

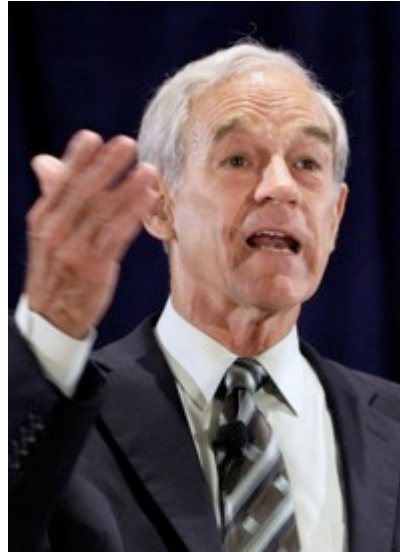


Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on February 22, 2010

“Crazy, kooky” Paul Wins CPAC Straw Poll

Dick Cheney, Ann Coulter, and Glenn Beck all received enthusiastic applause at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington that ended over the weekend, but Ron Paul was the landslide winner of the presidential preference straw poll.

Paul, the Texas Congressman whose bid for the Republican presidential nomination campaign in 2008 inspired a small but intense following among libertarian and small-government conservatives, took 31 percent of the straw poll vote on Saturday, finishing well ahead of former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, who also competed for the GOP nod two years ago. Romney received 22 percent, while former Alaska Governor and 2008 vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, who did not attend the conference, finished a distant third with seven percent. Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty was the choice of six percent, while Indiana Congressman Mike Pence drew five percent. Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, who addressed the gathering on Saturday, received four percent of the vote, as did former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, who did not attend. Conference organizers said 2,395 of the estimated 10,000 people attending the conference took part in the straw poll.



Paul's share of the vote was up 18 percent from the CPAC straw poll of a year ago, when he was the choice of just 13 percent of the participants. The results drew mixed reactions at the conference, with Paul's first-place finish drawing hoots and boos along with cheers. On the Townhall.com website, Meredith Jessup dismissed the vote as essentially meaningless.

"Count me as one of the many 'boos' that sounded off when these results were released," she wrote. "I wouldn't read too much into these results — more than 1/2 of the registrants of CPAC are young students and only 25% of CPAC attendees bothered to participate in the straw poll. This is definitely not an indication where the GOP primary elections are headed and certainly not a reflection of mainstream conservatives."

Writing for the *New York Time* politics and government blog, Katherine Q. Seelye noted, "The straw poll in past years has rarely predicted the winner of the Republican nomination." But conference participant



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David Franke wondered, on Lewrockwell.com, why CPAC would bother with the straw poll if it were all so meaningless. "Funny," he wrote, "I voted for Ron Paul at CPAC and I didn't see any notice on the ballot warning, 'This poll is unscientific and stupid. But if you're bored and still want to vote, here are your choices.'"

Franke also noted another aspect of the polling that got little or no notice in the major media. On rating issues in terms of their importance, 52 percent of straw poll voters put "Reducing the size of federal government" at the top of the list, up 9 percent from the poll taken at last year's CPAC conference. "Reducing government spending" came in second at 33 percent, also a 9 percent increase from last year. "The war on terrorism" was the top issue for 18 percent of the participants, down five percent from a year ago, while the war in Iraq dwindled from five to two percent. "Illegal immigration" was the number one concern of five percent of the voters, just half of what it was last year. "Doing away with abortion" dropped from 15 to 10 percent. On issues added to this year's poll, three percent picked reforming Social Security as the top issue, while reducing healthcare costs and stopping "gay marriage" each drew one percent.

"I doubt that CPAC conservatives have become more liberal, or libertarian, on social issues," Franke wrote. "What has changed are their political priorities. Addressing our economic and government spending crisis has come to the forefront, and that explains the Ron Paul surge within the ranks of CPAC. After all, Ron Paul is the *only* candidate who has a consistent record of fighting for fiscal sanity in Washington, and now he is reaping the rewards."

But the mixed reaction to Paul's victory is a sign that there is still a good deal of philosophical ground separating the "mainstream" conservatives and Paul's more libertarian following. Former Vice President Dick Cheney, a champion of increased government surveillance, the war in Iraq and the waterboarding of prisoners, was cheered at the same conference that reflected growing support for Ron Paul. Columnist and frequent talk-show commentator Anne Coulter, whose hawkish views on foreign and military policy are clearly at odds with Paul's non-interventionist stance, acknowledged Paul and his followers in her remarks at the conferencing, drawing cheers when she said she agreed with the Texas Congressman on everything but foreign policy. TV and radio talk-show host Glenn Beck, who wowed the crowd on Saturday night by comparing the Washington beltway Republicans to alcoholics addicted to reckless spending, has said on his radio program that Paul "has total credence when it comes to the economy. He does not necessarily have credence on the war on terror." Beck, whose TV program is now on Fox News, was once reminded by a caller, "When you were on CNN, you acted like (Paul) was a crazy, kooky guy."

"I still act like he's a crazy, kooky guy," Beck replied. Paul, for his part, has called Beck, "a demagogue at times."

Photo of Ron Paul: AP Images



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