



A Ron Paul Delegate's Story

Guest: Jeff Taylor

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WOODS: Since you were a Ron Paul delegate, and I wasn't, I am going to throw a lot of this program over to you to tell us about things you observed and what your impressions were, etc. Before we do that, tell us: how does somebody get chosen to be a delegate at the convention for Ron Paul?

TAYLOR: Well, it's not easy, for a couple of different reasons. For one thing, there's a lot of competition when you want to go to the national convention. There's not very many spots for each state, and so it isn't easy to get there just for that basic reason. The state of Iowa that I represented—there were 28 voting delegates for our state, and then all told, if we count the alternates who also go, who participate but don't actually cast a vote for president on the convention floor, there were about 52 of us total. So it's kind of a selective group, first of all. And then secondly, if you're supporting a candidate like Ron Paul who, as you and your listeners understand, was an insurgent anti-establishment candidate, you're also then facing a lot of opposition within the party hierarchy in order to get there. So in my case in Iowa, I had an opportunity in May of 2012 to be added to the Ron Paul slate for my state. Iowa as a caucus state, as we know, is the very first state that votes during the primary season, and it's a multi-step where we start off with local caucuses in January, and then by the time you get to the summer, you work your way up to the state convention. It was at the state convention that I was elected, and I was really elected because I had contacted the Ron Paul chair in our state, Drew Ivers, and I expressed interest in being added to the slate because I assumed we were going to be working as a team in trying to get elected. And that's what happened. And he was kind enough to add me, first as an alternate, and eventually I got bumped up to voting delegate.

WOODS: All right, now that we've got the preliminaries out of the way, I want to get your anecdotes, your observations. I want to get the texture of the convention. What it was like being there. But before I let you do that I want to know how did you *feel* being there, and what

I mean by that is you're surrounded by people who are there committed to vote for Romney, surrounded by them. What does that make you feel? And they don't think of you guys generally as being the loyal opposition who are maybe wrong on one or two things but basically are part of the same group. They think of you guys as the enemy.

TAYLOR: Yes, well, yes, that's problematic just on a personal level, if nothing else because you feel like, well, are you the skunk at the party or one of a minority of skunks at a party, and you're not really wanted in a lot of ways, and yeah, that's part of the problem with the national conventions in the modern era is that they really are less conventions than coronations. So the presidential nominee, everybody knows who it's going to be months ahead of time. We haven't had a competitive convention where it really was in doubt as to who was going to be nominated in the Republican Party since 1976, when Reagan and Ford were still dueling it out, and it was a neck-and-neck race right through the convention, and so with the coronation if you're not enthused about the new king, that is a problem. It's one of the kinds of things I thought about when I had the opportunity to be added to the slate, especially as a voting delegate: I was told, only sign up for this if you're for sure that you're going to want to go. And the timing was interesting. It was right before the Texas primary in May when I had to make my final decision whether or not to try to go, and that was like the day after Rand Paul endorsed Romney on the Sean Hannity show, and it was also the day after the Ron Paul campaign essentially pulled the plug and said, well, we're not going to actively campaign and compete anymore. It was very dispiriting because I thought, well, do I want to spend my own money? Because the party doesn't pay to get to the national convention. It costs a couple of thousand bucks, and do you want to spend that kind of money and time if you're going there, and your own candidate isn't going to actively do anything other than maybe climb on board the Romney bandwagon? Now, I am very glad I went because in the end that isn't what happened. The Paul campaign put on some great events, and they not only allowed us but encouraged us to cast a vote for Paul on the roll call ballot, and all of that in addition to meeting people that I admired, being able to fraternize with a lot of other Paul delegates and conservatives that I admired there at the convention. In the end, yes, there's the element of you're kind of an unwelcome guest, but on the other hand, I would say there were thousands and thousands of delegates there. There were many people who were respectful, and even if they weren't Paul people, you didn't feel like such a pariah, which I was afraid that I might feel once I got there to Tampa.

WOODS: All right, now what stands out to you in terms of your recollections? I know you kept notes of your time at the convention. As you look back on those, what's jumping off those pages?

TAYLOR: I teach political science, and as a political scientist I kind of suspected that the national convention would mirror what I know about the national leadership of the two big parties where it's very top-down, and to put it simply, the game is rigged. I knew that theoretically, but then being at the national convention I could see that up close. And so there was a confirmation of that, that the convention process was tightly controlled. The irony is that

Romney had an overwhelming number of delegates at that point committed to him, and all of the other candidates that had dropped out other than Ron Paul, so Gingrich and Santorum, and so on, they had endorsed Romney. So there was no chance that Romney wasn't going to win. Yet his campaign was run by a bunch of control freaks who really were ungracious winners, and I think it did not serve Romney or his effort well in the long run. But in the short run they were able to control the convention very tightly.

So that was one thing that struck me. For example, there was no access to microphones on the convention floor. All of those were turned off. They were only turned on when the head honchos decided that they wanted to allow a particular person to talk, which wasn't very often. There was no debate over motions. There were no appeals of the ruling of the chair of the convention. You might think that a convention would run according to *Robert's Rules of Order*, but that isn't the case at the national conventions. It's also based on the House of Representatives rules, which is very centralized and top down, and so once the chair of the convention makes a decision, you can't appeal. There's no debate. You could say that's undemocratic or that goes against our traditions of how meetings are run, and that's all true, but that's the way it is. You couldn't bring signs into the convention hall. Everything had to be pre-approved that was spoken from the podium. Even Rand Paul, in giving his speech at the convention, could not mention Ron Paul. That was forbidden. He had to refer to a certain congressman from Texas in order to even make a reference to his own father. So it was very tightly controlled.

WOODS: What is the story about this rules change? I couldn't keep track of all the technical aspects of how the convention runs and how the nominating process runs. I think the average person doesn't know a lot about it and isn't really inclined to learn. But there was some major rules change that took place, and there was a vote confirming this rule change. What was that all about?

TAYLOR: Yes, there were several rules changes that were made by the rules committee of the convention in conjunction with the Republican National Committee, which is the group that really runs the national party. All of them ended up being quite controversial, and it wasn't just Ron Paul people who were opposed. There were a lot of Tea Party people—a lot of traditional conservatives in the party like Phyllis Schlafly, and like Morton Blackwell from Virginia—that were long-time conservatives who realized that this was a power grab trying to take power away from the grassroots, away from the state parties, and centralize it.

One of the most controversial rules was voted on on the very first day of the convention. The first day was a Monday. That was cancelled because there was a thought that the hurricane might be coming our way. It didn't end up coming, but on Tuesday when we got things going—this was at the very beginning—there was no debate. John Boehner, who was Speaker of the House and was chair of the convention, just brought it up for a vote, and he said vote aye or no on the rules committee report.

Now, when the voting was done, it was by voice vote, and there was no way to tell if the ayes or the no's had it because it was evenly divided, and you can see this on YouTube, the clips that show it. It wasn't just the Iowa delegation. It was throughout the convention hall. It was an even vote. Now, normally what you'd have then is a division of the house where you'd have a standing vote or maybe go to a paper ballot to know exactly what the delegates want, but there was no interest in that. As soon as the vote was done, Boehner said the ayes have it. He banged his gavel, and he moved on, and those of us who were opposed, we booed, we yelled. It actually brought the convention to a halt for about 10 minutes, and the next person who was there to speak couldn't speak because the convention wouldn't come to order. But it was all to no avail in the end because the train moved on. Now, what upset people, especially the next day, was when a YouTube clip came out of somebody who had the presence of mind to turn around and take a video of the teleprompter that Boehner was reading from, and there we discovered that his actual words, "the ayes have it," that was part of a script.

WOODS: Wow!

TAYLOR: So it wouldn't have made any difference how the convention delegates voted. We were just props in that particular charade.

WOODS: Wow, that is right out of the Soviet Union. "The ayes have it" is written on the teleprompter.

TAYLOR: Yes, yes.

WOODS: Oh, man!

TAYLOR: One of the other Iowa delegates, Michelle, who is a lot younger than I, over breakfast when we were talking about this was almost in tears, and she said, doesn't it just crush you? And I said, well, it probably it should, but I said, I'm cynical enough to not be surprised by it. It's brazen, but yet that's how power works. When you've got it, you're not willing to share it and oftentimes you don't want to play fair. The sad thing is that the Democratic Party did the exact same thing a week later in Charlotte. There are video clips of this, too, you can find on YouTube where the mayor of Los Angeles was the chair, and there it was a vote on changing the platform, adding God to the platform, and also adding a reference to Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Those were controversial changes to the traditional wording of the Democrats' platform. He put those up for a vote, and they needed just a two-thirds vote. I don't even think they had a majority. But in the end he pushed that through as well, and again, it was a teleprompter that shows that the script was there, so yeah, it's kind of shocking and yet that's the way it works.

WOODS: Before I go on to ask you if you might extrapolate from your experience here to participation in the political process more generally, is there anything of burning significance that you want to share also from your own experiences there?

TAYLOR: A lot of it being on the convention floor. One of the more pleasurable things for me as a delegate isn't the official business, or who is talking up there, because they pull out a lot of politicians and candidates to give these speeches, and frankly I didn't care to hear Chris Christie or all these different hacks that are talking to us, and so that I didn't really care so much about. But while you are there you can mingle with thousands of other delegates on the floor, and you catch notices of some of the famous people, whether they are media people or politicians, or whatever, and most of them I wouldn't really care to speak to, but some of them I did. I saw Joe Scarborough, who is from MSNBC and used to be a congressman from Florida, so I talked to him briefly, and I knew that he had voted for Ron Paul in the Florida primary. I asked him about that, and he said that he had angst about who he should vote for right up until the time he got to the voting booth on primary day, and then he said as soon as he saw the ballot he said it took him half a second to mark the ballot for Ron Paul. I'm not always the greatest admirer of Scarborough, but I thought, well, good for you. That's something. I also had a chance to talk to Jimmy Duncan, a congressman from Tennessee that I am great admirer of.

WOODS: I think he's a good guy, yeah.

TAYLOR: Yeah, Ron Paul supporter, and great on foreign policy and on a lot of things. One of the things that was kind of interesting was on the night that we had the roll call vote for president, Iowa was one of three states that gave a majority of our votes to Ron Paul during the roll call, and at the same time we voted for president in Iowa, our delegation chair—who was Drew Ivers rather than the governor of Iowa, which would have been the more typical approach—asked us to also vote for vice president. He said it's unlikely that we're going to actually have a roll call for vice president, and we didn't—Paul Ryan was chosen by acclamation—but I thought it was interesting that I was able to see the vote totals after the fact, and a plurality of the Iowa delegation actually did not vote for Ryan. There were votes for a variety of other folks—for Rand Paul, to Ron Paul, to one of my favorite candidates, Tom Woods, even got two votes.

WOODS: I heard about that. I wasn't supposed to, I think, but I did hear that I got a couple of votes there. (laughs)

TAYLOR: It's unofficial because at the end, you know, we didn't actually get to cast them, but that's the way it would have turned out.

WOODS: Now, in talking to other delegates after all was said and done, did you get the impression that some of them had been so soured by the experience that that was it, they were giving up politics? Or did they think that, well, now I've just got to be smarter, I've got to work harder, I've got to fight against the corrupt establishment? Which way did they go?

TAYLOR: I would say that a little of both. A lot of the Iowa delegates, which are the ones that I have stayed in touch with, we call ourselves liberty delegates, have stayed active within the Republican Party in Iowa, and for a time, it was about a two-year period, we actually dominated the state Republican Party. We lost that this past summer, and as you know, the tide kind of

went out, and that's part of the problem, I guess. With the Ron Paul campaign, there were some problems in terms of—I hate to use the word marketing of the candidate—but in politics that's really kind of what it is. There were some problems with the Paul campaign at the top level.

WOODS: (sarcasm) No! No! I refuse to believe that.

TAYLOR: I know it's hard to believe, but there were a few problems there, but then there were also some problems at the ground level in terms of the support. For one thing, many, many of the Paul supporters were young, which is a great thing, and it bodes well for the future that the young generation was energized by Paul's message. Ironically, he was the oldest candidate, but he had the youngest base of support. But the problem is that young people, not only do they vote the least, and in this case many of them did turn out to vote for Paul, but because they don't have the experience, they are not necessarily as politically savvy, and they may not see the value of staying in for the long run. The other thing is that many of them being libertarian and oftentimes identifying, say, with anarcho-capitalism have the anarchist streak where they really don't believe in electoral politics. Maybe they don't believe in the necessity of government. And so then you're bringing your base, trying to plug them into a political campaign in order to achieve power in government. There is kind of a contradiction or an ambivalence there. So a lot of people who hadn't been involved in campaigns before felt like, well, we lost because the whole system is rigged. Every time Ron Paul lost it must have been vote fraud. I don't think that was nearly as widespread as some people suspected, but it kind of gave them an excuse in the end to say, well, forget this, the Republicans are a hopeless cause. We're not going to be involved in this anymore.

I think that's unfortunate because in the end we have a two-party system, and as important as third parties can be in Washington, they really don't even register. So you've got to pick your poison, in a sense, between those two and see it as a tool. That's really all it is. It's a tool to advance your principles. And unfortunately I do think a lot of the Paul supporters after 2012 have kind of checked out as a result of that campaign.

WOODS: Do you think that there's anything that you learned or observed, or even anything that you know as a political scientist that might be useful or relevant when we look at a 2016 Rand Paul campaign?

TAYLOR: Well, I think the interesting thing about Rand Paul being the son and protégé in many ways of his father is that he's almost the, I don't know what you'd say, mirror image isn't necessarily the right thing. It's almost a photographic image, where if you go back to the old days when you used film and you had negatives, it's almost like that where the parts of Ron Paul where he was strong, oftentimes Rand Paul I think is weak, and where Ron was weak, I think Rand is strong. So in many ways it's an interesting balancing act that Rand Paul is trying to achieve, where he's trying to keep his father's base of support of libertarians and constitutionalists, but he's trying to branch out into the wider Tea Party movement, the

Religious Right, mainstream Republicans, and I'm not sure in the end if he's going to be able to maintain that and not give away too much credibility. Because if you stretch yourself too much, you become open to the John Kerry flip-flopping kind of accusation. And I think there's some truth to that right now with Rand Paul where he's trying to situate himself within the party to have as wide an appeal as possible. Ron Paul was known as a truth-teller. He was known as uncompromising. He was pure. Rand Paul, much more of a compromiser, much more of a nuanced approach. He's a much better politician, I think, than his father at least at the national stage, but the downside to being a better politician is that I think he's also not as honest. When he gets the attention and he gets the spotlight, sometimes, especially in foreign policy, rather than using that as a way to tell the truth about things, I think he sometimes fudges or sometimes dodges or sometimes just doesn't say things the way they really are. So I don't know. I have some ambivalence about Senator Paul.

WOODS: Well, I'll say a little something here. I generally don't comment on this, just out of friendship to a certain senator's father, but I have been accused of hating Rand, and I have been accused of being a Rand cheerleader, so I don't know what, and it's from the same sentence, so I don't understand what the problem is. I have basically said, I understand what Rand is doing. I see what he's trying to do. I have been assured by people that he is as sound on issues as you or I are. I have been assured of that by people who would be in a position to know. So I do understand what he is doing.

One of my points would be, though, that you can actually explain the foreign policy position in a way that will resonate with the base. You can do it. The neocons' foreign policy is blowing up in their faces everywhere they turn. All Rand has to do is pull that dagger out and stick it in and keep sticking it in over and over and over until they—they're going to be a squirming pile of flesh on the ground. All he's got to do is just stick it in. It doesn't even have to be precise. He doesn't have to be a surgeon about it. Just stick the dagger.

When I think back to what excited me about the Ron Paul campaigns, what did we like about Ron Paul? That he took one position and stuck with it. That he told the truth constantly. That he never used slippery language or said he was being misinterpreted or whatever. No, this is my position. I don't care that it's controversial. I'm taking it, and I'm standing with it, and we loved that about him. And yes, I'm saying things that are totally at odds with the base, but they've got to be said—about the Fed, and about foreign policy.

We loved that about him. And I don't remember at that time, I don't remember one person—from the Ron Paul Revolution group—I don't remember anybody saying, you know, it's great for Ron to be principled and everything, but we'd get so much farther if he would just shut up sometimes, or just distort things, or just try and dance around issues. I don't remember anybody saying that. Whereas today I get that constantly. Today I'm hearing: look, man, you've got to live in the real world. I didn't get any of these implicit insults of Ron, which is what every

one of those statements is. Every one of those statements is an implicit insult to Ron. I didn't hear any of those at that time.

And then also, I guarantee you a Rand Paul campaign will be run by money-grubbing creeps. Prove me wrong, Rand. Prove me wrong. But I guarantee you it will be Jesse Benton and the whole usual crew of people who are going to get their five-figure monthly salaries. I guarantee you it will be that. I don't want it to be. I would love to be proven wrong, and I am waiting to be proven wrong. I acknowledge perfectly well that Rand probably has the best voting record of any senator in U.S. history. I absolutely, freely acknowledge that, but that doesn't mean I'm not allowed to have these other concerns.

TAYLOR: Yeah, yeah, well, I agree with you totally, and Jesse Benton specifically, but maybe others at the national Ron Paul campaign leadership, to me that was one of the weaknesses. If you're going to run a national campaign for president, you need to bring somebody on board who has had experience at that level, successful experience at that level. I think you don't necessarily think of your grandson-in-law as your first choice for that kind of position, even if he has a stellar personal character. I think it's not a wise decision. So I think you're exactly right, and I think the irony is that Rand Paul has been blessed with a type of eloquence and a speaking style, and a way to answer hostile questions by the media, in a way that I think exceeds that of his father, and so he in some ways is a better messenger of the message, but it's almost as though he's willing to throw the message overboard in order to speak these neocon platitudes.

WOODS: Just when the message is gaining steam! It would be like somebody switching to support the Iraq war in 2007. Like, what? Nobody supports the Iraq war anymore in 2007. Why would you choose then? Likewise, on foreign policy there is a chunk of the GOP electorate that is angry and alienated with regard to foreign policy. Nobody is going after that chunk. I think there's a half-hearted Rand effort to go after it, but it should be full blown. If he's uncomfortable with some of the arguments his father made on behalf of that foreign policy, he doesn't have to make those arguments.

TAYLOR: Well, that's right, and also if Rand were to be nominated as the Republican candidate and he goes up a Hillary Clinton or someone like that, he would have an opportunity, if he's got a consistent, clear record, to take votes away and appeal to Democrats, progressives who don't want to be so hawkish and don't want to maintain some kind of a global empire, or try to maintain it. So you're also ceding a lot of high ground there, I think not just in the party but among independents and among Democrats who don't think that we should police the whole world. So yeah, I agree, I think it's a missed opportunity the more he tries to play along with what he thinks Republicans want to hear. I'm not even sure that he's correct in that. It's a handful of party pros and financiers that take that line, but the rank and file, I don't think they are on board that neocon foreign policy.

WOODS: And you know what I think would also get Rand some votes and support, and I would like to see him do it. The *National Journal* ran an article not very long ago about Rand's

outreach to Jewish and Israeli interests, and they quoted somebody as saying we're increasingly sympathetic to Rand. We appreciate his outreach. Now we all know Ron Paul is an anti-Semite.

Now that's just right there in the article. Now what I want to hear from Rand, and what I think anybody who believes in filial piety wants to hear from Rand is, hey, look, that's my father, and I might not agree with him on everything, but how dare you insult him that way. And if being elected president means I have to throw my father under the bus, then I guess I won't be president. Now, that would get him support even from people who don't like his father, but who like the idea of fathers. And who like the idea of loyal sons. Why am I not hearing words like this in defense of his father? It would be in his own political interest. It's not even like he'd be shooting himself in the foot. Who is going to say, oh, he defended his father, can't vote for him!

TAYLOR: Right, I agree, you're exactly right there, so I'm hoping that maybe Senator Paul or someone close to him will rethink some of this. It is still relatively early, and the memories of the American voters are pretty notoriously short.

WOODS: Yeah, you don't say.

TAYLOR: So he's got some time to reposition and repackage before 2016, but yeah, I think staying on the present road, I don't know, I think he's being—they are trying to be a little bit too clever in the way they are doing this, and they may end up, and like Aesop's fable of the dog that's got his bone in his mouth and sees one in the stream and wants two instead of one and ends up with nothing. I think he's got to be a little careful about that.