *behind* Pawlenty, received favorable mention by Chris Wallace the following day for *his* showing.

Mark Levin is no conservative. He is a *neoconservative*. Yet his judgment of Paul is not, for this, necessarily incorrect. Philosophically speaking, Ron Paul is *not* a conservative; he is a *libertarian*. What is interesting, though, is that [Walter Williams](#) — the black “conservative” economist who has been guest-hosting [Rush Limbaugh’s radio show](#) for years — is no less a libertarian than Paul. Not only do Williams and Paul subscribe to the same “first principles” — the “natural rights” philosophy of John Locke — Williams has referred to Paul as his “friend,” and he has stated on more than one occasion that if America’s Founding Fathers could visit our time, Ron Paul would be one of a tiny handful of politicians with whom they would be able to identify.

This is interesting for Limbaugh, a *good friend of Levin’s* who is widely recognized as “the King” of “conservative” talk radio, not only is comfortable allowing the libertarian Williams to host his show; he mistakes this libertarian for a “conservative.” But if Williams’ cause, regardless of its philosophical inspiration, is compatible with Limbaugh’s “conservative” cause, then, because Williams and Paul hold virtually identical views, Paul’s libertarian-inspired cause should be judged compatible with the cause of



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“limited government” to which neoconservative establishment Republicans like Levin and Limbaugh routinely pay lip service.

Of course, this is all going to be lost upon Levin. This isn't because he fails to grasp my logic; it is because he does not *care* to grasp it. When Levin says of Paul that he is “no kind of conservative,” he is not drawing fine philosophical distinctions between Paul's metaphysical suppositions and those of the average Republican candidate; what he is saying is that Paul doesn't deserve to be a contender in this race, and possibly doesn't deserve to be a Republican at all.

Yet if this is true, then Williams doesn't deserve to host Limbaugh's show or be affiliated with the GOP in any capacity. And if *this* is correct, then Limbaugh doesn't deserve his reputation as the premiere “conservative” talk radio host, for if he really were a conservative, then he would never think of allowing a faux conservative like Williams within miles of his “golden EIB microphone.” But if Limbaugh is no conservative, then neither are those — like Levin — who consider themselves ideologically kindred spirits with El Rushbo.

Either by way of this line of reasoning or Levin's own record of supporting Big Government Republicanism, it is obvious that Levin is wrong about Paul and, truth be told, wrong about his own identity as a conservative.



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