



**Episode 691: Key Promoter of Iraq War Now Embraces Ron Paul and
Nonintervention: A Tom Woods Show Exclusive**

Guest: Jim Hale

WOODS: I'll tell you something: I get a lot of people writing to me via Facebook, and I'm so overwhelmed I can't even read all of them. I read everything that's sent to me through my website, but the Facebook thing, I feel like I would — it's not that I'm being rude; it's that I only have so many hours in the day and I have five kids. But something — I don't know, divine providence, I don't know how to account for it, but I read what you sent me. And I said, okay, hold on just a minute. You can't send me something like that and not come on the show. So here you are. I want you to tell me about the creation of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq.

HALE: Yeah, Tom, so that was one of these kinds of things that happens in Washington. I was already working on the Hill at a place called Orion Strategies. My boss there was Randy Scheunemann, and he had opened up the shop about a year before then. We had worked together; he was the president of an outfit in D.C. called the Mercury Group, which was basically the PR ad agency for the NRA. And then Randy left and later hired me to work for him. I worked on some issues mostly having to do with anti-Castro Cubans and that kind of thing. And then when the build up to the Iraq War started, Randy got on board, and his buddies there were Bill Kristol, of course, of *The Weekly Standard* and Bruce Jackson of Lockheed Corporation, and they formed the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq. And our stated goal was to inform both policymakers and the media and anybody else about why Iraq needed, why we needed regime change.

WOODS: During this time, you were in regular contact with people like Bill Kristol; you knew him well.

HALE: Well, I didn't know him well. So he called the office every day, and they strategized and they got together and they put together a media strategy, which was quite effective. You know, we got covered, I think it was like in November of 2002 when *The New York Times* picked us up, and we just started recruiting on both sides of the aisle. Kristol kept things pretty secret with Randy and with Jackson. They kind of met behind closed doors, and then I was the one who was taking the phone calls for Bill Kristol.

WOODS: Okay, given that, I'm not sure you'd be able to answer this question, but I'm curious to know and I don't even know if you'd feel comfortable answering this: could you tell if they really believed the official rationales for the war, or did they just want to get the war regardless of what it took or what rationale needed to be put forward?

HALE: You know, Tom, that's an interesting question. I think something happens when you get involved in these kind of initiatives, that you have to convince yourself that you believe what you're saying. As far as there are ulterior motives, I think with Kristol and a lot of the neocons, Israel is a big part of it. That's where a lot of their loyalty lies, and I think that is the root of neoconservatism in a lot of ways. And I do think that, you know, Randy was the author of the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 that was signed by President Clinton. Randy had a picture in his office of Clinton with a handwritten thank you note, thanking him for his work on the Liberation Act. And by the way, the stated goal of that, signed by Clinton, was regime change in Iraq. So obviously they were very eager to get the war going, to get the PR effort for the war going. In terms of how much they – or what their agendas were, I couldn't say.

WOODS: Now, where did you come from? What had you been doing that you would have been tapped for a project like this?

HALE: Well, I was a TV news guy for most of my professional career. I was actually a sportscaster and then a news guy, and I was always the token conservative in the newsroom. So I got fed up with the TV news business; I was a news anchor in Richmond, Virginia was my last stop, and I got a chance to go work for the NRA, so I took it. I went to Washington, and I became a true believer. I was the guy who was always listening to Rush Limbaugh and came into the newsroom and started debating with my liberal colleagues, and felt like it was time for me to go to Washington and become a conservative warrior.

And Randy and I were allies. We were pro-gun allies with the NRA, and we got on board there with the big campaign in 2000 when Rosie O'Donnell and the Million Mom March was happening and we went to battle with them. And it was high times. You know, when you're in Washington and you're in the midst of those battles, it almost takes on the feel of like a sporting contest. For me, I'm an athlete; that's my background. I said, yes, I'm all in here. So Randy just invited me to come and work with him. He knew about my background in the media. We were very successful promoting the anti-Castro Cuban cause. We had a great success with that. And so when the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq was formed, I was the natural go-to guy for that.

WOODS: Have you publicly said anything about the change of heart you've had about all these issues?

HALE: I haven't, Tom –

WOODS: Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold on a minute. This is a *Tom Woods Show* exclusive?

HALE: That's exactly right.

WOODS: Oh, get out of town. Fantastic, all right.

HALE: So look, I've got to be honest with you. I mean, I was on board with the Rubio campaign, and then I tried to love Cruz. But you know, Tom, a weird thing happened. Like the morning after Cruz got demolished in the Indiana primary, I woke up and I felt this strange sense of relief, like, okay, I don't have to drink the Kool-Aid anymore. And honestly, I think that I have been defending the Iraq War for so long with the same old tired talking points. But I do believe in 2008 Ron Paul really sort of cracked the door open for me and then again in 2012. Ultimately I would dismiss him and just say, oh, this talk about blowback, this is anti-American. I mean, you know all that. And I just couldn't go that far.

But in this election season, I just had to reevaluate everything. So it wasn't long — you know, it's only been a couple of months now that I'd landed on your website somehow and started listening to your podcast, going back and reading the rationale for Ron Paul's foreign policy. I read his book *The Revolution*. I've got a big stack of books that I've taken right off your website right in front of me. And so I just feel like, Tom, that I was wrong. And I used to call myself an evangelical Christian; now I'm a Confessional Lutheran, but I take my faith seriously, and I think that was really a big part of this, Tom. I felt like I could no longer rationalize all of my rhetoric about being a limited government Republican and talking about the big-spending Democrats, at the same supporting an insane foreign policy. My son now is 14 years old, Tom, and for his entire life we've been fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq almost, and I honestly had to say, as a believer and as somebody who professes faith and teaches my children to speak the truth and to reconcile the way they live with their faith. I could not reconcile it anymore.

WOODS: It's interesting you mentioned being a Lutheran. I used to be in the Missouri Synod, actually, and Luther himself would have had no truck at all with dispensationalist theology, the theology that is used to justify a lot of these wars because it's going to bring in — you know, Christ will return and they'll have the Rapture and all that. He would have absolute contempt for that. The vast majority of the Protestant tradition, certainly all the major thinkers, they would not have recognized any of this stuff at all. And that to me, that's one of the difficulties of — I mean, Luther had more respect for tradition, I think, than some of the later Protestants did, but the trouble is when you have almost no grounding in tradition, somebody can come along 1850, 1900 years later with a whole new theology, basically, and you just get swept up in it instead of saying, well, wait a minute, if this is so true, how come we didn't know it 1850 years ago.

HALE: Well, Tom, that's a big part of it. You know, you're really on to something right there. That's part of the reason why I'm speaking up now, because I want to talk to my fellow evangelical Christians, theologically conservative Christians who are instinctively politically conservative, because this is a big problem, especially in the South. Today's typical low church evangelical Christians have little or no interest at all

in church history. They've become so anti-sacramental and anti-historical that they really don't even care anymore. They don't say the creeds; they know nothing of the church councils or the heresies that were overcome, and that same type of historical ignorance applies to politics as well, conservative politics. A young neocon today has no clue that Republicans were the anti-interventionists of the early last century and that Democrats were the ones going around trying to make the world safe for democracy. So this is something we really need to confront.

WOODS: I want you to tell me what exactly it was — was there — because sometimes with me, when I change my mind on a big, big issue, it starts off with a small thing that might not have any effect on anybody else, but that small thing hits me; it gets me wondering; it gets me reading and thinking, and then I change my mind. What was that? Not that it would be the definitive argument that would change anybody's mind, but what was it for you that actually made you stop in your tracks and say, good heavens, I might have actually been seriously wrong about a major, major thing?

HALE: I think, Tom, I watched all the Republican debates, and it was quite entertaining. I mean, I sat down, my wife and I sat down and we made popcorn, and I just watched them with great ghoulish fascination, you might say. But we were told that really the choice, if you listened to conservative Christian radio, that Cruz was really the guy who had a deep Christian background and the self-professed evangelical. And then this is the guy talking about carpet bombing and accelerating and ramping up things, and I just thought, wait a minute, something about what — and the way he was saying it too just didn't sit right with me. And then again, I just kept thinking about what is the world that my 14-year-old son is going into. And everybody else was focused on Trump all the time, what is he saying; oh, he's a racist.

And then I noticed — isn't it interesting; I live in Virginia, and I used to live in Virginia Beach. That's where I was a sportscaster for eight years. Virginia Beach has the largest population of active and retired Navy personnel in the world, and in the Virginia primary, which Trump won over Rubio, he demolished the competition in Virginia Beach. Now, what was that all about? Well, Trump was talking all along about how he had been opposed to the war in Iraq, and I think that the neocons today, you know, if you read *National Review*, if you read *Weekly Standard*, they haven't figured it out yet. They don't understand how military people can support Trump, because he said a lot of crazy things about what he might have the military do, but he's never wavered from his opposition to Iraq, and he even questioned removing Assad. And I think that's the thing right now that we really have to focus on, is actually thinking about regime change in Syria, which would be worse than Libya or Iraq.

WOODS: Can I assume that that is a position that you would not necessarily have held 10 or 12 years ago?

HALE: Oh, of course not. No, everybody was going nuts a couple years ago that, oh, he's gassed his own people; we've got to get him. But you know, interestingly, I heard an interview; it was right after — it must've been four years ago with Ryan Crocker, who was the ambassador to Iraq that we installed. And he gave the most devastating

critique of possible regime change in Syria that I have ever heard and talked about what it would amount to. And everything he said four years ago is exactly what has happened. But you know, as a neocon, we just kind of charge in there and say we've got to do this and it's God's will. And you know, Tom, we'll all be getting together in our Bible studies on Friday nights and praying for the troops and saying we have to go confront this evil and never really examining what happens and how we make things worse, not just for the people who are victims, the innocent victims, but our young men and women too.

And now we're all excited about drafting women and sending them off to fight. I mean, it's just become absolutely insane, and I think as somebody who played a part in this, I do feel like I have some responsibility. I've never spoken up. Most of the people where I live near Richmond don't know anything about my past, because I don't talk about it very often, but I think it's time to speak out. It's time for former neocons to speak out and say this is enough.

WOODS: All right, let me ask you this; this might be a toughie, but at any time when you were media relations director, did you put out any material that you thought was at least a stretch or possibly outright false but rationalized it on the grounds that we've got to alert Americans to the importance of this threat?

HALE: You know, Tom, we were so over the top. I mean, the momentum got going. We had war protesters showing up at our office. I was out there one day, and I was trying to keep the war protesters away from my boss, Scheunemann, and this guy pulled me down on top of — he got behind me and he pulled me down on top of him, and he started screaming, "Citizen's arrest! Citizen's arrest! This man attacked me!" I mean, that's the kind of crazy, emotionally charged environment that we were in. I mean, people were coming by and vandalizing the place, and it was scary to walk down the street some times. But you know what? I loved it. I loved being in the fight. I loved all the self-righteous indignation and laughing at the liberals. Right next to our office, there was one of these anti-death penalty organizations, and I just thought that they were a bunch of morons at the time.

So yeah, and in fact, specifically I can tell you that I remember one time that we recruited — you know, it was all bipartisan. It was very important that we had this bipartisan, so we wanted to get Democrats on board, and that was our big job. And I remember that we got Evan Bayh on board. Finally, that was a big deal; you know, hey, we've got a Democratic senator who's joined the committee. And so we had to send out a press release. So Bayh had committed, but I couldn't get him that day — I couldn't get him to go on record to say anything. So Randy tells me at the time, well, just go on to the records. You know, you can go online and pull up floor speeches that people make at Congress.gov and pull a quote. And I was like, oh really? You really want me to do that? I mean, this was like a quote from the year before, okay?

So I made up this press release, and I plugged in this quote that kind of made it look like Bayh was, like it was a fresh quote on his joining the committee. And in fact, you can actually go on Google now and you can see the exact press release that I sent out.

And 15 minutes later, his vice chief of staff was on the phone just screaming at me, like where did you get this. And I was like, well, I got this on the record. And oh boy, that was unethical. But I didn't hesitate to do it, Tom. Like I said, it was like we were in a big game or something, and you know, when you're in Washington, you're trying to win. You're trying to crush the other guys.

WOODS: Have you kept in contact with any of the people who were in your circles in those days over the years?

HALE: You know what, I haven't. Actually, that event actually led to my quitting. So I left just about a week before the war started, because Randy blew up and actually blamed me for the press release, and that turned into quite a hostile encounter that we had. And I packed up my office and walked out one day. But you know, I was still a believer. I was still pleased when the war started and, you know, felt proud of the duty that I had performed. And then shortly after that, the committee disbanded. But yeah, that's the kind of crazy stuff that goes on.

WOODS: You know, I read the article that you sent — by the way, that article that you sent me about your background, has that been published anywhere?

HALE: I just wrote that out because I wanted to give you some background. I had thought about sending it around, kind of polishing it up and sending it around and maybe putting in some more stories —

WOODS: Yeah, maybe so —

HALE: — but you're the first person who's read it.

WOODS: Okay, yeah, because I definitely thought that should be available to people for sure. The reason I mention that article is because toward the end you mention Congressman Walter Jones from North Carolina. You know, there are a lot of people who now say, even Hillary Clinton, who now say, oh, I made a mistake in supporting the war. Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure, and you'll support the next seven of them that'll have even flimsier rationales. But somebody who really did change as a result of the experience was Congressman Walter Jones, who has been absolutely outspoken about all of this. He's on the board of the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity, which is an organization I'd like to put you in contact with. Have you ever gotten to know him, Congressman Jones, because I got to meet him only briefly once, and in meeting him I told him that I deeply respected his coming clean and being honest and being such a tough antiwar voice, and he simply said, "You honor me, sir."

HALE: Well, isn't that great? I go to eastern North Carolina; we vacation in the Outer Banks, and I was actually down there when his opponent was running ads on the radio really slandering Jones. It was ridiculous. But I did know Jones, not from the war issue. He was actually one of our reliable gun votes. So we did a lot of work for the National Shooting Sports Foundation and worked on preemption laws and that sort of thing, and Jones was always the go-to guy for the gun issue.

But I would challenge any neocon, any person who advocates interventionist foreign policy to go on to YouTube — I just saw the interview that Ron Paul did with him a couple of weeks ago — and especially if you identify as a conservative Christian, to go watch that YouTube interview and to hear Jones talk about the pain that he has to go through when he writes letters to the families at Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base, which is in his district. We're talking about thousands of condolence letters that he's had to write, and he talks about the penance, that he does it as a penance. And this man is deeply, deeply grieved over supporting the war, and you know, Tom, I'm actually hopeful that we can get the message out and that good Christians and people who take sin seriously will take a look at this and examine ourselves.

It's hard; you know, it's especially hard when you're a Southerner. And you know, I grew up in Texas myself. I had an ancestor who was a Texas Ranger in the Republic of Texas, ancestors on both sides that fought in the Civil War; both my grandfathers served in World War I; my dad's first cousin was Joseph Dawson, who was in every book you'll ever read about D-Day. I have a framed picture of him with Eisenhower pinning the Distinguished Service Cross on him. So you know, growing up in the South, we had that martial spirit. The South is the only part of the country that we still send our best and brightest off to the military academies. And I was just thinking about that; at my church, we have this strapping young man who was high achieving in high school, and I just talked to him, and he's here at VMI, and I was thinking, you know, you don't see that in the northeast at all. I mean, we like to fight in the South, and it kind of goes right along with our Christianity as well, that when we see evil, we fight against it; we sacrifice and we pray for those who are in harm's way, as we say.

But you know, now, Tom, my prayers are that we will see the truth and I'm full on board with Ron Paul and Tom Woods and everything that I'm reading now from Mises. And like I said, I feel like I've been liberated. And you know, I want to thank you for that, too, Tom, because I can tell that we were in the same world 15 years ago —

WOODS: Yeah, that's right.

HALE: — and being a warrior, being a conservative warrior and absolutely 100% sure that we're right about this stuff, and I can just say I was flat out wrong, and I'm ashamed of it.

WOODS: Well, join a very, very small, small, vanishingly small group of people who actually have the guts to come out and say that. The natural inclination, especially when you had a position in a high profile organization with a lot of well known people in it is to dig in your heels and try and rationalize what you did in the past. And I think it's better to just — you know, it's better for your own soul, it's better for the cause of truth, and it's better for other people and yourself to just come out and say, look, I did something that was wrong, and now I'm going to make amends for it and do other things, I think you should all do likewise. That's what I've tried to do, looking back on the inane things I was writing in college. Oh, good grief. Good thing there was no Internet back then, you know? Think of all the crap I'd have to explain away. But

anyway, Jim, I really, really appreciate your time, your courage in telling the story, your willingness to share it with us in particular. I just can't thank you enough.

HALE: Well, Tom, you know, I owe you a big debt. Everything that I hear on your podcast and in what you write — I'm almost through right now with *The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*, which is outstanding.

WOODS: Thank you.

HALE: I know this comes deep from within, and God has blessed you with extraordinary communication abilities, and I thank you, sir, for everything that you are doing.

WOODS: Thanks again, Jim.