



CPAC Battle Part 2: Neoconservatives vs. Constitutionalists

The annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) — the three-day political event taking place at the Marriot Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, D.C. — allows conservatives from far and wide to come together to celebrate and support conservative values. However, the term “conservative” is far broader than most are aware, and CPAC serves as the perfect forum to highlight the philosophical divisions of those in attendance, and the substantial dissent between neoconservatives and constitutionalists.



Until last year, CPAC had been a forum mostly for Republicans, with just a handful of Libertarians, anti-communist Democrats, and constitutionalists strewn throughout.

In 2010, however, the demographics changed — a result of “the repudiation of the GOP in the 2008 elections and the repudiation by rank-and-file conservatives of the Big Government Republican Party exemplified by George W. Bush and most of the GOP leaders in Congress,” as [RonPaulForums.com](#) observed.

The clearest indicator that an influx of new conservatives (not to be confused with *neoconservatives*) had made their way to the political activist scene at CPAC could be found in the results of CPAC’s 2010 presidential straw poll, wherein Texas Representative Ron Paul was elected by a considerable majority.

Ron Paul supporters are even more assertive this year, energetically chanting his name at the most opportune times, including during the presentation of the “Defender of the Constitution” award to former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

[Tensions](#) arose when Ron Paul supporters and critics of Rumsfeld jeered the award recipient, calling for the award to be granted to Ron Paul instead, while Rumsfeld’s supporters attempted to drown out the antagonistic remarks. At one point, attendees were actually shouting at one another to “shut up” and “sit down.”

In addition to those in attendance, this year’s scheduled CPAC events themselves continue to represent a marked divide in conservative thought, particularly between [neoconservatives](#), who support aggressive military endeavors and interventionist policies, and constitutionalists (sometimes referred to as “[paleoconservatives](#)”) who support strict adherence to the principles outlined in the Constitution, which does not support interventionist policies.

For example, Thursday’s schedule included a forum sponsored by the Committee for the Republic entitled, “Cut Pentagon Spending, Strengthen America.” Just a few doors down from this event was a showing of the film *America At Risk: The War With No Name* — which touted the importance of America’s continued role in the “War on Terror.” The video was introduced by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich.



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 11, 2011

A number of dichotomous events such as these are scheduled throughout the weekend, including one forum that calls for the repeal of the Patriot Act, on the same day as another presentation that asserts the importance of "Keeping America Safe in a Changing World," sponsored by the Nixon Center.

While an increased presence of Libertarian, constitutionalist, and Tea Party guests is certainly evident this year — ranging from Congressman Ron Paul and Senator Rand Paul to historian Thomas Woods and economist Dr. Joseph Salerno — the balance of the scales still appears to be tipped in favor of the neoconservatives.

For example, the largest forums are still seemingly granted to establishment Republicans such as Newt Gingrich and Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. Additionally, most attendees continue to tout the late President Ronald Reagan as the ideal example of conservatism, referring to him reverentially.

Perhaps most confusing are those who seem to be a combination of the two types of attendees — those who simultaneously boo Donald Rumsfeld and applaud former Vice President Dick Cheney, for example. Or, as noted by RonPaulForums, those who applauded last year's keynote speaker Glenn Beck, who ultimately sounded like a John Birch Society member, while concurrently applauding Mitt Romney.

Whatever the case, the growing dissonance of the conservative movement will likely be celebrated by open-minded conservatives, as it brings to the table discussions that are sorely needed as America nears its breaking point. Ultimately, the best ideas will be revealed through an open forum.

George Washington well understood this, having once declared, "Meet me on the battlefield of ideas."

Photo: Sen. Rand Paul, (R-Ky.) addresses the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, Feb. 10, 2011: AP Images



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