



The Real Ron Paul on Marriage and Drugs

As of late, Ron Paul has once again been the subject of relentless criticism courtesy of Republican Party pundits. It is his positions on marriage, “recreational” drugs, and current American foreign policy that invite, not just his detractors’ objections, but their ridicule and even their wrath. In all fairness, it is Paul’s statements in the Republican presidential primary debates — a venue, it must be admitted, that is not readily accommodating of the impassioned Texas congressman’s rather unorthodox beliefs — to which his critics speak. However, given that Paul has authored several reader-friendly books in which he elaborates on his views, if the GOP talking heads were really interested in what he thought, it is reasonable to expect that they would turn to these works.



So, what does Paul think about the aforementioned topics?

Let’s take marriage first.

When asked during the New Hampshire debate whether he would support a constitutional amendment explicitly defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman, Paul replied in the negative. He then followed up by insisting that “government” shouldn’t have anything at all to do with this institution. For this claim, he was excoriated by the likes of [Ann Coulter](#) and [Michael Medved](#) who exclaimed that Paul’s position would result in an anarchic situation in which property settlements, benefits claims, and the like would be rendered impossible.

The hysteria with which Coulter and Medved responded to Paul is in keeping with the hysteria that we have come to expect from his Republican opponents. Still, so defective is their reasoning on this score that it is hard to shake the suspicion that it is, at least in part, a function of bad faith.

Paul is not alone among his colleagues and competitors in the primaries in speaking of “government” interchangeably with the *federal* government. In fact, *all* of the candidates have a tendency to do this. And considering that they are all running for the presidency, it is to be expected that this should be so. That it is the federal government’s relationship to the institution of marriage with which Paul is principally concerned is born out by the following considerations.

First, it is the office of *the presidency* on which he sets his sights.

Second, being the constitutionalist that he is, there can be no doubt that if Paul were President, he would discharge only that narrow set of obligations that the Constitution specifies for holders of office at the federal level. How the individual states decided to treat marriage or any other issue that falls beyond the federal government’s constitutionally delineated jurisdiction is a matter to which a



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President Paul would be indifferent.

Third, again, the issue under question is an [amendment](#) to *the Constitution* that would supply a formal *definition* of marriage. Since it was immediately upon informing us that he would *not* endorse this amendment that Paul asserted his wish to see government remove itself from the marriage business altogether, anyone with any sensitivity to the context of this exchange should be able to recognize that “the government” to which he refers is the federal government.

In his newly published [Liberty Defined](#), Paul is clear: “Under our system, the federal government was granted no authority over this issue [of marriage].” As for Coulter’s and Medved’s charge that Paul’s reasoning promises to result in chaos, the much maligned maverick has a reply ready at hand. He says that not unlike parties to all other “voluntary and consensual agreements,” when marital “disputes” arise, spouses will have recourse to “the courts.” In other words, whether consenting adults want to call their arrangement “marriage” or not should be beside the point, from the government’s standpoint; when disputes occur, government — its judiciary branch — will adjudicate them.

As for drugs, while Paul thinks that governments should never coerce citizens when it comes to such self-regarding conduct as drug use, it is the federal government’s “War on Drugs” with which he is primarily interested. Here, once more, we turn to Paul in his own words as they appear in [Liberty Defined](#).

First of all, Paul draws heavily from the example of alcohol prohibition and the ill-fated [18th Amendment](#). That is, he relies upon *the federal government’s* utterly disastrous record of criminalizing “personal activities.” Paul writes: “Alcohol prohibition was destined to wreak havoc on the American people. It bred lawlessness and underworld criminal syndicates,” and because alcohol, being illegal, was less safe, it “led to blindness and death.” When these casualties are added to “the many” whose lives were extinguished in “the violence that occurred in” the alcohol’s “delivery,” [the Prohibition Era reveals itself to be a bloody era indeed.](#)

But for as big of a failure as the “War on Booze” undoubtedly was, the War on Drugs is that much worse. The War on Drugs has cost us “hundreds of billions of dollars,” to say nothing of the costs in “the loss of civil liberties” and a crime rate that “far surpasses the crime related to the fifteen years of alcohol prohibition.”

Paul anticipates the day when “the country will wake up and suddenly decide, as we did in 1933, that prohibition to improve personal behavior is a lost cause[.]” He thinks that this day may come sooner rather than later “because of the growing perception that the federal government is inept and that individual states must reassert themselves in order to provide more sensible government to their citizens.”

Paul, you see, has never said that if he were President, he would see to it that drugs are everywhere legalized. He clarifies this in the very first paragraph of his chapter on “Prohibition.” He writes: “If there are to be any regulations on the use of certain substances in the United States, it was intended that this should be done by the individual states, not by the federal government.”

Because it is Ron Paul’s position on foreign policy that lies at the core of his Republican opponents’ disdain for him, I will address this issue in full in my next article.



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