



## **Ron Paul: A Glimpse Behind the Scenes**

**Guest: Norm Singleton**

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***Norm Singleton was legislative director for Ron Paul from 2001-2012. From 1997 to 2001 Norm was Ron's legislative assistant for Education, Labor, and Health Care.***

**WOODS:** You were Ron's legislative director for how many years?

**SINGLETON:** Well, I was his legislative director for 12 from October 2001 until, I guess, technically January 2013 when he left Congress. Before that I was his legislative aide for education, labor, and healthcare issues from '97 to October 2001. In fact, actually my first day as legislative director was the day that the House shut down for—do you remember the great anthrax scare of 2001?

**WOODS:** I do remember that.

**SINGLETON:** Yes. So I got off to an auspicious start.

**WOODS:** I have gotten to know some people in different congressional offices, and the impression that I got, having briefly visited Ron's office, is that there's something different about working for Ron Paul. There's something about the tenor of the office, the type of person who wants to work in that kind of office. What did you notice, being there for so many years?

**SINGLETON:** Well, the first thing I noticed was that most Hill offices, prior Hill experience is considered a plus or even a prerequisite. In Ron's office, it was a negative. The only person at the start who ever had prior Hill experience was our scheduler, Anna Marie Pratt, whose father is Larry Pratt of Gun Owners of America. She had worked for Steve Stockman before that. Other than that, nobody else had Hill experience, and the reason is Ron wanted people who believed in his mission, and he wanted people who shared his philosophy, and he didn't want people who were infected with the Hill culture of telling him: well, the leadership really wants you to vote this way, and this is important to the district, or who were thinking, well, this guy could lose in two years, and I really want to stay on the Hill, and I want to be Chief of Staff next, so I'd better try to get him to play ball with K-Street or with the leadership because my career is dependent on it. He didn't want Hill careerists. He wanted people who came to Capitol Hill because they believed in his mission, because they shared his philosophy, because they

understood his philosophy and were knowledgeable about it. I think we were the only Hill office—you know how you walk into most offices, and there's a row of books on a lot of desks, and it's usually a lot of the typical, if it's a Democrat office, it will be Obama's, what was it called? *Hope to Ruin the Economy and Drone Lots of Muslims*, and Romney's *I'm Just Like Obama Except I Want More Wars*, or whatever his campaign book was called. And you know that they've probably never read that. In our office, the books on the shelves were Rothbard, and Mises, and Ron's books, obviously, and your books. And the staff had actually read the books that we put up on our desk. We didn't just have them for display. So that was a big difference. The knowledge of a philosophy that we were there to promote and expend was a key in hiring. So I would say, yes, we were very different than the average congressional staff in those two ways. And that's because of Ron's clear sense of mission and the fact that he only wanted people working for him who shared his mission, who shared his unwillingness to become a creature of Washington and never forget why we were there.

**WOODS:** Norm, now that Ron Paul's congressional career is at an end, maybe you're freer to speak about this sort of thing than you might have been before, but can you share with us any stories about exactly how leadership treated him? We've heard a lot about leadership's dislike of Dr. Paul but maybe not a whole lot of specific examples. Are there any that you feel at liberty to provide?

**SINGLETON:** Ron was actually on the floor at least once, and he was trying to make a motion to force a roll-call vote. I think it was Ex-Im funding or some other—one of those monstrous corporate welfare programs, and the person sitting in the Speaker's chair looked directly at Ron and still gavelled it down, said that it was a voice vote and refused to recognize him. There were times when we had amendments to force votes on various pro-liberty, anti-state, or antiwar issues, and we were denied that. There, of course, are the infamous stories about how he was routinely denied chairmanships of the Financial Services Committee until the Democrats took over in '07, and at that point through a combination of factors, he got his ranking membership chairman. And then, as Paul-Martin explained the other day, in 2011 he had become this great national figure and was being heralded as the intellectual godfather of the Tea Party, and I think that leadership just couldn't deny him that chairmanship anymore. There was a lot of little petty stuff—routine water projects in his district that would be never even questioned were stripped of funding in some appropriations bills. Clearly, it was an attempt to make Ron look bad to the people back home. What was really interesting about that is this was under a Republican subcommittee chairman, and the idea that a Republican would go out of his way to embarrass another Republican in an election year was unheard of, but that rule didn't apply to Ron.

**WOODS:** Yeah, the 12th commandment is thou shalt defame Ron Paul, apparently.

**SINGLETON:** Right, it was, because this was clearly an attempt to weaken Ron in a difficult election year, and it was done at the behest of some special interest somewhere, I am certain, who was hoping that Ron would lose, and the good news about that is that Ron was elected

that year by a record vote, and then the next year he kicked off his run for president. On the chairman story, I was told by someone about the way that they kept splitting the monetary policy's committees and then putting them back together that that was specifically done by the then-chair of the Financial Services Committee in order to make it easier for him to justify denying Ron a subcommittee chairmanship.

**WOODS:** This is unbelievable. There really should be a whole book just on this sort of stuff. Now, a few things that occurred to me that I've always been curious about. He's so even-tempered. Everybody knows this. He's unflappable. It doesn't matter what's going on. You don't have a sense that this is a man who flies into panic or rage. He seems very much in control. But yet, there must have been times when he got really angry. What is the kind of thing that would make this unflappable guy really angry, and what does an angry Ron Paul look like?

**SINGLETON:** Well, Ron, when he gets angry, unless you have worked with him for a long time and can tell the signs, it can be tough to tell, because he doesn't really raise his voice. He doesn't really yell. He doesn't use profanity. He's always a perfect gentlemen, even when he's mad. But what made him angry—I think one time that he was really angry, he came back from a Texas GOP delegation lunch, and this was shortly before the Iraq war vote, and Tom DeLay was bragging about how he was scheduling the vote as close to the election as possible because he thought that it would really damage, put the Democrats in a bad position to either vote against their antiwar base, or vote against the majority of the country—which, remember, supported the Iraq invasion because they were being fed a steady diet of propaganda by the mainstream media, and the bloody flag of 9/11 was being waved. And Ron was incredibly angry at that and just incredibly offended that the most fundamental question that a Congress would face, which is whether or not we will commit our young men and women in the fighting force to fight, die, and kill overseas, was being manipulated to score political points. The morning of the infamous three-hour prescription drug vote he was very angry because he'd been on the floor for three hours. It was 6:00 in the morning by the time that he got back to the office, but again, it was—I could just tell by the expression on his face—the way his voice—it wasn't raised. It was just more of a tone. Again, Ron never really loses his cool. I think once or twice in the debates you might have seen him get—

**WOODS:** Testy, maybe.

**SINGLETON:** Yeah, which I thought was awesome. When Newt Gingrich or Rick Santorum is up there talking about how great war is and how wonderful they are because they want to kill more foreigners than Obama, it's wonderful to see Ron actually get mad and get kind of, not in their in face butm directly challenge them.

**WOODS:** Tell me the atmosphere in the office on September 11th.

**SINGLETON:** Well, we were actually out of the office very early because I had to go to a meeting downtown, and I was actually in a cab when I heard the Pentagon was hit. By the time I figured out what was going on, the Capitol was evacuated. I think the next day and the rest of the week

we were sort of in a planning mode. There was a sense of foreboding about what would happen, because while Ron supported the idea of some kind of response, and while Ron recognized that there needed to be something done to respond to those who did it, and if you'll recall he introduced his own proposal, marque and reprisal, which is the way that the Founders wanted us to deal with this. We were, as early as the morning of September 12th, discussing what the fallout would be in terms of foreign policy and civil liberties, and we even were discussing blowback and how this was to be foreseen, unfortunately, from our own policies, and how Ron and a few others had actually expressed concerns that this was going to happen. And if you go back to the statements that were made in response to that tragedy, I think you'll find that Ron was the first one to express any concern that we not go overboard in terms of allowing this to be used as an excuse to increase police power and to take away our civil liberties. Unfortunately, he was not listened to, and that's one of the things that I think working for Ron, and I'm sure you felt this too, and I'm sure everybody who is listening to this has felt.

It's very bittersweet to be able to say Ron Paul was right so often for two reasons. One of which is he is right in all the bad stuff. He was right in the late '90s that the Internet bubble was going to pop, and this so-called new economy was built on a house of sand and fiat currency. He was right from 2002 or 2003 up until the meltdown that the housing boom was again built on bad government policies and fiat currency. He was right in the '90s to warn that our interventions, continuing intervention in the Mideast and in Europe were going to have awful consequences for the United States because our policies were serving as recruitment tools for some very, very bad people, bad people who are also are in some ways getting help from the United States and have been since the '80s. If you look at our policies in the '80s in Afghanistan, and once again with the ISIS situation in Iraq, he had been proven right, because if you remember Ron and a few others warned that going into Iraq, we would not be welcome with sweets and flowers. What we would be doing would be letting the bad guys loose and probably empowering Iran, al Qaeda, and even worse forces, and that war, like every governmental action, has unintended consequences.

At some point you have to shake your head and wonder: this guy has been right so often, yet mainstream opinion in D.C. is always: Ron Paul doesn't know what he's talking about, he's a kook, he's an apologist for America's enemies, he has these crackpot theories of economics that have been disregarded. Okay, well, let's put Ron Paul's track record of predicting what will happen against Bill Kristol's and Paul Krugman's.

**WOODS:** Yeah, the problem is, the whole society is run by kooks, and it's kooks who affirm each other all the time by saying the same things. So when a sane man comes along, they claim he's a kook, and they've got the general public wrapped around their fingers, or at least the 50 and overs, let's say, wrapped around their fingers who are programmed to say, this man is a kook. He says unapproved things that my overlords don't approve of. It's shocking to me that so many people followed what they were being told by the media: don't listen to this man. The great thing, of course, was the breath of fresh air of the young people who hadn't yet been

programmed—who didn't know they weren't supposed to listen to this man—who hadn't been told yet that they were supposed to confine themselves to Romney or Obama and be happy with it.

I want to ask you, how did things change in the office, in the congressional office, once the first presidential campaign got started? Something must have been different.

**SINGLETON:** Well, before that, Ron had a national following, but it was very small compared to what it became, and it was largely goldbugs, hardcore antiwar libertarians, and old right conservatives, and that was a much smaller group than existed post-2007. What happened was all of a sudden there was a strange, new respect around Ron. People started taking him more seriously. People who had never talked to him wanted to talk to him. To me, one of the first signs that I got that things were changing was in 2007, shortly after the South Carolina debate and the Giuliani moment. A friend of mine who worked for another office and was always very cordial but never seemed very interested in Ron or our ideas came up to me and said she was flying into her boss's district the week before, and as she was going over, she saw this huge sign that said, "Ron Paul for President," and she was just amazed. I could tell the way she said it that she was just amazed that Ron was getting that kind of support, because when he announced, there was sort of a feeling on the Hill that this was a quixotic venture to spread a message, but it's really not going to get anywhere. And after the Giuliani moment, I remember Ron told us that on the floor, a member, I forget who, had come up to him who was supporting Giuliani and thanked Ron for helping his candidate out in the debate. Of course, we see who benefited from that.

That was basically the big change. Ron was still saying the same things. We were still operating the same way, and it's just that now other offices were taking notice of Ron. They were starting to pay closer attention. Just the way we were treated was a lot more respectful. Our views got a lot more of an interest at hearings. You had members now coming to Ron and asking for endorsements. You had members coming to Ron and asking for him to come to their district, and a lot of times, and what really fascinated these people was the money that Ron's campaign was able to raise because, of course, and a question that would always be asked that I found very amusing because the answer to me is so obvious is, how can Ron Paul raise all this money, and why does Ron Paul have all these young people? Because he is the only Republican that seems to be able to reach out to young people and get a good response. I think for all the respect that he got, one of the problems was that they knew the answer, and they didn't like it, and that's why they kept asking the question. They thought that Ron's campaign had found some great new technology or some great new messaging that they could tailor their message to.

**WOODS:** But then when they found out they would have to be different, well, now, that's not what they wanted.

**SINGLETON:** Right. Right, and the other change that happened was all of a sudden we had people coming in on a daily basis to—you know, Ron would be...mobbed might be too strong a word, but whenever he would walk the halls of Congress, there would be tourists and students stopping to get their picture with him. We had other members—one of the requests was autographed pictures, and we still get that a lot at Campaign for Liberty, and I'm sure Daniel gets it too at the Institute, is people that I knew on the Hill will call and say, could you get so-and-so from my boss's district an autographed picture of Ron? Or when will Ron be in D.C.? Or when will he be on the Hill? Again, which I think if I were to give an honest answer for Ron I think it would be, check the temperature in Hades. Actually, if you're on Capitol Hill, that might not be too far a trip.

**WOODS:** Yeah, well, indeed, indeed. I actually remember all the way back in 2008, the night before the so-called Revolution March was to take place. I remember—I don't think you were there, but some people were there, but we were having dinner, and he tends to go to bed early, I think, compared to a lot of his followers, let's say. And there was a before-party going on the night before the Revolution March at a bar, and I floated the idea: wouldn't it be great for you to just stop in on these people and surprise them, and he looked at his watch and jokingly, he said, "Are people still up at 10:00 at night?" So we actually did this. We talked him into it. We parked. We walked down to the street to get to this bar, but of course, people went completely berserk. They couldn't believe he was there. But to me, just as fun was walking down the street and hearing people saying, "Hey, that's Ron Paul!" Now, that's only 2008. He exploded in 2012. But people were saying, "Hey, look, it's Ron Paul!" I bet that didn't happen in early 2007, walking down the street.

**SINGLETON:** No, it didn't, and that was an incredible change for people who had been with Ron for years or had known Ron for years, to see him become this icon of American politics and seep into the American culture. One of my personal favorite moments was the first time he was on *The Tonight Show*. And when he started talking to Jay Leno about Austrian economics, and Jay Leno was sitting there nodding along like he was very interested in what Ron has to say, and to me, that alone to me made the presidential run worthwhile. Because there is so much, I think, to be gained from having our ideas spread out into the mainstream culture like that, and all the people who found Ron through YouTube videos or through *The Tonight Show*—I sometimes wonder: if Ron hadn't run in '07, what would have happened? I think as bad as you could say the situation in America is now, it would be so much worse.

**WOODS:** It would be.

**SINGLETON:** And there wouldn't be this great hope that we have. You and I were both, I know, at YALcon [TW note: the Young Americans for Liberty National Convention] two weeks ago, and think, there wouldn't be all those young people.

**WOODS:** Yeah, we didn't have that. It's not like we had a 50% smaller version of that when you and I were in school. We didn't have that. We had three or four friends who kept us sane, and

that was it, and it was all we could do to just keep from losing our minds—the idea that we might forge ahead and push our ideas out there was really not on the radar screen at all. Now, when I think back to the presidential campaigns, I was really excited when I heard he was going to run for the 2008 cycle because I thought he'll get some votes, and that will be interesting, and we'll see what kind of a splash he makes. It did not occur to me that it would effect an intellectual revolution, first in the minds of so many people, especially young people, but secondly among the general public, that now there are issues talked about that weren't talked about at all before.

**SINGLETON:** Right.

**WOODS:** And he did that. One person did that.

**SINGLETON:** Right. He made the Fed an issue in American politics for the first time I think since at least since the late '70s, and even then it was more Reagan, and Kemp, and a few other supply-siders gave a nod to the gold standard, but certainly they gave nothing like the hardcore Austrian critique that Ron and his followers present, maybe since the first time since 1913 when the Fed was created. And even then it really wasn't a big issue in American politics because it was sort of snuck through under cover of night, literally, under the cover of Christmas Eve. He made it acceptable to be pro-civil liberties and against the Bush—bomb everyone into democracy—neocon foreign policy.

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**SINGLETON:** One of the great things about Ron being the consistent libertarian is that remember during the Bush years, if you opposed the Patriot Act, if you opposed the Iraq war, if you opposed warrantless wiretapping, it was sort of thought that you were some sort of hippie communist.

**WOODS:** Yeah, whereas here's a guy who's been married for 50 years, wears a coat and tie everywhere he goes, is an OB who has delivered thousands of babies. You're not going to be able to hang that around his neck. The fact that he was able to make antiwar, pro-civil liberties a non-leftist cause was also very important.

**SINGLETON:** And he's more hardcore on economics, on guns, on life, than Romney, or Giuliani, well, certainly than Giuliani was. So you can't say that he's a moderate Republican or he's a liberal. And I think that one of the things that always impressed me—I have a friend who works in one of the think-tanks in the Beltway, but he's still a good guy, and he said after the '08 election that Ron Paul's most important accomplishment will be that he saved a chunk of a generation from socialism. And part of that was that he was opposed to the Bush-era foreign policy and civil liberties policies. He showed young people who would otherwise have been attracted to Obama that opposing neoconservatism doesn't mean you have to be a socialist and support Obamacare, that you can actually oppose both—you actually can, and you actually should if you want to be intellectually consistent, oppose both Obamacare and the Patriot Act.

**WOODS:** He was staking out that position. Now, let me ask you before I let you go, share with us one or two of your favorite moments, favorite stories from in the office. Things that you look back on with a smile.

**SINGLETON:** One of my favorite stories actually doesn't come from our office. It was something I was told by someone. They were talking to their boss, and they were going over the latest compromise offer from the Republican leadership for some god-awful bill, but the conservatives were going to vote for it because the leadership had agreed to make it 80% bad instead of 100% bad. And the guy looked up and said, you know, I'm getting sick of playing these games. I think from now on I'm going to be like Ron Paul. And then he voted for the bill and kept voting for these stupid compromises and ended up getting absolutely nowhere, which I think shows that standing on principle is the way to go. Otherwise you get sucked into this D.C. game, and you end up 10, 20 years down the road asking what have you accomplished, and you have to say, oh, I'm a pretty marginal figure, actually.

My favorite story directly concerning Ron. A lot of them, I think—one of them is there was a bill fairly early on when Ron was still in his first or second term, and he was a top Democratic target. They were throwing a lot of money at him. And I was discussing with him a bill that would provide some money for some hospitals, and we had rural hospitals who were really suffering from some Medicare changes, and this money was meant to shore them up. And I said, well, sir, I recommend the "no" vote because it's bad. I said, you should know that this could be a political firestorm for you back in the district because the hospitals are all going to scream. And he looked at me, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "Well, if I go down, I'll go down, but this is really the right vote." And that's something that always stuck with me, because I can't think of many members who would say that over a vote. Even a lot of what we look at now and say, these are the good guys, will not be there on every vote the way that Ron was. Ron was the gold standard because he was consistent.

And I knew that, and it was just the way that he phrased that, that as important as he knew it was to have someone with his views in Congress to have that platform, he also knew that to compromise at all on even one vote was to weaken his mission and was to betray the ideals for which he was there.

I think that Ron will be remembered as a historic figure. I don't think there ever will be another Ron Paul, because that combination of moral courage, the willingness to stand by your principles, the willingness to stand up and talk about unpopular issues, take unpopular positions, literally be booed by almost everybody in the room for standing for what you know is right, but then also, the intellectual curiosity, the knowledge that I think Daniel and Paul-Martin both talked about, the fact that he's always reading, he's always thinking, he's always coming up with projects and ideas, and he's always talking about how to refine the message, how to advance the movement, and always learning, and always teaching. I think those are two rare

combinations. I don't see those being ever found again. So I think that he is going to be remembered as one of a kind.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I agree completely, and I want to add as we wrap up that he had working for him a legislative director who was very much like him in that he did not demand that the spotlight be placed on himself. He didn't go out of his way to tell everybody what he was up to. But those of us in the know knew that behind the scenes Norm Singleton was making so many important things happen, without calling attention to himself. So now I'm calling attention to you, and I'm saying a collective thank you for all of us who cheered Ron over the years, for all the work you did, all the 12-hour days, all the nights where you wish you could have slept longer, but there was work to be done. It has not gone unnoticed. We deeply appreciate that work, and I certainly appreciate your time with us today.