



## Episode 585: Rand Paul Drops Out; Could Rubio Be the Nominee?

Guest: Daniel P. McCarthy

**WOODS:** Rand Paul dropped out today, and it came as a surprise to me. I thought there was a chance he might drop out at some point, but I could swear we had heard some campaign statement to the effect that he was moving on to New Hampshire, and everything was fine, and they had a strong fifth place finish in Iowa, which I have to say, there was a certain Soviet press release aspect to all this. Like, don't worry, citizen; the steel quota has been met, sort of thing to that. But I accepted it. And so I was a little bit surprised, and it's a sad thing in some ways, because he did inject into the conversation some ideas that we weren't going to hear otherwise. I wanted to talk to you about it, because you had just written a column actually on Rubio but that really talks about the top tier and about why Rand might have had some difficulty some time around, so I thought you were the person to talk to about this. Were you surprised at the timing of Rand's decision?

**MCCARTHY:** Well, a little bit, but I think it actually is the right decision, and even if the campaign had put out certain signals a few days ago suggesting that they were going on to New Hampshire, I know from experience, from my own experience actually with the Ron Paul campaign back in 2008, that it can be a very, very confusing time for a campaign right after you've had a disappointing performance. So in my experience, that happened with Ron Paul in 2008 and with Super Tuesday, and at that point, the chiefs of the campaign and the candidate and others have to get together and figure out what the heck they're going to do. And of course all the supporters expect a clear signal to come from the campaign right away, which means that the communications guys actually have to be a little bit proactive, and it can be a confusing time.

So I don't really hold against them that they weren't sure exactly what their message was going to be. But I think this is the right decision, because Rand has a Senate battle to worry about, and you know, it's clear enough from the results in Iowa and also from the polling in New Hampshire that there isn't a good place for Rand to make a last stand and to actually get into the top tier in a future primary. So better to just call it a day and live to fight tomorrow.

**WOODS:** All right, let's talk about then why do you think he had such trouble, given that, as the press is endlessly reporting, X number of months ago or a year and a half ago or something, he was polling very well, in double digits in New Hampshire and he

was being feted as the most interesting man in politics and so on. So the issue is what went wrong, and I guess it would be a combination of things Rand did and a combination of external factors.

**MCCARTHY:** Yeah, I think there were two Rand Pauls that were developed: one of them early on and one of them as the campaign actually began. The earlier Rand Paul media profile was this "most interesting man in politics idea," where Rand was going to be a new kind of Republican, who was going to reach out to minority voters, who'd bring in young voters and libertarians and wouldn't simply be politics as usual. And he would be good on foreign policy. He would be, you know, anti-war; he'd be anti-intervention.

But that wasn't the whole of it. It was this whole idea that Rand Paul was really reinvigorating the Republican brand for the 21st century. Now, that all sounded great to the media, and it will indeed get you a *Time* magazine cover, but what it won't do is get you votes in Iowa, and it won't get you votes in Republican primaries, and the political advisors around Rand Paul were perfectly well aware of this, that going into the actual campaign, he needed to be much more of a traditional Republican, or at least that was their view.

And so you had this very awkward transition, where on the one hand, Rand Paul was going to be the hot new thing who was going to say surprising things, and then on the other hand, the first fundraising pitch you get from the Rand Paul campaign was about how Rand Paul stands for term limits in Congress. And it's like, this sounds like a release from Newt Gingrich back in 1994. What does this got to do with the politics of the 21st century? How is this any different?

So Rand's campaign people wanted him to be I think the most conservative guy in a race between Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush and Rand Paul — sorry, not Rand Paul but Jeb Bush. Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, and Rand Paul were the three candidates they expected to be the main contenders in the 2016 Republican primaries, and they thought as long as Rand made a pitch for being a generic conservative who was to the right of both Marco Rubio, especially on immigration, and Jeb Bush on just about everything, that they would get the nomination.

It turned out not to be the case, and they were kind of blind to the fact that Rand Paul does have a certain legacy from his father that he was expected to live up to, and he's identified with libertarianism, whether he wants to be or not, and therefore he has to find a way — as a candidate he had to find a way — to integrate a certain libertarian perspective with whatever other sales pitch his people were trying to make. And I think that's where he failed. He wasn't able to show how libertarianism could be integrated with some of the appeals to evangelicals he was trying to make in the primaries, and he also wasn't able to bridge the gap between some of the nice things that liberals were saying about him and being kind of a right-leaning or center libertarian as well.

**WOODS:** Ron actually did reasonably well among evangelicals in Iowa, and he made a pitch that was a libertarian pitch, but my own view is that libertarians can make fairly effective pitches to a lot of different groups. And you know, we're not going to promise you absolutely everything that the other guy will promise you, but that guy isn't going to deliver anything, whereas, by leaving you alone, that actually gets you, as it turns out, an awful lot of what you really want.

Now, I think you hit on one of the key issues with Rand, is that as soon as he began to brand himself as a generic conservative, the excitement that we saw, just the wild unpredictability of these grassroots supporters just failed to materialize this time around. And I distinctly recall an article – well, I guess it could be that distinct; I don't remember the source. Maybe *Politico*? – in which Jesse Benton was saying, well, this time around we're going to make sure we keep an eye on the grassroots, and we have a leash on them or something. And they never materialized to begin with, precisely because, if you ask me, of the very kind of establishment-oriented type of approach that was being urged on Rand by people like that.

**MCCARTHY:** Well, it's quite a mess. It's clear from Donald Trump's success this year that an anti-establishment outsider candidate could have done very, very well. I think if Ron Paul were running again and were running in the way he had run in 2012 and 2008, he would have done much better than Rand has done. However, you can see the logic of what Rand Paul's team was trying to do. Basically they were trying to do exactly what Ted Cruz has done, right? They were bringing together this certain kind of right-wing constitutionalism, so-called, with a pitch to evangelicals and with a certain generic conservative appeal, and that seems to have worked very well for Ted Cruz.

The problem is, unfortunately, that that simply isn't who Rand Paul is expected to be, and I think it's not really who he is either, deep in his heart. Rand Paul actually is someone who has strong libertarian leanings. Not as strong as his father, but certainly they're quite pronounced. And he seemed to kind of run away from those and tamp them down, and as a result, I think he just didn't make the sale to anyone. Not to his father's libertarian supporters, but also not to evangelicals who could sense that he wasn't really in his heart of hearts one of them, and not really to, you know, Silicon Valley donors who have their own kind of libertarian view of things but that isn't the same as Ron Paul's necessarily. They could have gone for Rand, but they I think correctly sensed that Rand didn't know who he was when he was on the campaign trail, that he was trying to construct something without having a sense of integrity and sincerity to it.

And I think Rand himself – I think he knows where he's coming from, but I don't think his campaign staff did. I think there was a lack of sort of ideological awareness and sensitivity to ideas, communication, and messaging that his people just thought – the view I have is that, in the same way campaign professionals, who have a lot of expertise about organizing precincts and how to take over a state convention to get delegates and things – in the same way that they're often frustrated by the sense that enthusiastic grassroots supporters don't understand what's effective and what's simply

not effective, I think in exactly the same way those campaign professionals have no idea when it comes to ideology and philosophy and ideas what is effective communications and what is not, and so they don't bring in people who can actually communicate effectively. They don't bring in, you know, a Tom Woods, for example, and as a result, they have a guy who has a very ill defined brand, and he loses support from every single direction.

**WOODS:** And this is such a shame, because there really was still left over an awful lot of energy. There was a big donor base. There was a lot of enthusiasm out there. And I've even seen some people complain that the problem was that libertarians didn't get on board, and they didn't generate the enthusiasm, but I think that has it the other way around. I mean, there is an obligation on the part of the candidate to bring that out in people. You don't yell at the voters for not acting. Voters have to be encouraged to act.

Let me say a few things about what you just said here. You know, when I think back to Ron's campaign — I am so far from being infallible in my judgments about stuff like this. I was actually saying in the 2008 campaign that Ron shouldn't talk about the Federal Reserve, because, boy, this is too complicated for most people. And I didn't mean that in a condescending way. Most people don't even know what the Fed is, so I thought this is not something to spend time on. What a mistake that was, because I actually think that and his anti-war position, the two things that the establishment would most have been happy if he had just abandoned, are the two things that most account for his fundraising success, because he was so unusual in emphasizing them so strongly.

Whereas Rand, of course, he would talk about the Fed, but it was usually to audit the Fed. So now you take an institution no one's ever heard of, and you talk about auditing it, and it just sounds wonkish and people are just not interested. Ted Cruz is not a guy I've supported, but he will stand there for X number of hours on Obamacare, and I think when Rand is talking about the NSA, this leaves a lot of people cold. Yeah, maybe we don't like this type of surveillance, but nobody's a single issue NSA-style voter.

And by the way, Ron's people also tried to paint him this way the best they could. Of course he undermined them in every speech he gave, but I remember looking at a lot of the campaign literature that was coming out, and it would be Ron with an aircraft carrier photoshopped in the background or there'd be some military aspect, and it was always that Ron was a doctor and he served in the military. It was always emphasizing that stuff. And I understand why they felt the need to do that, but in that case, you had a candidate who was so ideologically sure of himself, that everybody really knew who he was. And as you say, with Rand we had a little bit less clarity.

**MCCARTHY:** Yeah, but you know, I do have to push back a little bit, because —

**WOODS:** Oh, please do. I love when the guests push back.

**MCCARTHY:** It just seems to me that enthusiasm by itself is not enough, and it's wonderful that Ron Paul awakened a great many people and got them charged up. He got them not only interested in supporting him, but also in learning about the ideas that he was communicating. He got them interested in reading about Austrian economics, learning about America's anti-war tradition. All that is beautiful; all of that is exactly why I supported Ron Paul and why I was happy to work for him.

But you do need to do more to actually win in politics. There's a lot of sort of institution building, a lot of finding out how to communicate your ideas consistently but also in ways that reach different audiences and not simply preaching to the faithful. And it seems to me, you know, Ron Paul was pretty darn successful actually more so than people thought. In 2008 and 2012, he had some very surprising establishment people who were actually quite willing to support him.

So I don't think too much outreach is necessarily a problem for some of these people, but it does seem to me that it takes a level of sophistication about thinking through your principles and communicating them and figuring out what elements can appeal to different audiences and piecing together this jigsaw puzzle that – again, I think political professionals don't appreciate it, and I also think grassroots enthusiasts don't appreciate it, because they kind of what to have red meat. Red meat alone is not going to get you elected, and that's one of the things I think we should learn from Ted Cruz, I think we should learn even from Marco Rubio.

These guys are very sophisticated in terms of how they take an established intellectual base and an established, you know, sort of institutional framework and connect those with a degree of grassroots support that is actually kind of surprising in the case of someone like Rubio, especially. And they make it work. So Rubio way outperformed expectations in terms of the numbers of votes he would get in the Iowa caucuses. Ron Paul, unfortunately – even though both Rubio and Paul got third place, Ron Paul underperformed relative to what his polling had been in 2012. So third place is great, but he was actually expected maybe to possibly win the Iowa caucuses.

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**MCCARTHY:** So that's not to say Rubio's good and Ron Paul's bad. Quite the opposite. You know, it's clear where my loyalties lie. But I do think there are practical lessons to be learned about not just sort of the cold blooded sort of campaign professional/mercenary approach to things and how you get out votes and organize caucuses and precincts and what not, but more importantly, how to connect ideas in a way that is flexible and inclusive and extends your influence and reach, as opposed to simply believing that raw enthusiasm among the most faithful, but perhaps not always the most sophisticated supporters, is by itself going to be enough. I mean, it's not going to be enough for Trump, it wasn't enough for Ron Paul, and it wasn't really enough for Buchanan in the '90s.

**WOODS:** Right, that's true, but on the other hand, it gets attention for a candidate who might otherwise be left out in the cold. Bernie Sanders, where would he be

without his hordes of supporters? I mean, he's not a particularly charismatic guy, but, my goodness, he's got a lot of enthusiasm out there. So it can get you some things.

Now, I want to amplify something you said. I agree with you that people don't adequately appreciate how good Ron Paul was at precisely the sort of thing you're talking about, about taking his message and applying it before audiences that might at first not seem to be hospitable audiences. So for example, the way he would speak at the Values Voters Summit was very effective, and yet he did not betray his principles in any way. So he was very good at that. I think sometimes we only remember the red meat speeches that Ron gave that we all watched on YouTube. We don't remember, well, when Ron was in different settings, he could explain how his ideas would also work for other groups, and that's a very important thing.

Now, I want to talk about Rubio in a minute, because he really is a surprise and because I really hope what you're saying in your article doesn't come true. So first of all, let's remind people the show notes page for this episode is – let's see, today is [TomWoods.com/585](http://TomWoods.com/585). I'm going to link to Dan's – of course I'm linking to *The American Conservative*, [TheAmericanConservative.com](http://TheAmericanConservative.com), but I'm going to link to Dan's article on the Rubio phenomenon and what we can expect in the future, because I really, really hope he's wrong about it.

But before we get off this subject, I want to just add a couple things here. I mean, I think there was a definite desire to keep Ron out of the spotlight until the very, very last minute, and I think that was definitely a mistake. But also, even on foreign policy, yeah, obviously Rand sounded better than some of the others, but I would see banner ads when I'd be online, saying, "Rand stands with Israel." Now, you know, Ron felt like he stood with Israel in a certain way, in the sense that he wished Israel well and he thought that foreign aid was actually hurting their economy and whatever, but he wouldn't do something pandering like that. Or we're going to create a Kurdistan out of other countries, and then we're going to arm it and defend it, does not seem – like, that's just not a smart thing to say, and so it led people – yeah, okay, he's –

See, the nice thing about Ron was it was easy to promote him. You could say, Ron believes the following basic principles; whereas with Rand it got to be so nuanced. Well, where does he stand on foreign policy? Generally, he wants to hold back a bit, but there are certain circumstances, and this – And at that point, people had given up listening, so I think that was a problem too.

**MCCARTHY:** That's right. Rand let himself get very complicated in terms of what his positions actually were. And you can have nuanced positions, but they need to be nuanced positions that are kind of scalable, right? So they need to make sense when you look at them from a distance and you're just seeing the big picture, and they also need to make sense when you zoom in and see how the individual parts connect.

And if you're not – you know, with Ron Paul, he had, you know decades of experience as a congressman, as someone who was deeply entrenched in libertarian thinking, libertarian and conservative thinking on foreign policy. Pat Buchanan was the same

way. These guys had deep intellectual traditions that they could draw upon and say, I don't have to just explain everything in one speech; if you want the nuances of my position, you can go and look at some of these other thinkers that I'm citing, and you can go look at this tradition.

With Rand, that was never the case. He never connected with a larger set of ideas, with a larger constellation that would allow people to fill in these gaps, so it just seemed like Rand was just kind of making things up as he went along. And it certainly seemed to me that the campaign didn't even understand what their candidate was saying. Like, he was explaining things in such a complicated way that even the campaign itself was completely lost as to what it should be doing, which meant that the professional simply thought, well, we're just going to do what we think is going to pander to the most voters.

And that's how you get these, you know, "Rand stands with Israel" ads. And who is that fooling? I mean, that's not going to help actual Rand Paul supporters support Rand. It's going to demoralize them. And then if you look at, you know, people who prioritize Israel as their top issue in caucuses and primaries, they were going to go to some other candidate, someone who clearly really did believe that as his top thing.

And I agree that, you know, Ron Paul, Rand Paul, I mean, none of these guys are anti-Israel. They're in favor of, you know, individual rights all around the world. But certainly the message that people are supposed to get and that you do get when you say that you stand with Israel is that you have a certain foreign policy, which is going to be very aggressive, in terms of America getting into interventions in the Middle East. And you know, why on Earth Rand would be putting out that message and sort of dog whistling that message is baffling to me.

**WOODS:** Let's turn, unfortunately, to Rubio. I won't steal your thunder by telling people what the thesis of your article is, but what is in store for Rubio now that he had that strong finish? I mean, he was able to position himself in a way that third place seemed like a stunning victory. And in a sense, it was. What happens now?

**MCCARTHY:** Well you know, going back a year and more, here in Washington, D.C., whenever I would be in mixed company with, you know, neocons and the establishment conservatives who are basically subservient to the neocons and who rely on the neocons to do their thinking for them, they were 100%, 110% behind Marco Rubio right from the beginning, and they were extremely confident this guy is not only our guy, he's going to be the nominee. And this was at a time when Rubio was in futile digits in the polls. He hadn't even officially declared yet, and I certainly couldn't see where this grassroots swell of support for Rubio was going to come from.

I mean, it was very clear that someone like – you have candidates that represent evangelical blocks; you have theoretically Rand Paul could represent the libertarian block; you have a lot of different demographics that could go for different people. And even Jeb Bush I expected would get the kind of establishment and electability block. And so it didn't seem to be that Rubio had any real following, but the neocons were

very, very clear about what they wanted and that they were going to get it. And they basically have. They've pushed Rubio in the media as much as they possibly can. They've certainly supplied Rubio with plenty of money, and they've done a bit of this – one of the things that I think a lot of campaign professionals don't understand about how politics actually works is a lot of it is done through credentialing. It's the idea of carrying the imprimatur of the right set of elite opinions, which then brings out, you know – it kind of has a ripple effect.

And that's what happened with Rubio. He got the imprimatur of the neocons and the elements within the establishment that the neocons can influence, and as a result, even people in Iowa were saying, well, if this is the kind of party that I identify with, if this is the kind of elite opinion I identify with, then I'm going to support Rubio. Rubio had a very good ground game. You know, he used that money that he got from the neocons very effectively to build up his ground operation in Iowa, and you know, as Jeb Bush consistently failed in the polls and in every other respect, Marco Rubio was in a very good position to overtake him and to become not just the neocon candidate but the candidate of the establishment overall.

And now it seems to me that Rubio's on a very good path in terms of getting the nomination, because basically the right wing of the party is split. It's going to be split between Trump and Cruz for a very long time, and I think all the neocons, all the establishment are going to pool their resources into Rubio and he's got a good chance of getting it.

**WOODS:** All right, so that's the main reason; that basically you're going to wind up with three people, more or less; two of them are going to split a sector of the vote, and Rubio will gather up the remainder. So I mean, there is an elegant simplicity to that, which makes it a compelling thesis. And by the way, of course, his slogan, "A new American century," it's so in-your-face neocon. There's nothing subtle about this guy whatsoever. On the other hand, isn't there anything to – I mean, the poll numbers do have to mean something. Trump just has a crushing advantage. Are we saying that as the other candidates drop out, they're all going to – apart from Carson maybe, where they might go to Cruz – they're all going to coalesce around Rubio? I mean, the Fiorina people aren't necessarily going to – I mean, we're talking about a handful of people at that point I guess.

**MCCARTHY:** Oh, I think it's overwhelmingly likely that they will, and here's why. If you were to ask Jeb Bush or Carly Fiorina, or if you were to ask the people who give them money and the people that, you know –

**WOODS:** Oh, who do they favor now?

**MCCARTHY:** – that their political lives depend upon, if you ask them, well, do you expect that Donald Trump is going to be friendly to you if Donald Trump becomes president, their answer's going to be, oh heck no. So they're going to cut a deal. So in the case of Jeb Bush, it seems to me that he's got to worry about his entire political dynasty. I mean, his son George P. Bush has ambitions, and if he wants to make sure

that the family doesn't take a hit for sacrificing the party to Donald Trump or Ted Cruz, then he has to get behind Rubio. So that's what I expect to happen pretty soon. Even though Jeb Bush hates Rubio. I mean, Rubio is the man who just destroyed his life's dream of becoming the nominee and becoming president. Nevertheless, I think the family's going to have that kind of sway.

And similarly with Carly Fiorina, with all the others, I think that the fact that all the establishment power is behind Rubio means that if you want to continue to live within the establishment, if you want to continue to have that sort of lifeline of support from them, you're going to have to eventually fall into line. But maybe a couple of others who don't actually – a colleague and I were putting bets on who Santorum's going to endorse today. I think my friend believes that Santorum is sincere enough about his blue-collar politics that he's going to endorse Trump, and I think he's still a Republican insider and he's still going to go for Rubio. So even if that proves to be, that my friend is correct and he goes for Trump, I think most of the others are going to wind up being Rubio supporters.

And I think also, Republican primary and caucus voters, they tend to be obsessed with the idea of electability, right? So even though Mitt Romney and Bob Dole and John McCain proved not to be electable at all, they were the ones who had this kind of aura of electability. And it seems to me that's going to trend towards Rubio, and the same people who made Mitt Romney the party's nominee in 2012 will make Rubio the nominee in 2016.

**WOODS:** I guess we're going to be getting – so does that mean, by the way, Santorum now has dropped out, because I hadn't seen that?

**MCCARTHY:** Yeah, that's obviously (laughing) – he hasn't received as much attention as Rand Paul has, but the news today is Santorum's also dropping out.

**WOODS:** Okay, I see; I see. So we're going to get more and more of those, so it's likely that it will wind up with three people. It'd be interesting to see what Carson does, because of course the Carson people are very upset with Ted Cruz right now.

**MCCARTHY:** That's right. I have no guess about what Carson might do. Now, I will say if Jeb Bush is somehow able to rally in New Hampshire and get into third place, he might well be able to revive his campaign at that point. I don't think anyone is expecting that. If anything, you know, if we get a surprise in New Hampshire, it'll probably be John Kasich, and Kasich really has no support anywhere else in the country. So that won't do anything in the long run. But if Bush is able to get support again, I think he'll actually frustrate Rubio quite a bit. That could make a very interesting extended primary.

**WOODS:** Oh, don't tell me I have to root for Jeb Bush (laughing).

**MCCARTHY:** (laughing)

**WOODS:** Just to keep it interesting for the neocons, you understand, right? Make it a nail-biter for them. Have them divide their resources for a change.

**MCCARTHY:** Exactly.

**WOODS:** All right, well, I guess we'll just have to wait and see what's going to happen in the coming days, but gosh, that possibility of Rubio being nominated, when he is – I mean, I don't think he's a particularly impressive intellect, and I think he is hot-headed, and I think he is just as bellicose as he sounds in these debates, and as you – I don't know if it was you, or it could have been Scott McConnell's article – said that basically by voting for Rubio, what you're saying is nothing about the party of George W. Bush, nothing about that Republican Party needs to change, because we're just going to double down on all of it.

**MCCARTHY:** Well, that's right. What the neocons have done very effectively is they found a much more attractive wrapping and vehicle for the message than the Bush family. So the whole Bush dynasty name is ruined right now because of the foreign policy that Bush pursued with neocons egging him on. The neocons, having achieved that, they've jumped ship, and now they've got a fresh-faced Latino Republican who is seen as being a wave of the future. And it's interesting to watch how these sort of fantasies that the media and even a lot of the public engage in. Just seeing someone like Rubio, looks different and is young and fresh and youthful, how they want to project all these nice things on to him, even though if you actually listen to what he's saying, it's the voice of George W. Bush or even something worse that you're hearing. Appearances are everything, and Rubio is getting a lot of mileage off that.

**WOODS:** All right, I'm going to let you go. This has been a great conversation. People should of course check out *The American Conservative* magazine, because you won't have to – you'll get something different from what you get in *The Weekly Standard*, for example, and that's a great relief. It's non-leftism that is sane and literate, and unfortunately that is a very rare commodity. So [TheAmericanConservative.com](http://TheAmericanConservative.com) is the site. I'm going to have Dan's article linked at [TomWoods.com/585](http://TomWoods.com/585). Dan, thanks so much.

**MCCARTHY:** Thanks, Tom.