



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on November 9, 2014

Senate Leader McConnell Says He'll Back Rand Paul for President

Things have changed considerably in the last four years for Kentucky's political odd couple, Mitch McConnell, the anticipated majority leader in the new GOP-controlled Senate, and the state's junior senator, Rand Paul.



In 2010, Paul, the political newcomer and Tea Party-backed insurgent, was running against Kentucky's Secretary of State Trey Grayson and "the D.C. insiders" backing him in the Republican primary. Most prominent among those "D.C. insiders" was McConnell, the state's senior senator and the party's leader in Washington. McConnell was a conspicuous backer of Grayson, but put his organizational support behind Paul after the challenger's impressive upset primary win. After Paul supported McConnell's reelection bid this year, both in the primary against Tea Party favorite Matt Bevin and in the victorious general election campaign against Democrat Alison Lundergan Grimes, McConnell told a Kentucky newspaper he is ready to back Paul among what is likely to be a large number of GOP presidential hopefuls in 2016. That could put the new majority leader in a somewhat strained relationship with Republican senators Marco Rubio of Florida and Ted Cruz of Texas, both of whom are also likely presidential hopefuls.

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"Obviously, I'm a big supporter of Rand Paul," McConnell told the [Lexington Herald-Leader](#) in an interview published Friday. "We've developed a very tight relationship, and I'm for him." Asked if that included Paul's expected presidential bid, McConnell said, "Whatever he decides to do," adding, "I don't think he's made a final decision on that. But he'll be able to count on me."

The endorsement adds some "early and important establishment heft" to Paul's coming campaign, the *National Journal* commented, noting that it gave the junior senator the kind of "institutional support" never bestowed on his father, Ron Paul, a former Texas congressman and long-shot candidate for the GOP presidential nomination in 2008 and 2012. The younger Paul had declared his support for



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McConnell early, campaigning for him during both the primary and general election campaigns. McConnell featured his junior colleague in the final ad of his primary campaign, and the duo flew across the state together to campaign stops on the final day before last Tuesday's election. "It speaks to Paul's ascent and popularity in Kentucky that McConnell wanted to appear with him both in the waning days of the primary and the general election," the *National Journal* said.

Some of Paul's Tea Party supporters, on the other hand, were clearly miffed earlier this year at Paul's support for the establishment leader against Bevin, a Louisville businessman, in the party primary. Paul early this year called into question Bevin's opposition to the 2008 bailout of Wall Street financial firms through the Troubled Assets Relief Program, noting Bevin's signature on a pro-TARP letter issued by an investment company where Bevin was president.

"I think it hurts any individual if it appears as if their responses to issues aren't consistent," Paul was quoted as saying. "So the fact that at one point he said he was for TARP but now he's against TARP, it does hurt credibility." Yet the Bevin campaign reminded voters that McConnell not only supported TARP, but also called its passage "[one of the finest moments in the history of the Senate.](#)" Following his triumph over Bevin in the May primary, McConnell predicted more wins against Tea Party-backed candidates nationally. "We're going to crush them everywhere," he said.

"Rand's credibility with the United Kentucky Tea Party and Conservatives around the state dropped several notches with his statement bashing Matt," Scott Hoffstra, spokesman for the United Kentucky Tea Party told Breitbart News during the primary battle. Matt Hoskins, head of the Senate Conservatives Fund, found it ironic that Paul was supporting McConnell in the primary, since McConnell "did everything he could to defeat Rand Paul in 2010. Conservatives know their champions are going to do things from time to time that they don't agree with, but this one is pretty hard to swallow," he told Breitbart.

An early sign of the McConnell-Paul alliance came two years ago when Paul's Senate aide and former campaign manager Jesse Benton moved over to the McConnell camp to manage the Senate leader's bid for a sixth consecutive term. Benton has long been allied with the Pauls, having also managed Ron Paul's bid for the GOP presidential nomination in 2012. He is also married to a granddaughter of Ron Paul. The reason for his joining the McConnell campaign became embarrassingly clear with the release of a tape on which Benton was secretly recorded saying he was "holding my nose" to work for McConnell in order to boost support for Rand Paul's presidential bid. He apologized for the remark when the tape became public.

Benton resigned from the McConnell campaign in August of this year as the result of an investigation of a bribery scandal involving Ron Paul's 2012 presidential campaign. Former Iowa state Sen. Kent Sorenson pleaded guilty to accepting \$73,000 from Paul's campaign in exchange for his endorsement, and to obstruction of justice for lying about his involvement, the *Lexington Herald-Leader* reported. Saying the investigation might otherwise be a distraction from the McConnell campaign, Benton issued a statement saying he was resigning because of "inaccurate press accounts and unsubstantiated media rumors about me and my role in past campaigns that are politically motivated, unfair and, most importantly, untrue."

Photo of Senators Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul: AP Images



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