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Reforming LP News

Bill Winter is leaving as *LP News* editor. Under Bill Winter's tenure, *LP News* has grown in size and style. *LP News* became truly professional under Bill Winter. I can hand a non-Libertarian a copy of *LP News* and be proud of its quality.

Yet, I am happy to see Bill Winter go. For while Mr. Winter is skilled at what he does, to some extent he does the wrong thing well. That is, he has done a wonderful job of implementing his vision of what *LP News* should be, but I question his overall vision.

Pick up a copy of *LP News* and you will see the build-up of national Libertarian celebrities. And celebrity is measured the same way as in Hollywood: number of eyeball-hits, vs. anything to do with electability. Thus, we got extensive coverage of a *Canadian* professional wrestler saying he is a libertarian, and of a junior staff member getting on a game show. We got the promotion of Kenny Kramer, on the basis that he was the basis for an idiot character on a banal TV comedy. We still get the promotion of Harry Browne, despite the scandals that surrounded his last campaign, and the promotion of those near to the scandal who refused to report to the LNC.

OK, some of these people did deserve some of their promotion, but if these same figures are the only ones doing the work of the LP, then we are a bunch of donors supporting a small cadre of professionals and near professionals. I wouldn't mind such a vision of the party if the professional were actually winning elections, but they are not.

Michael Cloud is a great speaker and very energetic, but should we be putting scarce resources into his salary or should he get a non-LP day job? Let's see, Mr. Cloud went on a hunger strike when he failed to get covered by the Boston media. Meanwhile, LP Buncombe chair Clark Walter gets a column in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* on a monthly basis, Dave Goree gets page-long coverage of his projects in the *Mountain Xpress*, and Clarence Young has had many of his essays printed in the local papers. Last year, the Asheville Freedom Team of Dave Goree, Kevin Rollins and Bernard Carman was getting on average a couple of press hits a week – on a very low budget. Last month, the forum we put on promoting the ideas found in my earlier essays, “A Coherent Vision of Freedom” and “The Milsted Chart” got television coverage.

This is not to disparage Mr. Cloud or to claim the LP Buncombe activists are superhuman. I am trying to point out the power of working at a level where the Libertarian Party can be credible. We need to field our “A” teams against the Demopublican “B” teams. *LP News* has not promoted this vision, to say the least.

In my opinion, *LP News* should not only incite donations, but to incite activism. Also, when inciting donations, it should incite donations to credible races – those at the grassroots level. This has not been the focus of *LP News*.

Motivation requires several components, including: desire for the end result, belief that the end result is attainable, and knowledge of what to do to attain the end result. *LP News* has promoted the first two, but has been very weak on the last. When I submitted an article explaining the Economy of Scale project (sharing print runs of issue signs to build up the party brand), I was told by Mr. Winter that this article was “too technical” for *LP News*. Knowing the techniques is part of what it takes to get people motivated to action! And learning of new techniques of activism can also build morale. If the old techniques fail badly, then there had better be some improved techniques or future failure is inevitable!

So What Do We Do?

I am not campaigning for *LP News* editor. If I were to become editor, many would question *my* vision. Indeed, my vision of the party is more controversial than most members’ visions. I think the solution is that we need to have more than one vision represented in *LP News*. The Libertarian Party is not a non-profit foundation which raises money for professionals to spend. It is a grassroots volunteer organization. *LP News* should reflect this. We need stories and essays from the workers in the trenches for the workers in the trenches, and *LP News* should encourage passive members to *become* workers in the trenches.

At each LNC meeting, the regional representatives are supposed to submit a report as to what is going on in their regions. These reports are briefed during the meeting and then promptly forgotten. There is a stub in the archives section of lp.org for the regional reports, but it has no data.

I propose that the regional reports go in *LP News*. Better yet, I propose that each regional representative be allocated equal space in *LP News* for content from his respective region. This content can be stories, editorials on issues, and discussions of strategy. Since the regional reps are always answerable to the state chairs, they can be recalled if they abuse this privilege. By giving each rep an equal amount of space, we can guarantee that *LP News* does not play favorites to any particular region.

The professional editor of *LP News* should serve primarily as copy editor and ad manager. Stories which are truly national would also be in the hands of the national staff (or the contractor). But at least half of *LP News* should be in the hands of the regional reps.

The result would be a newspaper representing a grassroots volunteer organization. True, it would be grittier, more technical and at times more negative than the current *LP News*, and some members would not like this. However, polish can be intimidating; a mediocre article can be inspiring to someone else to write something better. A bit of negativity can prepare members for the doom that usually befalls our campaigns. For example, did the results in the Ed Thompson campaign come anywhere close to what *LP News* prepared us for? Did Project Archmedes perform according to expectations? How about our presidential races?

While facing reality can diminish contributions in the short run, facing reality can also function as a vaccine against burnout in the long run. And maybe, just maybe, a dose of cold water on the high profile unwinnable campaigns could push a few dollars to those smaller campaigns which have a bit of credibility.