

Noted.

PAUL'S PAC? The recent **Conservative Political Action Conference** (CPAC) promised to give Washington a sense of the sentiments energizing the angry right-wing populists who are supposedly transforming not just the GOP but the American political landscape. And it did. But the signal sent by the conferees wasn't the one pundits and Republican elites expected. Asked to name a favorite candidate for the presidency in 2012, the delegates voted by a wide margin (31 percent) for **Ron Paul**, who opposes the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Patriot Act and Wall Street's "free trade" agenda, and who is perhaps best known as a relentless critic of collusion between central bankers and the elites of both parties.

Paul, the Republican-Libertarian hybrid who so upset former New York Mayor **Rudy Giuliani** during the 2008 Republican presidential debates, easily beat **Mitt Romney** (22 percent), **Sarah Palin** (7 percent) and the rest of the 2012 prospects. Paul's no liberal; he would actually shut down most of the federal government. But neither is he a talking-points conservative like Palin, who has owned the spotlight over the past few months. He's an outlier within the mainstream conservative movement and the GOP.

The CPAC straw poll, which attracted 2,395 participants (by far the highest number at any CPAC session), contained no good news for **Barack Obama**. Only 2 percent of those surveyed approved of the president. But the news wasn't all that great for the GOP establishment, either. Thirty-seven percent disapproved of Republicans in Congress. And a plurality—44 percent—rejected Republican National Committee chair **Michael Steele**.

The results are telling. The anger on the right won't necessarily translate into excitement about Republicans like Romney, Palin or Steele. Even CPAC keynoter **Glenn Beck** was disapproved of by 27 percent of those present. Yet, for the most part, coverage of the CPAC gathering focused on tried-and-true Republicans. An Associated Press report on presidential campaigning at the conference failed to mention Paul; the *USA Today* story

published after the release of the straw poll results was all about Romney. The real headline, missed by most of the media, is that the anger of the populist right is complex, nuanced and directed not just at Obama but at a lot of mainstream Republicans as well. JOHN NICHOLS

PUBLIC OPTIONS: In loose concert with similar groups across the nation, on a brilliant sunny Saturday in February a line of healthcare reform-minded New Yorkers marched across the Brooklyn Bridge flaunting signs and chanting calls for action on legislation stalled in Congress. There were only about 400 of us, ranging from toddlers on shoulders to seniors on canes, and many 20s and 30s in the middle. (So where were you?)

The marchers, who represented twenty-five organizations, including **Healthcare for America Now**, **SEIU**, **MoveOn**, **National Physicians Alliance** and many New York-based groups, headed for the downtown Manhattan headquarters of **WellPoint**, the nation's largest health benefits company, which was recently in the news for imposing staggering rate hikes. Chants and signs included "Get it done/Get it right" and "Let's finish Teddy's fight/Healthcare is a human right." A MoveOn guy we talked to during a comfort stop at Starbucks said his organization and others have been meeting with members of the state Congressional delegation and are buoyed by recent expressions of support for the public option by Senators **Kirsten Gillibrand** and **Chuck Schumer**.

In a rally in front of a giant, blank-looking black and chrome-slashed slab at One Liberty Plaza, a series of speakers blasted WellPoint for putting profits before people, even as 45,000 die each year for lack of insurance. In early February, the corporation's California subsidiary, **Anthem Blue Cross**, announced that it would raise premiums as much as 39 percent. WellPoint's net income for 2009 totaled \$4.7 billion; adjusted net income was \$2.9 billion, compared with \$2.5 billion in 2008. In 2009 it spent \$4.7 million on lobbying. Meanwhile, 2.6 million New Yorkers younger than 65 have no insurance. In the past decade, insurance premiums for

family coverage in New York State have climbed 92 percent, while median income went up 14 percent. Health reform groups will hold a rally in Washington on March 9 to challenge the **Association of Health Insurance Providers**, which is meeting to plan how it will next thwart reform. RICHARD LINGEMAN

TAX EVASION: In 2007 America's wealthiest households reported their highest incomes and lowest tax rates on record, according to recently released **IRS** data going back to 1992. The average adjusted gross income of the 400 highest earners rose by 31 percent from 2006 to 2007—from \$263 million to nearly \$345 million—but their income tax rates dropped to 16.6 percent, continuing a decline in rates since 1995 when they were at 30 percent. The fall in average tax rates for top earners, along with rising income, is largely the consequence of capital gains tax cuts passed by **George W. Bush** in 2003 and **Bill Clinton** in 1997.

Top earners made two-thirds of their income in 2007 from capital gains, currently taxed at 15 percent under the Bush cuts. Clinton reduced the capital gains tax to 20 percent. In 1992, when the tax was 28 percent, capital gains accounted for about a third of gross income among top earners. Salaries and wages were just 6.5 percent of gross income for the top 400 households in 2007; they were 26 percent in 1992.

Total adjusted gross income for the top 400 in 2007 was nearly \$138 billion, or 1.6 percent of all national income. That's three times the share recorded in 1992.

For the great majority not in these rarefied brackets, the numbers are grim. As tax analyst **David Cay Johnston** wrote on Tax.com, which first reported on the data, "Since 1992, the bottom 90 percent of Americans have seen their incomes rise by 13 percent in 2009 dollars, compared with an increase of 399 percent for the top 400."

FREDERICK DEKNATEL

ONE MAN'S TERRORISM... The **Wall Street Journal's** headline for a news story on **Andrew Joseph Stack**, the Texas man who flew his plane into an IRS office in Austin, killing himself and IRS manager **Vernon Hunter**: "Tax Protestor Crashes Plane Into IRS Office."