Ballot Access Efforts Shifting Into High Gear and Bringing Results

The Libertarian Party's Ballot Access Committee hopes to have a good chunk of its job completed by the time delegates name the LP presidential nominee over Labor Day weekend in Chicago, and recent successful efforts give Libertarians good reason for optimism.

In addition to the substantial gains realized from 1990 LP vote totals, an independent's showing in Maine is responsible for the LP being certified as an official party there. The independent, Andrew Adam, received enough votes to qualify for official party status, and by changing his registration to Libertarian—which he did January 18th—his status was transferred to the LP. BAC Chair Bill Redpath and 51-'92 Committee Chair Andre Marrou were on hand for the official change-of-registration.

On the petitioning front, the Alabama LP and Kansas LP have recently completed petition drives. The Kansas drive was funded primarily by the state LP.

Petitioning is now underway in Arizona, while state legislators there consider a bill aimed at cutting the petition requirement from 15,000 to 7,000. Petitioners will collect about 8,000 signatures and then wait for the legislature's vote before continuing. In North Carolina, the 51-'92 organization is conducting a petition drive to place the LP on the ballot.

CORRECTION: Contrary to last month's Liberty Pledge Newsletter, pledgers of $10/month or more will continue to have their memberships automatically renewed.

Libertarians in Forefront of Opposition to Persian Gulf War

The LP is setting up a new "900 Number" for opponents of U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf. Callers will hear a recorded message stating opposition to the intervention, which will be delivered in their names to their congressmen if they leave their names and addresses. The LP will also send each caller a "Bring U.S. Troops Home" bumper sticker.

"We wanted to encourage people to speak up and be counted on this important issue," National Director Nick Dunbar said. "We hope people will take advantage of this service who wouldn't take the time to sit down and write their congressman a letter."

College chapters are being urged to get involved in this hot issue. Informational packets were sent to 222 campus contacts regarding their role in establishing strong opposition to reinstating the draft. LP anti-draft activist Paul Jacob recently spoke to over 70 students at one of the smaller campuses of the University of Wisconsin. (See article on page 2.)
Speaker at UWM calls Selective Service totalitarian

Jacobs explained his decision last Thursday night in the east corridor of the UWM Post. He also stressed that people at the rallies, riding a wave of growing support for the draft laws, are the same people as the two older parties and have been successful in part for their own policymaking. Jacobs said resistance and draft avoidance were still a major issue in the nation, but not when they get 75,000 miles, "It is not a pacifist. Jacobs said. "It is a national defense, but not when the nation is not ready."

"The liberals in Congress are doing a brisk business passing out free bumper stickers supporting their candidates, and I'm not sure what they're doing, but they're doing it."

"What you want to do with your life is your business. You're free to do what you want, but you're also free to resist registration in order to protest what's happening."

"I did not try to file as a conscientious objector or elect a State Senate seat." Boddie, chief fundraiser for Libertarian Richard Boddie's 1984 presidential campaign, said the time for the U.S. to leave the United Nations was now, because the United States has given up its spiritual faith, grown too much, and is not a part of that policy. Boddie said government's original role in American society is now forgotten.

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"I just keep on talking, " Jesse's a joke," Boddie said in an interview. "Jesse is an opportunistic politician, a professional speaker, a Show Business Democrat." Boddie, a political science graduate of Florida State University, said he was in Tucson last night speaking to the audience. "I am black. I grew up poor."

"Because what we're talking about is the American Dream."

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Two-party gatecrashers

Editor’s note: A former vice president of the now-defunct Gainesville Gas will speak about the forced sale in 1989 of his company to Gainesville Regional Utilities at Grace Knight Hall in the County Administration Building. Mitchell Prugh will speak about the “winners and the losers” of the buyout. The speech is Tuesday Nov. 27, 7:30 p.m. and is sponsored by the new Libertarian Party of Alachua County.

By Tim J. Hill

The table occupied by the Libertarian Party at the Alachua County Fair was nondescript compared to their neon-bedecked neighbors, the Florida Lottery, and the Republican Party down the row, whose booth was decorated with ribbons, political posters and a five-foot cartoon elephant. The table run by the newly-formed Alachua County party featured literature, hand-drawn signs and bumperstickers on sale for a donation. The only icon in sight was the Statue of Liberty.

In between renditions of “We’re in the Money” by the Florida Lottery Dixieland band, you could have spoken to party members about platform issues such as relaxing ballot-access laws, passing laws to ensure “fully-informed juries,” privatization of government services and generally establishing laissez-faire capitalism. And for many people who stopped by on their way to the wild rides outside the convention hall, talked centered on why the Libertarians, and third parties in general, are nearly unheard of in Florida.

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“The ballot-access laws in Florida are some of the toughest in the country,” said Mike Fender, a UF law student and local party organizer. In order for Libertarians to get on the ballot, he said, canvassers have to collect signatures from about five percent of the state’s 6.8 million registered voters—340,000 people in all. And they have to have a candidate as well.

Ronald Reagan, who helped increase the size of the federal government, ironically was elected for his Libertarian ideal of reducing the national bureaucracy. Yet the party has gained little headway into mainstream politics. Ron Paul has run for president on the Libertarian ticket since the party was formed in 1971, and Libertarians here and there have managed to get elected. But no major movement has coalesced.

In Florida the party has had little success, as members blame the ballot laws. But onto the ballot for the U.S. House of Representatives, for example, a candidate for a third party in Florida (not an independent) would need about 170,000 signatures. In Louisiana the candidate would only need 107,000 signatures, and in Mississippi zero.

“The president is talking about how good it is to have multi-party systems in Eastern Europe. We hardly have a multi-party system here, do we?” Fender said. A woman who stopped at the table to offer a cynical remark about the elections agreed, and was about to sign her name to a mailing list when her husband ushered her away.

About 70 other people, however, did sign their names to a mailing list last month at the Legalize Hemp Rally at the downtown courthouse, where Fender and other party members called for the legalization and mass cultivation of hemp—the marijuana plant.

Libertarians generally believe in the rights of the individual in the face of ever-expanding government. Libertarian, or classical liberal, precepts were the political philosophies of the country’s Founding Fathers. Most of them believed in an unrestricted, or laissez-faire, marketplace, an open forum for artistic, religious and political expression, and the right to trial by jury. The Libertarian Party, which was founded on those and other ideals written into the Bill of Rights, has extended their political platform even further. They support the decentralization—or re-legalization—of illegal drugs and the shifting of welfare programs from the public to private sector, as well as privatization of most government services and the eventual elimination of the federal income tax. They more or less seek to undo the evolution toward socialism the federal government has been undergoing since the early 20th century.

Notoriety, and maybe acceptance later on—the are the current goals of the Libertarian Party of Alachua County.

The group was brought together in August by Fender, and all of them meet at one time or another at the Philosophy Bookstore. Behind the local party and offering moral support is the bookstore’s owner, Jon Asfour, “the longest-tenured Libertarian around,” according to member Fred Kirchoff, 73, a self-employed burglar alarm installer and long-time area resident. (Asfour was out of town while this article was being written, and could not be reached.)

The current party line-up, according to Fender, is the third attempt to form an Alachua County Libertarian group. Fender, once a member of a campus Republican group until he quit when the president was impeached for being gay, and then a member of the College Libertarians until he moved to Orlando, got on the phone this time because he thought the timing was right. The Libertarians have registered with the county Supervisor of Elections.

In the meantime, members will casually hammer out their agreements and differences among the party. Kirchoff calls the distinctive individualistic style of Libertarians. Kirchoff, in turn, is called by compatriot Clark Hodge a “Libertarian crank.”

“We all have our differing beliefs, different reasons for being in the party,” Kirchoff said, a professor in UF mechanical engineering and secretary of the party. He said the party’s core group of 12 don’t agree entirely about all local issues, but a general consensus exists. Like his compatriots around town and through time, Schweller prays for a government that governs least. For exact tice, he thinks the county airport serves as a model for how the rest of the county government should operate: farm out as many services to private industry as possible.

One issue the local group firmly stands behind is seeing that Bill Hasfield—the owner of Novel Ideas who is being prosecuted for “distributing harmful material to a minor” in the form of a revealing comic book—does not go to jail. They have started a legal defense fund to help offset the cost of a lawyer.

Many of the members the local party belong to the state or national Libertarian parties. A national party issue is presently the “Fully-Informed Jury Act,” an attempt to get courts to follow the English common-law practice of charging juries to not only judge the guilt or innocence of an accused person but to decide whether the law itself is just.

While popular issues abound in the party’s platform, the goal of the Libertarian party and its members—from local to national level—is to get voters to question the basic premises of elections and campaigning. Third parties have not been the center of American politics since the early 20th century, when the Populists emerged from the heartland to represent farmer interests in Washington. They faded away, but their spirit remains. Ann Richards’ victory in Texas, for example, has been called a populist victory.

But in Florida, Libertarian candidates have rarely been elected to any office. Alan Sawyer has run for Gainesville city commission several times but lost. Allison DeFoor, Gov. Bob Martinez’s running mate in the recent election, was elected to sheriff of Monroe County as a Libertarian. Elsewhere in the state, Libertarian candidates have fought uphill to get on a ballot but are usually subsumed by the two major parties. Marlon Migala successfully challenged the state’s ballot access laws when Rep. Claude Pepper of Miami died. The special election after his death discriminated against minor parties by requiring difficult hurdles. Last year, the U.S. District Court in Gainesville agreed: Florida statutes for minor party access to special elections violates the state constitution.

Kirchoff wants less government in his life. “And we want to get voters thinking about basic philosophy. Too many people when they go to the polls, they think about just issues or the style of the candidate,” Kirchoff said.

And Schweller, recalling general dissatisfaction with the trend of American politics to exclude more people than it includes, and the tendency of local politics to become bloated with bureaucracy, says: “I’m not proposing Utopia. I just want something that will work.”

mike fender