

Ron Paul

By Staff writer
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We have long lamented on this page that Indiana's primary election, in May, falls so late in the process that presidential candidates ignore the Hoosier state and its concerns. Instead, candidates spend their limited campaign resources in early primary states that really count toward the nominations: Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina. That's why the presidential nominations of both parties are locked up by February, even though the party conventions aren't until summer.

So it comes as a surprise that Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul recently sent direct-mail to Indiana voters, including some in Evansville. Sent by Paul's campaign headquarters in Greenville, S.C., the mailing is a full-color, six-panel, two-sided flier, chock full of factoids about the candidate and his positions. It includes a handy detachable mail-in postcard for recipients who want more information, although it does not explicitly solicit donations.

Direct-mail ads don't come cheap — \$10,000 is typical for a local or legislative race - and the conventional wisdom is that a presidential candidate who spends his resources in a noncompetitive state whose primary isn't for another six months is wasting his money.

But Paul is not a conventional candidate. Some have labeled him as an extremist; but the longtime Texas congressman is articulating a message of small-government libertarianism - anti-abortion, pro-gun rights - that has earned Paul a small but intensely loyal following. Taking a page from the

Howard Dean playbook four years ago, Paul's campaign has organized a grassroots network of volunteers over the Internet. A group of Paul's Evansville supporters waved signs at Eastland Mall on Black Friday. Political observers have been surprised at Paul campaign's fund-raising ability, much of it donated in small increments: Paul collected \$5 million in the third quarter of 2007 and raised \$4 million over the Internet in a single day, Nov. 5.

The fact that any presidential candidate is doing direct-mail or grassroots organizing in Indiana this early is noteworthy. Why is Paul making an effort here when _ other candidates Democrat, are not? Paul's campaign may view Southwest Indiana as ripe with potential supporters. The area for 12 years was represented in the U.S. House by former congressman John Hostettler, and Paul and Hostettler hold similar views on a number of issues. Both voted against authorizing the U.S. invasion of Iraq and both were members of the

congressional Republican Liberty Caucus, a group of about two dozen congressmen with small government views.

Paul's spokesman Jesse Benton said Paul has "tremendous mutual respect" for Hostettler but to his knowledge, the Paul campaign had not obtained a Hostettler mailing list.

Paul's campaign seems to want to downplay one of its local enthusiasts. Bernard von NotHaus, head of the Evansville Liberty Dollar, has donated \$2999 to Paul's campaign records show. Liberty Dollar among other things, minted coins with Paul's image on them. The company reportedly is being investigated by the FBI for possible currency violations.

Benton said the Paul mailings are coincidental to Liberty Dollar's operation in Evansville and that the campaign neither authorized nor approved of the company using Ron Paul's image on its coins. At a rally last week in Reno, Nev., Paul distanced himself from the Liberty Dollar raid, according to a recently-posted YouTube video. "I don't know the people: I didn't read what the charges were: I don't know what at will happen." Paul said.

The coin distraction aside, it is odd that a presidential-candidate would mail fliers to Indiana voters. Political science professor Robert Dion of the University of Evansville believes Paul has no chance of winning the Republican nomination. But Dion sees a certain logic to Paul's tactics: Paul, like third-party candidate Ross Perot 15 years ago, might help shape the debate by putting his issues of monetary policy front and center. "He may be positioning himself to be a leader and spokesperson of a segment of the conservative electorate," Dion said. "If you do that, it doesn't matter if you're mailing to people who are not going to vote for you; in that case, you're helping the strategy."

Regardless of the reason, we find it refreshing that at least one presidential candidate is seeking to reach Southwest Indiana voters. We encourage the rest to do the same. and would add: Don't just advertise here: campaign here and listen to the local voters, too.