Harry Browne wins presidential nomination

At the largest third-party political convention in more than 50 years, Harry Browne won the Libertarian Party’s nomination for president — and then immediately embarked on a national media blitz.

Browne, a bestselling investment author and the LP’s 1996 candidate, won a first-ballot victory at the Libertarian National Convention in Anaheim, California on July 2. He picked up 56% of the vote, besting challengers Don Gorman (19%), Jacob Hornberger (13%), and Barry Hess (6%).

Winning the contest for vice president in a nail-biting contest that took two ballots was former Bellflower, California mayor Art Olivier, who defeated Steve Kubby and Ken Krawchuk.

The Convention, held June 30-July 3, attracted more than 900 credentialed delegates and 1,200 total attendees — making it the largest third-party convention in America since the Progressive Party’s convention in 1948, according to Ballot Access News publisher Richard Winger.

In the week following the convention, Browne launched a nationwide media tour, participating in six national TV shows, eight national radio shows, eight local radio shows, four print interviews, and seven Internet interviews — including CNN Today, CNN’s Inside Politics, PBS Evening News, MSNBC’s Equal Time, and C-SPAN’s Washington Journal.

“I was proud, humbled, and excited [to win],” said Browne. “I am determined to do everything possible to get every last vote I can, to bring in every new member possible, to spend every dollar in the most cost-effective way.”

In officer elections, Jim Lark won a decisive victory in his bid for National Chair.

LP candidates are running in majority of U.S. House races

It’s official: The Libertarian Party will run candidates in more than half of all U.S. House races this November — making it the first third party in 80 years to accomplish that feat.

At least 236 LP candidates have declared their intention to run, or have already qualified to be on the ballot for the 2000 election, LP Political Director Ron Crickenberger announced at the recent National Convention in California.

That’s well over the 218 candidates needed to pass the half-way mark for the 435-seat U.S. House. Another 21 LP candidates are running for U.S. Senate this year.

“We’re going to give the American public the opportunity to vote for a majority in Congress that will support the Constitution and the Bill of Rights — instead of trampling on them,” said Crickenberger.

The last third party to have candidates in so many Congressional races was the Socialist Party in the 1920 election, according to the Washington Times.

Same impact

“The last party to achieve this was the Socialists, and I don’t have to tell you what kind of effect they had on American public policy,” said Crickenberger. “We want to have the same impact — but in the opposite political direction.”

The Libertarian Party is running more Congressional candidates than “all other third parties combined,” Washington, DC’s The Hill newspaper announced.

Leading the list of states with the most LP House candidates is California with 45, followed by Texas (24), Ohio (18), Michigan (16), North Carolina (12), and Indiana (10).
Practicing what he preaches

Libertarian Party hopeful refuses matching campaign funds

By ALAN BERNSTEIN
Houston Chronicle

As the Libertarian Party candidate for president, investment adviser Harry Browne doesn’t want the taxpayers’ money. He is refusing to accept matching campaign funds from the federal government.

Browne said he is eligible to receive up to $750,000 for the primary season. He explained that taking the cash would betray his party’s drive for a minimal government with no national tax, no gun control laws, no anti-drug law enforcement programs.

“It would be hypocritical of me to say that we have got to get people’s noses out of the trough and then put my own nose in there,” Browne said in a Houston interview Friday.

It’s one of several ways Browne is setting himself apart from Vice President Al Gore and Gov. George W. Bush, the soon-to-be nominees of the Democratic and Republican parties.

Bush refused matching funds for the primaries, which allowed him to raise an unlimited amount from private contributions. But he and Gore will each accept $67.5 million for the general election, funded by the $1 check-off option on every American’s income tax return.

Browne would be eligible for a much smaller amount from the program, which was intended to blunt some of the influence of special interest money on White House races.

Browne, who lives in a Nashville, Tenn., suburb down the highway from Gore’s national campaign headquarters, said he hopes to raise $5 million in donations and then put his own nose in there.

“I do not expect to win the presidency, but we are so much bigger and better financed and stronger than we were in 1996 that I expect that we should have a much better result,” Browne said.

The goal, Browne explained, is to make sure voters know that Libertarian candidates for any election are the ones who would reduce government the most.

He opposes federal government efforts to eradicate poverty and illegal drugs, saying they have not only failed, but made the problems worse.

“Because I have seen what the war on drugs has done in escalating drug use and crime in his country, the last thing I would want is the government on my side to stamp out abortion,” the mild-mannered 66-year-old said. “I mean, if you enlisted the government to try to stop abortions, probably within 10 years men will be having abortions.”

He said the two major political parties are hypocritical on abortion, because so-called pro-choice lawmakers would not let a woman choose to use marijuana to ease the pain from cancer or glaucoma, and so-called pro-life candidates didn’t oppose the U.S. bombings that killed civilians in Kosovo.

As part of the Libertarian philosophy, Browne calls for a federal retreat from education, welfare and other programs that he says are not authorized by the Constitution. He would abolish the Social Security payroll tax and withdraw U.S. troops from foreign peacemaking missions.

Steve Dasbach, spokesman for the Libertarian Party, reports: “This month, a school in New Jersey suspended two kindergarten students, after they played cops-and-robbers on the playground, for pointing fingers at each other and shouting ‘hang-hang!’ Which brave politician will be the first to propose a finger buy-back program?”

Please, Dasbach, don’t give Jackson’s City Council any ideas.


Libertarian Party Selects Presidential Candidate

Libertarians field full candidate slate

Libertarian candidate assails Bush, Gore over policies on drugs
It is just possible that the next speaker of the House will be neither a Republican nor a Democrat. The 30-year-old Libertarian Party is fielding candidates in at least 218 House districts this year, the first time in 80 years a third party has put up candidates in half or more of the contests. That means that if the Libertarians win all their races, they could take the majority away from Republicans and Democrats alike.

Other more famous third parties, such as the Greens and Reform parties, are not even close to fielding so many congressional candidates.

"We see it as our job to give the public a reason to vote for a third party," said George Getz, press secretary for the Libertarians.

The party admits, however, that they would be lucky to win one seat, let alone the majority.

"The other candidates in the race are moved a little bit closer to the Libertarian position, at least in rhetoric," said Ron Crickenger, the party's political director and a candidate for the 8th Congressional District of Virginia.

"The party argues for sharply limited government and broad personal freedom. On a federal level, that translates to a strict adherence to and narrow interpretation of the Constitution.

Candidates typically campaign on economic issues, such as free trade and limited government regulation, and progressive social issues, such as an end to the "War on Drugs" in favor of a crackdown on violent crime.

The last time a third party fielded candidates was 1920, when the Socialist Party was a presence in more than half of the races. While the Libertarians oppose almost all the positions of the Socialists, Mr. Crickenger said other party organizers are looking to the Socialist model for inspiration.

Although the Socialists never gained national power, they managed to inject some important ideas — welfare programs and union rights, for example — into the debate, Mr. Crickenger said. Those ideas have since become mainstream.

Both major parties expect a close race this year, with control of the House in the balance and even control of the Senate possibly in question. Yet neither party seems worried by the third party challenge, noting that the Libertarian candidates rarely reach even 5 percent of the vote in congressional races.

"When the Libertarians start to break into double digits, we'll start paying attention," said Frank Luntz, a Republican pollster and a political analyst for Y!Rock.com.

So ununconventional: the Democrats that a party official privately admitted he wasn't aware of any Libertarian candidates in key races. A party spokesman didn't return a call for official comment.

Yet there are cases in which Libertarians have clearly made a difference. Perhaps most famously, Libertarian Michael Cloud denied Republican John Ensign a seat in the U.S. Senate, guaranteeing re-election of Sen. Harry Reid, Nevada Democrat, in one of the most closely watched races of 1998.

Mr. Cloud managed to get a majority of the contest's votes, or about 1.8 percent. But the race between Mr. Reid and Mr. Ensign was decided by an astounding 428 votes, or less than a tenth of 1 percent.

Mr. Ensign, who is favored to win the Nevada Senate seat this year, appears to be paying attention, saying at one point that "most of what the United States government does is unconstitutional" — a most Libertarian sentiment.

Mr. Ensign's campaign manager, Mike Slanker, denied that the remark was an outright rejection of Libertarians. The comment was widely taken out of context to indicate that Mr. Ensign opposes federal programs, he said in an interview. Mr. Ensign was referring specifically to Washington's high-handed dealing with Nevada, where 90 percent of the land is federally-controlled.

Mr. Slanker said Mr. Ensign is quick to proclaim his affinity with Libertarians and other minor party voters. He makes a point of his independence and his willingness to buck party leaders when necessary.

"He's got a little bit of that independent spirit that some of the lesser party voters are looking for," said Mr. Slanker.

Common wisdom says Libertarians tend to draw votes away from Republicans more than Democrats. But Libertarian officials say they tend to draw more Democrats when the talk about social issues such as tolerance of drug use takes place. Mr. Crickenger said the party is making drug policy a major theme this year and will back up candidates with at least $1 million in advertising money.

Libertarian candidates say they are something by their weak electoral showing so far.

"In every way this party is growing," said Carla Howell, the Libertarian candidate opposing Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts Democratic.

Ms. Howell admits that her guest is a long shot, but she said she is the only alternative to Mr. Kennedy since the sole Republican challenger failed to meet the ballot requirements.

There are already more than 400 Libertarians in office in local appointive and elected offices, including a sheriff in Colorado and a district attorney in California. Ms. Howell and party officials predict they will elect at least one member to Congress by 2004 as third parties gain more public attention.

"In the past, you had big government Democrats and big government Republicans whose performance in office was distinguishable only under a microscope — both voted for more taxes and bigger government," she said. The option of voting for smaller government is something most voters have never even heard of.