

A Libertarian Media Conspiracy

By Carl S. Milsted, Jr.

Everything I said before is a lie. All those ideas on designing and distributing literature, all those ideas on outreach to the Left...none of it worked. In particular, the Gore for Asheville campaign came in 12th out of 13 candidates in an open primary, with 5.5% of the vote (people were allowed to vote for three).

OK, so we were under-funded, and Dave has an evil villain mustache and dresses like a racing engineer, but still. Many of my ideas were applied, and they didn't come near doing the job.

So how about the alternative approach of heavily funding a small number of candidates? Virginia did that this year by getting behind Robert McBride [see www.mcbride2003.com] for county supervisor. Robert is Mr. Likeable – well groomed, nice smile, outgoing and just a real nice guy. Robert was already involved in the community including as a member of the county budget committee and road bond committee. His campaign manager, Paul Miller, ran the campaign with military precision, deploying volunteers to canvass the entire district. The state party sent him some real money to work with. Mailers were sent [see www.lpva.com] large newspaper ads were run and likely voters were telephoned. Yet despite all this Robert got 20% in a three-way race, respectable by Libertarian standards, but still a long way from victory.

Perhaps my negativity is exaggerated. This *is* November, a depressing month for Libertarian activists. However, it is worth asking the question: are we doomed? Can the third party approach work? Is the Libertarian philosophy salable?

The answer is: ***it still has not been tried!!!***

Sure, we have worked hard and campaigned hard. On a few occasions we have spent as much money as the major party candidates. But this is still a drop in the bucket! Political are only the endgame of what it takes to build a party and get candidates elected. When a major party candidate puts his name on the ballot, 30% of the vote or more is already guaranteed without any campaigning needed. Most campaigning is about going after swing voters, with the rest about simply reminding the already converted to go and vote. Libertarians, on the other hand, are still using their limited campaign resources merely to acquire and locate their base. A political campaign is an extremely expensive way to do this.

Consider what the Democrats have to build their base:

- Labor unions
- Liberal college campuses
- Public school teachers
- Hollywood, and much of the mainstream media
- Black churches. Liberal theology churches.
- *The New Republic, Mother Jones, ...*

- Jim Hightower, Molly Ivins, etc.

Meanwhile, the Republicans have:

- Conservative talk radio.
- *Fox News, The Wall St. Journal, Forbes*
- Fundamentalist churches
- The Chamber of Commerce
- Golf courses
- *National Review, The Weekly Standard, ...*

The Republicans are a bit outgunned on this front, but make up for it with superior fundraising power.

On top of these huge outreach organizations, both the major parties get *daily* front page coverage of their major campaigns and their office holders. Their office holders can buy votes with billions of dollars of pork and extort contributions with thousands of regulatory threats.

So what do the Libertarians have?

- Ayn Rand novels.
- Some science fiction authors, notably Robert Heinlein.
- *Reason, Liberty.*
- Neal Boortz, and a few minor talk show hosts.
- A large array of web sites.

Folks, we are heavily outgunned! We are outgunned *everywhere*. We have no safe districts. We need to have repeated outreach to people other than scattered nerds. We need our own biased media – somewhere. We need our own safe districts.

The Free State Project is about trying to create safe districts by moving the scattered nerds into one small state, New Hampshire. Moving 20,000 people is quite an undertaking. At \$10,000/move on average, this comes out to an expense of \$200 million! And this is not counting the cost of living in a cold climate, moving away from family, and possibly taking a pay cut. It would be nice to come up with something cheaper.

Well, Kevin Rollins is doing just that. He has started *The Free Liberal* [see www.freeliberal.com], a monthly free newspaper filled with articles with a left-libertarian perspective. That is, instead of going on a hunger strike to get coverage in the liberal media, as a certain “Great Communicator” has done, Kevin has created some liberal press that features libertarian people and ideas prominently.

“Why the name *The Free Liberal*?” you might ask. Well, Kevin started out with a campus paper called *The Free Marketeer*. While such a newspaper is valuable for recruiting the already converted or the nearly converted, it can do little to *change* minds. For a newspaper to change the mind of a liberal-leaning college student or intellectual, the newspaper must be one that a liberal-leaver will read.

You are young. You are free-spirited. Your body is pierced and tattooed in interesting and unusual places. You believe people have the right to do drugs. Meanwhile, corporate America wants you to wear a dorky uniform and get drug tested. So when you go to the locally owned coffee shop to drink shade-grown organic coffee, you pick up a copy of *The Free Marketeer* for intellectual stimulation. Right? WRONG! And you are not likely to shell out \$5 for a copy of *Reason* either. But you just might be enticed to pick up and read a newspaper called *The Free Liberal*.

This is not mere speculation; I have tested this theory in the field. I deployed *The Free Marketeer* at a local college student hangout and tried unsuccessfully to deploy at a local hippie hangout. Some copies were read, but the level of interest was disappointing. After seeing this response, I implored Kevin to change the name to something more Left-friendly, like *The Free Radical*. After much argument and brainstorming we settled on *The Free Liberal*.

The difference has been night and day. At the stated student hangout, we have had to replenish the stack multiple times, despite the fact that first issue is getting dated. Bernard Carman and I have gone into very lefty coffee shops, vegetarian restaurants, and organic food coops and left copies of *The Free Liberal*. When management approval was needed, the response from management has been excellent – even in shops where most of the other literature was borderline communist.

And this positive response came after they thumbed through a tabloid containing articles criticizing the FDA, endorsing the Free State Project, laughing at diaper recycling, describing the Dave Goree for Asheville campaign, and questioning the constitutionality of any gun ban. Of course, to get this positive response, it also mixed in articles providing positive coverage of liberals who were doing good things such as defending civil liberties, calling for drug freedom and questioning foreign military adventures.

A 100% pure libertarian propaganda sheet will not get read by the general populace. And we do not need such. What we need is good coverage in good media – media that people will read. As a final data point, I note that I had both *The Free Liberal* and *The Libertarian Viewpoint* on an LP outreach table at a recent *Halloween with Hightower* event. For every *Libertarian Viewpoint* that was picked up, around ten copies of *The Free Liberal* were picked up.

The Business Model

The Free Liberal is a for-profit operation – one that requires the volunteer efforts of Libertarian activists to get distributed. That said, the profit/outreach factor is still far less than certain “non-profit” operations that feed off the libertarian movement. Kevin works far cheaper than either Perry Willis or Harry Browne. Keep him in beer money and he is happy to bust his butt for liberty.

A 100 count box can be had for \$15. Compare that with \$25 for *The Libertarian Viewpoint*. Get a larger box or subscribe for 8 or more months and the price drops. Year long box subscriptions can be had for less than \$.10/copy. And this is for a 20+ page newspaper *that people will read*.

Kevin has forgone color (which doesn't look that good on newsprint anyway) and hopes to make his profits with advertising. Actually LP affiliates and campus groups can also sell advertising. All you need to do is print up a local advertising supplement and put it in the middle of the paper before distributing.

So if you are a libertarian and live near a downtown area, a college campus, or anywhere else that liberals hang out, get a box or more of *The Free Liberal* and put stacks (with permission) in the coffee houses, newsstands, record stores, restaurants, student unions, libraries and so forth. Wire racks are available for those venues that have room for another rack. Outdoor boxes are expensive so are not yet available. But if you have a woodworker in your group, you could build some to put in front of post offices, subway stops, and bus stops. The local communists in Asheville do this with their paper with great success.

The Strategic Implications

The LNC spent all that time and money to come out with a strategic plan, and then didn't have any money to spend on it. The national office is recovering, but it is still broke. Well, here is a chance for local affiliates to take the lead and get us back on track.

Consider some of our goals:

Goal 5: Increase public awareness, acceptance of, and support for Libertarian ideas.

Well, having a libertarian free newspaper that non-libertarians will read is about as direct an approach to this goal as is possible. Oh, with a bigger budget we could do infomercials, movies and build our own schools, but those can wait until after we have grown a bit.

Goal 4: Increase the Libertarian Party's market share among youth.

While *The Free Liberal* is not strictly a campus newspaper, it is quite appropriate for campus distribution and distribution to student handouts. And given that the typical freshman college Libertarian is an introverted nerd inspired by Ayn Rand, science fiction or web pages, we need some campus activities for budding organizations that do not require great amounts of people skills. Getting *The Free Liberal* distributed is such an activity.

Goal 2: Strengthen Libertarian Party state and local organizations.

The effect on this goal is more indirect, but still important. The Libertarian Party's growth model to date -- books, presidential campaigns, and national direct mail -- recruits scattered members, too widely dispersed to put together a winning local campaign. Distribution of *The Free Liberal* by currently active local affiliates recruits new members/supporters/voters in areas where we already have an active local organization.

And now, a look at some of the strategies:

Strategy 2: Develop and use high-quality presentations of Libertarian ideas, which present both direction and destination, to support the work of affiliates, campaigns, the national party and individuals.

A quality libertarian newspaper is precisely the above. Get some for your outreach tables and watch people pick them up.

Strategy 6: Expand and strengthen Liberty Party organizations at levels other than the affiliate level (e.g. local, city, county, campus)

See what I said about Goals 2 and 4.

Strategy 10: Increase the number of new people comprising the Libertarian Party's support base.

The first step towards support of the LP is support of libertarianism.

Strategy 12: Strive to achieve a left/right balance among the Libertarian Party support base.

We have mined the Right with our direct mail outreach and talk show hosts like Neal Boortz. This is good, but if we just mine that area, all we do is create a second Republican Party to the benefit of the Democratic Party. Many libertarians realize this and thus do not support the LP. To bring in Right-leaning libertarians, we must show we can bring in Left-leaning libertarians.

Strategy 18: Focus resources to achieve the repeal of drug prohibition at the federal level by 2010 and get substantial credit for it.

If we are going to take the hit for being in favor of legalizing pot, we had better get the pot head vote!

Conclusion

If you are in a local or campus affiliate that can afford \$15/month or more for outreach, an affordable and effective tool is now available. The more affiliates who subscribe, the cheaper the printing becomes.

So order a box and start building a safe Libertarian district in your community – **today**.

This essay first appeared at libertyforall.net. Other such essays are archived at www.quiz2d.com/essays.