

Candidates' positions, not polls, matter most

Nov. 5 was a watershed in American politics. Republican Congressman Ron Paul raised more than \$4 million in a single day, shattering John Kerry's 2004 record for a presidential candidate in the primary elections.

Was this news to you? Can't say I'm surprised. The response from the print media has been, well, underwhelming. Some of that can probably be explained by cultural differences between print and on-line media. Paul is the most consistently pro-freedom, pro-responsibility of the presidential candidates of either party, and that resonates very well with the online crowd. That's why he consistently outpolls other candidates on Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and just about every other big Internet site out there.

Most of his donations are collected online. Because Paul is a man of principle, he updates his fundraising status on his Web site, rather than timing fundraising reports for maximum political leverage. This is the sort of behavior that print media (present company excluded) have trouble getting a handle on.

But cultural differences can't completely explain asymmetry in media coverage. Paul has such strong mainstream credentials, he should be getting plenty of play in print. After all, who won the Conservative Leadership Conference straw poll? Ron Paul.

Who is the only member of Congress to never vote for an unbalanced budget? Ron Paul.

Whose book on foreign policy was an Amazon.com top-100 best-seller? Ron Paul.

Who was one of only four Republican congressmen to endorse Ronald Reagan in 1976, when everybody else went for Gerald Ford? Ron Paul.

Who is the Republican candidate with the most distinguished record of military service? All right, that's probably John McCain. But who was an active duty Air Force flight surgeon? Dr. Paul. That clearly makes him No. 2. In fact, according to the Center for Responsive Politics and ABC News, Paul has received more donations from active duty military than any other Republican candidate. Including McCain.

So why is Paul having trouble getting media play? Two reasons.

First, he has principles. Most journalists



OPINION
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are pragmatic liberals, so in principle they don't think much about principles. They figure a Republican who has principles must be a Pat Robertson or a James Dobson. A principled Republican who doesn't promote morality through legislation simply doesn't register on their radar screen.

Second, there are the poll numbers. Unless you're a front-runner, the media doesn't want to cover you. This makes some economic sense; newspaper space is a scarce resource. Of course, one of the ways you become a front-runner is

to get media coverage, so it's a chicken-and-egg problem.

But the real reason why front-runners stay front-runners is voter behavior. When it comes to a front-runner, you look for reasons to show support. When it comes to an underdog, you look for reasons not to. After all, it's embarrassing to tell someone you support a candidate who isn't currently at the front of the polls. It's like telling someone you've got money on the horse that's not leading the pack. Who wants to hear that?

That's the real problem. People don't respond to candidates based on their positions. They respond to candidates they think will win, because they want to tell their friends they voted for a winner.

Please, people, vote the issues. Google "Ron Paul," visit his Web site, check out all his positions. If you see one where you think he's completely wrong, don't stop there. Keep going, and keep a tally. Do this for all the candidates.

If, when you're all done, no one scores higher than Paul, then darn it, he's your guy and you should support him, front-runner or not. Send him money, put a sign in your yard, argue with your book club over coffee, but do something. Don't support the usual suspects doing business as usual just because they're ahead in the usual polls. Paul's record-setting fundraising is a rallying cry for the only principled voice for freedom and responsibility in presidential politics today. It would be a shame if that voice went unheard because people paid attention to his vision but ignored their conscience.

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