

Republican Senator Paul Fuels 2016 Presidential-Bid Speculation

Republican Senator Rand Paul, a favorite of the conservative Tea Party movement, fueled speculation on Wednesday that he will follow in his father's footsteps and run for president in 2016.

Paul, a freshman senator from Kentucky, told reporters he will visit early voting states this year and indicated he will make a final decision next year.

Paul's father, former Congressman Ron Paul of Texas, was a presidential candidate three times, running once as a Libertarian and twice as a Republican. He won Libertarian and Tea Party movement voters during the last Republican primaries, but failed to win broad support.

The younger Paul, at a media breakfast hosted by *The Christian Science Monitor*, said he wants a voice in rebuilding the Republican Party after its losses to Democratic President Barack Obama.

"I want to be part of the national debate, so whether I run or not, being considered is something that allows me to have a larger microphone," Paul said.

Paul said he plans to visit Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina, the first three states to vote in the Republican nomination battle, this year.

Paul expanded his national profile when he led a 13-hour filibuster on March 7 to highlight the risk of the potential use of drones on American soil. The move sparked the slogan "Stand with Rand."

Earlier in the spring, Paul spoke along with other Republican up-and-comers, including Florida Senator Marco Rubio, at a Washington gathering of conservatives known as the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC).

At that conference, a number of young Republicans wore t-shirts proclaiming "Stand with Rand."

Paul also told reporters on Wednesday he will do what he can to help fellow Kentuckian Mitch McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, get re-elected next year.

Relations between the two had a rough start as Paul, seen as the insurgent candidate, defeated McConnell's choice, Trey Grayson, in the Republican primary on his way to victory in 2010.

Paul said of McConnell: "I've endorsed him. I've raised money for him. And I will try to see him re-elected. I think he's good for Kentucky."□