



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on February 24, 2010

CPAC: “Conservatism” at the Crossroads

President Barack Obama’s first year in office has done much to stir broad and angry opposition to his autocratic rule and his efforts to nationalize and socialize virtually the entire American economy. However, as the 2010 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), which met recently in Washington, D.C., demonstrated, the opposition is far from unified. The three-day event (February 18-20) at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park Hotel was a factious, inharmonious affair exposing the deep philosophical divisions and conflicting political goals within the loosely defined “conservative movement.”



Launched in 1973 by the American Conservative Union and Young Americans for Freedom, CPAC has been the annual “premiere” gathering of conservatives, featuring future, current, or past Presidents of the United States, Governors, Members of Congress, authors, academics, commentators, and celebrities. While ostensibly nonpartisan, CPAC has been essentially a Republican event, with a sprinkling of Libertarians and exiled anti-communist Democrats. That changed this year, however, owing largely to 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. This year’s conference, the largest ever, was particularly notable for the large presence of activists from Congressman Ron Paul’s Campaign for Liberty, an outgrowth of his energetic and highly visible 2008 presidential campaign in the Republican primaries. In addition, independent Tea Party activists, many of whom also were activated by the Ron Paul campaign, comprised a significant contingent of the more than 10,000 attendees at the CPAC confab.

The Bush-Cheney wing of the Republican Party and the neoconservative scribblers at *National Review* who favor a borrow-borrow/spend-spend domestic policy only slightly less lavish than the Democrats and a foreign policy of “perpetual war for perpetual peace” have targeted both the Ron Paul supporters and Tea Party activists for ridicule and exclusion. But the CPAC organizers wisely decided that in the interest of “big tent conservatism” they should not bow to the Republican establishment’s wish to bar those “unruly” elements that condemn and oppose GOP policies that are incompatible with the genuine conservative philosophy of our nation’s Founders. Those policies include most especially the Republican Party’s conversion on matters such as foreign interventionism, binge spending, corporate bailouts, expansion of federal Leviathan and federal police authority, and evisceration of the Bill of Rights.

The conflicting forces at play were very evident at the concluding events of the CPAC summit on Saturday evening, when the results of the annual [“straw poll” of CPAC attendees](#) were revealed, just prior to the final address by Fox TV commentator and talk radio star Glenn Beck. The Bush-Cheney Republicans were stunned when the winner for the preferred Republican nominee for President in 2012 was announced. Rep. Ron Paul, the maverick Texas Republican, was far and away the leader, with 31



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percent of the vote. A loud chorus of “boos” from Mitt Romney supporters greeted the Ron Paul victory announcement. Romney had won the three previous CPAC straw polls, but this year the former Massachusetts Governor — a pro-abortion, tax-and-spend liberal, whose RomneyCare healthcare package prefigured ObamaCare — came in a distant second, at 22 percent. GOP heartthrob and former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin was even further behind, at seven percent, with Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty following closely at six percent, Indiana Congressman Mike Pence at five percent, and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee tying at four percent.

The Ron Paul upset was a stinging rebuke to the Bush-Cheney-Romney-McCain-Giuliani-Gingrich “moderate” wing of the GOP, as well as to the Beltway conservative establishment that has been their enabling force. A confluence of many factors was responsible for this establishment rout at CPAC, but chief among them has been the widespread disgust and anger over the onrushing financial calamity that threatens to completely annihilate our economic system. The neocon Republicans, who would like to have the Obama Democrats take all the blame for the debacle, are rightly seen by the conservative rank and file as hugely complicit. The day of economic reckoning is upon us, and many have come to recognize that Dr. Ron Paul has been a solitary voice in Washington, D.C., for the past couple decades, decrying the suicidal fiscal and monetary policies that now threaten to sweep away the most free and prosperous nation in history. Seeing the political writing on the wall, more than 300 members of the House have belatedly decided to jump on board Paul’s legislation to mandate a long-overdue audit of the Federal Reserve System.

It is this finger-to-the-hurricane reality check that has also caused many of the Republican elite to back off of their earlier bashing of the Tea Party activists and try instead to co-opt the whole Tea Party movement into a grassroots subsidiary of the GOP. The verdict is still out on whether or not that co-opting effort will be successful; but the CPAC experience seems to indicate that there is still a strong resistance from many conservative activists to backing any of the “usual suspects” the Republican neocon hierarchy may try to put forward as standard bearers in this year’s midterm elections, or in the 2012 presidential run.

Throughout the three-day event, the GOP establishment could count on rousing applause for its “golden boys” — from at least a sizeable portion of the audience. Mitt Romney, Dick Armey, Bill Bennett, John Bolton, Newt Gingrich, George Will, John Boehner, Haley Barbour, Michael Steele, Fred Thompson, and Dick Cheney all received cordial-to-enthusiastic welcomes. But the most fervent and heartfelt ovations went to those who could be categorized as contrarians and insurgents: former Florida House Speaker Marco Rubio, who is challenging establishment-backed Governor Charlie Crist for Florida’s open Senate seat; former [Representative J.D. Hayworth](#), who is challenging 23-year incumbent John McCain’s effort for a fifth term in the Senate; Sen. Jim DeMint of South Carolina, who sponsored a companion Senate bill to Ron Paul’s audit-the-fed legislation in the House; Judge Andrew Napolitano, the pugnacious Fox commentator, author, and columnist; Thomas Woods, the best-selling author-historian and free-market advocate; and, of course, Rep. Ron Paul, whose book-signing line stretched, it seemed, from the Marriott to somewhere just West of his Houston, Texas, congressional district.

The thunderous response to Glenn Beck’s rousing headliner speech could not have been lost on the CPAC leaders and Republican pols, whether watching up close or from afar. Unlike many of the other speakers who were aglow with Republican triumphalism over Team Obama’s recent poll declines, Beck lashed out at the Republican Party’s complicity in promoting the cancer of “Progressivism,” and called on the GOP to emulate Tiger Woods’ public repentance and admit it has sinned.



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Beck, who is a recovering alcoholic, said he believes in the concept of redemption but that he doesn't think the GOP has taken the first step to achieving it. "I have not yet heard people in the Republican Party admit they have a problem," Beck told the jam-packed Marriott ballroom audience. "I have not seen a come-to-Jesus meeting.... 'Hello, my name is the Republican Party and I've got a problem. I'm addicted to spending and big government.'... They need that moment."

While other CPAC speakers preached optimism and Ronald Reagan's positive "It's morning in America" message, Beck took a different tack. "It's still morning in America," he said, but then added: "It happens to be a kind of a head-pounding, vomiting, hangover kind of morning in America." The pundits, politicians, and analysts who claim that our economic crisis has passed are lying, he warned; there is worse yet to come.

Those lines, like many additional blasts in his speech aimed at the GOP's "progressive" leadership, echoed the irritation felt by many, if not most, CPAC attendees toward RINO (Republican In Name Only) politicians who dance in the conservative chorus line at election time but then tango with the liberal Democrats once they get to Washington. Beck's appeal to return to limited, constitutional government and his pointed attacks on the Federal Reserve, the income tax, the League of Nations, the New Deal, welfare, corporate bailouts, and "spreading democracy" at gunpoint sounded more like typical red meat fare at a Ron Paul rally than the neocon talking points that have become the standard Republican version of "conservatism."

In fact, Beck's speech echoed the messages of earlier speakers at the conference such as Ron Paul, Andrew Napolitano, and Thomas Woods, who indicted the Republican complicity in promoting socialism and condemned the establishment neoconservatives who have betrayed the principles they claim to champion by dressing up statist nostrums in conservative attire. The tension between the paleoconservatives (small government constitutionalists of the "Old Right") and the neoconservatives was evident following the Presidential Banquet on Thursday evening, when around 1,500 attendees gathered in the Marshall Ballroom to hear Paul, Napolitano, and Woods, while a comparable number stayed in the main ballroom to hear neocon icon George Will. Judge Napolitano delivered an especially fiery and impassioned denunciation of the neocon promotion of foreign wars and the simultaneous destruction of liberty and constitutionally limited government at home. Pointing toward the other ballroom, the judge decried the fact that many CPAC participants had actually applauded former Vice President Dick Cheney.

CPAC's paleocon-neocon tension had been running long before the conference began. In addition to the continuing conflict between the Republican establishment and the Ron Paul forces over the Federal Reserve and perpetual global wars to "spread democracy" under the guise of fighting terrorism, the neocon bloggers at *National Review*, *FrontpageMagazine.com*, and elsewhere were frothing at the mouth over the "invasion" of CPAC by Tea Party "wingnuts" and (horrors!) the "crackpots" of the John Birch Society — the parent organization of this magazine. The Birch Society, which was a co-sponsor of this year's CPAC event, operated two side-by-side booths in the conference exhibit hall, with one of the booths serving as a video studio. Throughout the course of the three-day forum, dozens of conference speakers, authors, candidates, and organization leaders stopped by to be interviewed. (Some of these interviews can be seen online at [LibertyNewsNetwork.tv](#); more will be added over time.)

Birch Society President John F. McManus, who was at the CPAC conference, found most participants warmly welcomed the Society and its consistent message of limited constitutional government. The Society, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008, was attacked by *National Review's* William F.



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Buckley and exiled from “respectable” anti-communist and conservative circles by the Buckleyite Republican establishment.

With the help of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, PBS, and other bastions of the liberal-left establishment, Buckley was able to redefine conservatism and co-opt the conservative movement into gradually embracing the very collectivist policies, programs, and principles it had once firmly opposed. “Buckley got the movement to think in terms of ‘conservative,’ which is undefined, instead of ‘constitutionalist,’ which strictly and definitively limits government power,” McManus explained to a reporter who stopped by the JBS booth at CPAC. McManus’s 2002 book, [William F. Buckley: Pied Piper for the Establishment](#), is a penetrating look at the man who is revered by many as the patron saint of “modern conservatism.” As McManus notes, however, Buckley’s “modern conservatism” soon became neoconservatism, a fusion of conservative rhetoric with collectivist philosophy. Buckley’s main mentors were former Trotskyites Wilmore Kendall, James Burnham, Irving Kristol, and Norman Podhoretz. These founding fathers of neoconservatism had rejected some, but not all, of their former communist beliefs.

According to neocon godfather Irving Kristol, neoconservatives favor a “conservative welfare state,” an oxymoron if ever there was one. “Neocons,” Irving Kristol admitted, “do not feel that kind of alarm or anxiety about the growth of the state in the past century, seeing it as natural, indeed inevitable.” Redefining conservatism, Kristol wrote: “We accepted the New Deal in principle, and had little affection for the kind of isolationism that permeated American conservatism.”

Buckley, Kristol, and their fellow neocons knew they had to proceed slowly at first, however, if they were to keep traditional, constitutionalist conservatives on board for the transformation. Thus when Buckley penned the mission statement for *National Review* in 1955, it was freighted with appeals to traditional paleoconservative concerns.

National Review, he wrote, “stands athwart history, yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it.”

He pretended to oppose FDR’s New Deal, an execrable, socialist program to all conservatives. He stated:

Conservatives in this country - at least those who have not made their peace with the New Deal, and there is serious question whether there are others - are non-licensed nonconformists.... Radical conservatives in this country have an interesting time of it, for when they are not being suppressed or mutilated by the Liberals, they are being ignored or humiliated by a great many of those of the well-fed Right, whose ignorance and amorality have never been exaggerated for the same reason that one cannot exaggerate infinity.

Buckley and his “well-fed Right” at *National Review* would go on to suppress, mutilate, ignore, and humiliate many of the leaders and luminaries of the conservative movement, betraying many who had befriended and helped them. This included authors John T. Flynn and Frank Chodorov, economist Murray Rothbard, Ohio Senator Robert Taft, the *Chicago Tribune*’s Robert McCormick, John Birch Society founder Robert Welch, *National Review* editor Joseph Sobran, and writers Pat Buchanan and Sam Francis — to name a few.

The 1955 *National Review* mission statement also declares: “The growth of government (the dominant social feature of this century) must be fought relentlessly.” But, of course, that is completely undercut by the neocon embrace of the welfare state.



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The mission statement further states: “No superstition has more effectively bewitched America’s Liberal elite than the fashionable concepts of world government, the United Nations, internationalism, ..., etc.” Buckley also announced opposition to any efforts “to surrender U.S. sovereignty to a world organization.” However, Buckley and the *National Review* neocons soon accepted the United Nations and joined the liberals in lampooning the Birch Society and others who saw in it dangers of world government and threats to U.S. sovereignty. Likewise, the neocons have embraced the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other UN attacks on national sovereignty.

Buckley also joined the liberals in favoring gun-control legislation and national service, as well as coming out in favor of abortion and removing restrictions on homosexuals in the military. He was also a frequent writer for the nation’s “premiere” pornography vehicles *Penthouse* and *Playboy*, but then, Buckley was no champion of “traditional values,” despite his tendency publicly to wear his Catholic legacy — whenever it advanced his agenda. This amoral path is still trod by Buckley’s successors at *National Review* — Jonah Goldberg, Rich Lowrey, David Frum, et al — who had conniptions over the Birchers being invited to CPAC, but celebrated CPAC’s welcome of [GOProud](#), the “conservative” homosexual organization, as a co-sponsor of the conference.

“The John Birch Society has remained true to the ideals of America’s Founding Fathers, to the Constitution, and to the moral principles on which our nation was founded, which certainly can’t be said of the neoconservatives,” notes McManus. “We cannot hope to recapture America’s greatness and return to sound, constitutional government if ‘conservatives’ do not adhere to eternal verities and continue to allow their adversaries to define and redefine the terms under which we operate.”

Photo of Ron Paul at CPAC: AP Images

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