

## [Ron Paul and Fred Thompson: A Comparison](#)

Much has been made lately of the impending entry of Fred Thompson into the Republican race for the nomination. The journeyman actor has precious face-recognition, a commanding presence and camera-smart charisma all on his side. Admittedly, it's hard not to be drawn in by him. His most recent gig has concretized him as the *Law and Order* candidate, which I think effectively sums up what a fair number of my fellows are looking for. But what of his credibility as a conservative—a *true* honest to goodness conservative? Is he the champion of limited government that he makes himself out to be?

The former Senator says that [federalism is his lodestar](#):

Republicans have struggled in recent years, because they have strayed from basic principles. Federalism is one of those principles. It is something we all give lip service to and then proceed to ignore when it serves our purposes ... Those who are in charge of applying the conservative litmus test should wonder why some of their brethren continue to try to federalize more things—especially at a time of embarrassing federal mismanagement and a growing federal bureaucracy.

He has [covered this ground](#) elsewhere too, and in a fashion that actually sounds a lot like Ron Paul talking:

Our government, under our Constitution, was established upon the principles of Federalism—that the federal government would have limited enumerated powers and the rest would be left to the states. It not only prevented tyranny, it just made good sense. States become laboratories for democracy and experiment with different kinds of laws ... Federalism also allows for the diversity that exists among the country's people. Citizens of our various states have different views as to how traditional state responsibilities should be handled.

“Limited enumerated powers”. Those are three words that we don't hear so often anymore. The fact that someone of Thompson's evident stature is saying them is heartening indeed. The federalist system we once had, with a very small central government rigidly defined in its jurisdiction, has in fact been turned on its head. It needs to be righted. Rep. Paul has been saying this for a good long time and I'm glad that Mr. Thompson is helping bring attention to it as well. None of the other candidates have shown much interest in the subject.

So how do these two, Fred Thompson and Ron Paul, stack up to one another? Judging strictly by the rhetoric, they don't appear all that dissimilar. But of course it's action that counts, and that's where we should look to see who wins on the federalism front; to find out which one of them is really the most conservative. Luckily both have worked in Congress and have thereby provided us with a handy roadmap. Our comparison is abetted by the Congressional voting records published at [Project Vote Smart](#).

Let's start with Mr. Thompson. **Out of some 50 appropriations bills the former**

**Senator voted on between 1995 and 2002, he voted for all but 2 of them.** These bills he voted to pass spent billions upon billions of dollars on, among other things:

- Agricultural subsidies (to dairy farmers, tobacco growers, livestock producers, peanut farmers, and others)
- Federal crop insurance
- Guaranteed subsidized loans to farmers
- Subsidized loans for rural housing, electricity and telephone service
- The National Endowment for the Humanities
- The National Endowment for the Arts
- The Peace Corps
- The Job Corps
- The Federal Railroad Administration
- Discretionary education spending
- School violence treatment and prevention
- The Commodity Credit Corporation (for the purpose of influencing production, prices, supplies, and distribution of agricultural commodities)
- The National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education
- The Smithsonian Institute
- The United States Holocaust Memorial
- The National Science Foundation
- The Dept. of Housing and Urban Development and its various community development initiatives

He also voted for the No Child Left Behind Act and the McCain-Feingold Act. He voted for increasing benefits to workers who have been displaced due to increased imports, voted for many tens of billions of dollars in foreign aid, and he voted to double the President's salary. (On a side note, Mr. Thompson's penchant for having the federal government underwrite insurance appears to predate his term in the Senate, going back to his lobbying efforts for the Tennessee Savings and Loan. I would ask Mr. Thompson how extending government support of the S&L industry through the FDIC figured into his concern for the principle of federalism).

Now let's look at Congressman Paul's record. **Out of 166 appropriations bills voted on between 1997 and 2007, Ron Paul voted against all but 6.** His rare "yea" votes were reserved for bills which:

- Prohibited subsidizing crop insurance for tobacco farmers
- Reduced funding for the Dept. of Labor and the Dept. of Education
- Prohibited the use of federal funds to restrict travel to Cuba by United States citizens
- Prohibited federal funding of adoption in D.C. for couples not related by blood or marriage
- Allocated funds for the military quality of life functions of the Department of Defense (housing allowances, health services, veteran's health benefits and pensions)

Paul also voted for a Constitutional amendment that mandated a two-thirds vote in both Houses of Congress in order to increase taxes (requirement waived if war is declared), voted *against* McCain-Feingold, *against* No Child Left Behind, and *against* the Medicare Prescription Drug Bill.

The two candidates' records are almost exactly the reverse of each other. The answer to the question, "Who is the more conservative?" is clear. Fred Thompson talks a good game (and I for one do appreciate him for *that*), but his record reveals a tendency to stray far and often from those "limited enumerated powers" that he references in his TownHall.com articles. Probably no less than 95% of every non-military piece of legislation he's ever voted for has been non-federalist and un-conservative, as well as blatantly unconstitutional, having no basis whatsoever in those particulars set forth for Congress in [Article 1, Section 8](#). In this respect he may be no different than the vast majority of others who have spent some time on the Hill, but it will no longer do for him to use the rhetoric of federalism and limited government while the money hose still bears the impression of his grip upon it.

They say the problem with actors is that they never stop [acting](#). This country needs a leader who actually *lives* his message.