



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 20, 2011

Paul Poised to Win Iowa; GOP Establishment on Edge

With the Iowa caucuses just two weeks away, Ron Paul has taken the lead in two caucus forecasts — a development that has the GOP establishment on edge. A December 18 Public Policy Polling survey found that the Texas Congressman was the choice of 23 percent of likely Republican caucus voters. Mitt Romney came in second at 20 percent, with Newt Gingrich in third at 14 percent and Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry, Rick Santorum tied at 10 percent. “Someone else/Not sure” was next at 7 percent, followed by Jon Huntsman at 4 percent and Gary Johnson at 2 percent.



Gingrich was the biggest loser in the poll, having plunged from 27 percent support three weeks ago to 14 percent now. In addition, he possesses the highest “unfavorable” rating of any candidate in the race (47 percent). Paul, meanwhile, led the pack on the positive side with 54 percent of voters viewing him favorably.

On matters of principle, Paul, not surprisingly, is the champion in voters’ minds. Seventy-three percent said he has strong principles, while only 50 percent thought the same of Romney and 36 percent of Gingrich. (The question was not asked about the other candidates.)

The *New York Times* is also forecasting a Paul win in the Hawkeye State, but with even more certainty than PPP. As of this writing the Gray Lady [believes](#) Paul has a 52 percent chance of winning the Iowa caucuses. His closest competitor, Romney, stands just a 28 percent chance of being the victor; Gingrich is given a mere 8 percent likelihood of success.

Feeling fairly confident that Paul will take Iowa, the *Times*’ Nate Silver [argues](#):

It may now be as important to watch his New Hampshire polls as those in Iowa. Our New Hampshire forecasts now give Mr. Paul about a 17 percent chance of winning the state, but those odds would improve with a win in Iowa. Although Mr. Romney might prefer that Mr. Paul win Iowa ... all bets would be off if Mr. Paul won New Hampshire too.

What happens if Paul does indeed win the caucuses? “The Republican presidential primary ... will get downright ugly,” [predicts](#) the *Washington Examiner*’s Timothy P. Carney. His reasoning? “The principled, antiwar, Constitution-obeying, Fed-hating, libertarian Republican congressman from Texas stands firmly outside the bounds of permissible dissent as drawn by either the Republican establishment or the mainstream media.”

Three things are likely to occur following a Paul victory in Iowa, Carney says.

First, he forecasts, “Much of the media will ignore him (expect headlines like ‘Romney Beats out Gingrich for Second Place in Iowa’).” There is precedent for this. Paul was virtually ignored when he practically tied Bachmann for first place in the Ames Straw Poll in August, and his many subsequent straw poll victories have gone equally unreported. Even Carney’s joke headline isn’t much of a stretch:



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When a September poll showed Romney in first place in New Hampshire, distantly followed by Paul, Huntsman, and Perry, in that order, Yahoo! News actually [posted a story](#) about it with the banner “Romney leads in New Hampshire, Huntsman third, Perry in fourth.”

Second, according to Carney, “Some in the Republican establishment and the conservative media will panic.” This is, in fact, already happening. Rush Limbaugh has taken to [lamprooning Paul](#) for his noninterventionist foreign policy, a sure sign that the Republican Party fears people might actually listen to Paul.

Sean Hannity, another reliable bellwether of GOP establishment opinion, “felt the need on [December 14] to bring Bill Bennett on his show for a segment of unsaturated Paul-bashing,” *Salon’s* Steve Kornacki [reported](#). “Bennett articulated an increasingly common concern among GOP elites, saying that Paul’s candidacy “isn’t going anywhere — except if he wins Iowa.”

“And what happens if he does?” asks Kornacki.

If you have a mischievous streak, it’s a fun possibility to consider, because the short answer is that guys like Bennett and Hannity will freak out — and their freak-out could last for a while. An Iowa victory would make Paul the center of the political media world, flood his campaign treasury with even more small-dollar donations, and boost his prospects in subsequent states. He might be able to parlay it into an impressive showing in libertarian-friendly New Hampshire, weather losses in South Carolina and Florida (where the numbers just aren’t very promising), then surge again in February, when his caucus state strategy kicks in. If the rest of the field remains unsettled then — with, say, Romney winning New Hampshire and Newt Gingrich taking South Carolina and Florida — Paul could find himself at or near the top of the delegate race, pushing the Hannity/Bennett panic level through the roof.

The third probable result of a Paul caucus win, Carney suggests, is that “others [in the GOP establishment and conservative media] will calmly move to crush him, with the full cooperation of the liberal mainstream media.”

Indeed, Fox News’ Chris Wallace has already set the stage for just such an eventuality, [saying](#) that if Paul wins in Iowa, “it will discredit the Iowa caucuses because ... most of the Republican establishment thinks he’s not going to end up as the nominee, so therefore Iowa won’t count.”

Wallace’s remark, however, is a mere pinprick compared to the onslaught Carney envisions. He predicts nothing less than full-scale character assassination: “[Paul’s] conservative critics and the mainstream media will imply that he is a racist, a kook, and a conspiracy theorist” — just as they smeared Pat Buchanan as a racist and anti-Semite following his victory in the 1996 New Hampshire primary.

This, too, is already under way. Last week the neoconservative media, including Limbaugh, Hannity, and *National Review*, had a grand old party [repeating](#) the canard that Paul believes in 9/11 conspiracy theories when, in reality, he simply believes that the whole story, particularly those portions that demonstrate government incompetence, has yet to be told.

As to charges of racism, recall that on the day of the 2008 New Hampshire primary, the *New Republic* published a [hit piece](#) claiming that Paul had authored several articles with potentially offensive, but mostly just politically incorrect, content that appeared in a newsletter bearing his name. The article, Justin Raimondo [observed](#) at the time, was “intellectually dishonest, inauthentic in its outrage, and unintentionally humorous at times.” Those who know Paul, including CNN’s Wolf Blitzer and the



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president of the Austin, Texas, chapter of the NAACP, did not believe that he had written the articles in question. Nevertheless, Paul was forced to respond to the attack, admitting that the articles had indeed appeared in his newsletter but repeatedly stating that he had neither authored nor approved them. Expect this story to be dredged up again if Paul begins to look like a real threat to a Romney or Gingrich nomination.

Paul is looking more and more like a serious contender for the GOP nomination, and the outcome of the Iowa caucuses may provide the first hard evidence of that. For constitutionalists, a Paul victory in Iowa will offer a glimmer of hope that America's slide into socialism and empire can be reversed. "But for the enforcers of Republican orthodoxy," avers Carney, it "will be an act of impudence that must be punished."



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