

# Commentary Chuck Malloy Even in Idaho, Paul gets Trumped

**Chuck Malloy**

Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, who blitzed through the Gem State last week, would be a viable presidential candidate if this were your usual run-of-the-mill presidential race.

He's one of the fast-rising stars of the Republican Party - with looks, charm and age on his side. He has a message that conservatives like.

But thanks to the bombastic Donald Trump, who makes the news almost every day and is providing great political theater, there is nothing ordinary about this campaign. If this were an ordinary year, only a few million people would have bothered to watch the recent Fox News debate and the audiences would be smaller in future debates. With Trump, 24 million people tuned in for the political version of World Wrestling Entertainment. Trump already has turned this campaign into a spinoff of "Celebrity Apprentice," with him essentially firing everyone except himself.

In Mobile, Ala., recently, a basketball arena was not big enough to hold a Trump rally. It had to be moved to a football stadium.

Everything Trump is doing is creating big problems for any candidate with the title of "Governor" or "Senator" - a dilemma for someone such as Paul. This rising star and poster boy for the Tea Party movement is hardly on the radar screen in the national polls.

Next to Trump, Paul sounds like another boring politician with worn-out rhetoric about abolishing the Internal Revenue Service, creating a flat tax and shrinking the size of government - things that presidents can't seem to do with a hostile Congress.

*Zzzzzzzzzzz.*

Trump talks about making America great again, while Paul talks about saying "no" to everything. Paul had some nice applause lines at his Boise State University rally last week. But compared to Trump - who is setting the standards for pizazz in this GOP race - Paul comes across as uncreative and uninspiring.

"Clearly, Donald Trump has taken the wind out of Rand Paul's sails," said former Idaho Sen. Larry Craig. "At this point, Trump is capturing much of the independent vote - the Tea Party and libertarian vote, which is what Paul is trying to attract."

As Craig sees it, Paul has other problems. "How many times did his dad run for president?"

Rand Paul has better standing than his father Ron Paul with mainstream Republicans, but his poll numbers aren't much better. Rand Paul is in the middle of the pack in the field of 17 candidates - somewhere above former Texas Gov. Rick Perry and below Texas Sen Ted Cruz. Trump hasn't helped by turning Paul into a political punching bag and suggesting that he "leave quietly."

Craig says he's enjoying the show.

"I'm glad The Donald is mixing it up. I have sensed the anger, frustration and fear of the American public and the Idaho public for several years now, and he has tapped into that in a very skillful way," Craig said. "Was it intentional? Did he know what he was doing? I suspect he knew exactly what he was doing."

The question is whether the entertainment he's providing can carry over to the caucuses and primaries next year.

"I think he is slowly, but surely, drawing support from the conservative Republican base," Craig said. "If he's successful doing that, then he is viable in the primary states."

Of course with Trump, there's no guarantee of staying power. If there's a candidate who could be voted "most likely to implode," it's Donald Trump.

He could pull a Vaughn Ward (remember him?), who looked like a sure winner for Congress in the 2010 Idaho GOP primary, only to fold like a cheap suit in the end. His series of blunders elevated now-Congressman Raul Labrador to the top of the ticket.

Labrador, who is Paul's Western states coordinator, knows his guy still stands a chance - as slim as it might appear. It depends on how much money he can raise, and whether he's willing to put in the work for the campaign.

The Paul campaign can be encouraged by warm receptions in Idaho, which is among the reddest of the red states and will be a player in the early primary season next year.

But Paul could easily be "Trumped" if The Donald happens to visit Idaho before the presidential primary election.

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