

# *Paul the apostate*

**The Economist**  
**July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

## **Is this would-be president brave or crazy?**

RON PAUL, a libertarian Republican congressman from Texas, likes to say what he thinks. And among the things he thinks is that the census is a violation of privacy. He has opted out of the congressional pension programme. He claims never to have voted for a tax increase, or for an unbalanced budget, or for a congressional pay rise and never to have gone on a congressional junket. He wants to return to the gold standard. Most notably, he strongly opposes the Iraq war and has from the beginning.

Mr Paul is running for president. And according to the latest report from the Federal Election Commission, he is in better financial shape than John McCain, once the front-runner. Mr Paul raised \$2.4m in the second quarter of the year, has roughly that much on hand, and has no debts. Mr McCain raised far more money but spent it just as fast, ending the quarter with \$3.2m on hand but with \$1.8m in debt.

Mr Paul represents Lake Jackson, a pretty coastal city that looks like an advertisement for planned community life. On a recent summer evening, children splashed in a fountain next to the bustling public library, and a family of four cycled single-file down That Way drive. In some ways, Mr Paul is an odd choice to represent the area. Although the Gulf coast is vulnerable to flooding, for example, he wants the Federal Emergency Management Agency not to interfere. But he has deep roots in the area. For a time he was the only obstetrician in Brazoria County and he has delivered many local residents.

Running for president as the Libertarian Party candidate in 1988 (while still, oddly, a Republican) helped Mr Paul acquire a small cadre of devoted supporters around the country. But he was widely unknown until this May, when he enlivened a Republican debate by saying that Middle Eastern terrorists struck at the United States in part because "we've been over there; we've been bombing Iraq for ten years." Rudy Giuliani, a former mayor of New York, promptly tore into him. The crowd cheered Mr Giuliani.

It seemed that Mr Paul would be ostracised. But since then he has been vigorously defended by libertarian internet buffs everywhere. (His supporters are diligent correspondents and, having published this article, *The Economist* expects to hear from them.) The singer Barry Manilow has donated to his campaign. An Indiana company is putting his face on their specie-backed Liberty Dollars. Mr Paul's spokesman said that the Liberty Dollars are nice, but supporters should keep sending regular ones.

Several months ago, Mr Paul got a consistent 1% of the Republican vote. In a Gallup poll released this week, he had tripled that. Although he had better not choose his White House curtains just yet, the Texan's presence could invigorate the Republicans. Even those who question his plans to withdraw from the UN can appreciate his candour.