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Let's Talk About The Pledge

The Pledge is probably the most discussed and cussed element of the LP. I am on record for getting rid of the pledge, for 3 reasons:

1. It is open to interpretation. When I signed it originally, I thought FORCE referred to violence. Other people believe it means the perfect example of a free society based on anarchist principles. The problem with this is because of its interpretive nature, large groups of LP members will never agree on what it actually does mean, and this becomes another divider within the LP.

2. David Nolan, the founder of the LP, has made it plain that the only reason the pledge came about was the shield the LP from possibly being considered a revolutionary body by Nixon's government, such as the Black Panthers. The meanings ascribed to the Pledge regarding non use of force (meaning any sort of force at all, including force required to have a police dept., etc) were added after the fact from various other movements related to the broader movement.

3. Having a pledge to swear before you can be a participant in the LP is directly counter-intuitive to a political party that espouses personal freedom and choices. It shows that we do not have the courage of our convictions and that we are afraid of actual openness and freedom within to choose how we express ourselves within the broader freedom movement. There is no reason to restrict LP members - because the simple act of self identifying with the LP restricts you anyway, and The Pledge is too vague and broad in scope to be of any real use as a litmus test. See #1 above.

The Following is the current Pledge:

I hereby certify that I do not believe in or advocate the initiation of force to achieve social or political goals.

It seems to me that the compromise position on this would be a very simple statement. The Libertarian Reform Caucus has the following on its website:

The Libertarian Party will always stand for more liberty and less government on every issue. As a member of the Libertarian Party, I will not attempt to change this.

That's OK, and a great improvement, but it does not address the real issue: Should LP members be forced to sign a pledge? I don't believe the LP can remain true to its principles and yet force prospective members to sign something. There's a third alternative: Along with the Squyres Proposal as may be adopted at the next LNC meeting, the LNC could offer a pledge for Officers and Candidates. Those in positions of leadership and our candidates are a much better tar-

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A Change in Direction

I strongly believe that the Libertarian Party (LP) is our best hope to promote liberty, recover our birthright of freedom, and restore America to its constitutional basis. To a minor degree, the LP has been successful. However, we are neither affecting public policy nor electing candidates to higher offices.

For years, the Libertarian Party has struggled with building an organizational infrastructure, founding state and local parties, establishing name recognition, creating a positive public image, and recruiting a core base of members. It is time for us to advance to "moving public policy in a libertarian direction".

We must do what we can to turn the LP into an active and key player in American politics. Imagine what headlines like "Libertarians Lead Charge to Overturn Patriot Act" will do for our public image.

The Libertarian National Committee (LNC) is charged with giving voice to our principles. From a LNC typical meeting it appears that databases are more important than combating the undeclared war in Iraq. Administration is very important, but our myopic focus on them is counterproductive. Most situations would resolve themselves if attending to proper priorities brought us increasing membership and contributions. We need to change the direction of our beloved party. There are ten key issues which I want the national party to implement, namely:

Major Changes in How We Raise Funds

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Like many of you, I strongly disagree with the recent vote of the LNC to increase dues to \$50. The Libertarian Party should be moving in a direction of zero dues, as proposed by George Squyres. This would increase our membership numbers while forcing the LP to focus where it should – on politics. One does not have to pay \$25 or \$50 to be a Republican or Democrat. Why are we trying to compete with them while maintaining more stringent requirements?

As an interim step, I support decreasing the amount of dues or having various levels of dues with corresponding benefit levels. As an example, one who pays \$10 might receive a membership card and access to an online version of LP News, but not the printed and mailed copy. With any change in the amount of dues members pay, UMP payments to state affiliates should reflect the change in the percentage of the dues increase or decrease. Anything short of this is not in keeping with the spirit of the Unified Membership Plan (UMP) agreements.

The primary focus of our fundraising endeavors should be issue-oriented. We should employ 21st century technologies. Better utilization of the Internet is imperative. The amount of mailed

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fundraising letters should decrease, because their efficiency has decreased over the last few years. .

Show someone a television commercial online and if they like the message, they are likely to contribute to air it. Establish a new office position and raise funds for it before filling the position. If party members feel strongly enough to place someone in the position – they will pay for it. People generally prefer putting their money where they think it will do the most good – as opposed to throwing it into the black hole of general administrative expenses.

We should establish fundraising causes and goals, earmark the funds collected, and post a graphical meter of fundraising success on the Internet. This should be augmented with phone calls, e-mails, and even snail mail, as required. However, the goal, and our progress towards it, should always be prominently posted.

This approach works – as clearly evidenced by the work of my team in the latter days of the Badnarik campaign.

Better Candidate and Ballot Access Support

The Libertarian Party needs to support its candidates better. To begin, it should not take plane flights or endless communications with the LNC and national office for candidates for federal office to obtain every membership list legally available. One or more liaison officers should be selected from the volunteer base or office interns during busy election cycles. This(these) officer(s) would have the responsibility of acting as intermediaries between the national office and campaigns. Website and LP News coverage of our most viable candidates should increase, as well as the current level of campaign promotion by the party.

Likewise, the Libertarian Party should allocate a greater proportion of its resources to ballot access issues for federal races, and implement a more effective ballot access strategy. In addition to fundraising for signature collection, the LP needs to provide a greater level of support for legislative and judicial activity with the goal of reducing and eventually eliminating all ballot access impediments.

Hire More Key People

We should create greater Libertarian visibility and enhance operations by appropriately fundraising and then recruiting people to serve in the following positions at the national office: Political Director, Fundraising Director, and Volunteer Coordinator. With better fundraising methods employed and specific goals for these positions established, earmarked contributions will more than likely fund these positions. However, these positions should remain vacant until such time as the party has raised enough money to fill one or more of them. Following the success of a program such as this, other paid positions should be considered, such as Ballot Access Coordinator or Legislative Director.

A Greater Level of Transparency

According to the Bible verse (and subsequent song), “For

everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.” This includes a time for secrecy, even in a political party. However, it is often easy to take secrecy too far.

In general, there should be no secret votes of the LNC or behind closed door executive committee sessions. A reason given in the past to justify such secrecy involved the example of hiring and firing directors at the national office. The explanation provided that a member of the LNC might be too timid to cast a public vote to dismiss such employees. My belief is that if one cannot accept this minimal level of pressure, he or she is not qualified to serve on the national committee. As with our Congress, the votes of our representatives should always be made public.

There are times when discretion may be desired, however. As an example, in order not to alert the opposition, there may be times when it is not advisable to announce the date that a new television advertisement airs. Likewise, an employee may wish to take a leave of absence because of a very personal health or family issue. In the former case, it is reasonable not to announce the commercial until after it debuts. In the latter case, simply announcing that an employee is taking a leave of absence for personal reasons will suffice and spare that person unnecessary embarrassment.

In general, common sense should prevail with regard to secretive actions by the LNC.

Change our Model of Operation

Recently, some members of the LNC have seemed to be unduly concerned about running the LP as if it were a business. In business, there is a product or service to sell. The product of the LP is politics. However, in our focus on administrative details, we are forgetting the product and neglecting the customer. The technical term for a business that disregards its product and customers is “bankrupt”.

It is clear that our priorities are out of order when we spend more time focusing on a database rather than combating the undeclared war in Iraq or argue more about the dues structure as opposed to reversing the growing political movement towards a gay marriage ban. The LP needs to shift from a business model to one of politics, politics, and more politics.

Practical Political Objectives

The LP Platform contains many wonderful elements - almost every one required for us to enjoy a free society. It is with great pride that I call myself a member of the “Party of Principle”. Many of my reformed-minded friends and advisors believe that we should modify the platform, removing some of the planks which are not currently politically viable. Many of my activist friends and advisors feel that removal of any existing planks is a compromise which would violate our claim to be principled.

There are pros and cons to both sets of arguments. I agree with both sides that this is an important issue. However, the authority to change the platform does not fall within the auspices of the LNC, but with members of the party through the convention process. Therefore, I'd like to make it clear that I will support the platform as it currently stands and also support it with any revi-

sions enacted that I can reasonably imagine.

The key issue is that some of our positions are more palatable than others to the typical voter. In political campaigns, candidates typically pick a few items from the party platform upon which to base their campaign. They naturally tend to steer away from the items which might cause problems with their campaign, while they emphasize those which are likely to bring about the greatest vote total. The specific issues obviously vary from race to race and in different geographic locations. It is important that we remember that the primary mission of the candidate is to win every possible vote from both inside and outside the party – not to convince voters to join the party.

Likewise, we need to be selective about how and when we target certain political issues. A great example exists with the war on drugs. While the public is generally not accepting the absolute elimination of drug prohibition, they are more than willing to legalize medical marijuana. This does not mean we should strike absolute drug decriminalization from the platform, but that we should focus our political efforts where they are most likely to succeed. We should relegate the less popular issues to the interim step of educational outreach – until such time as these issues have been accepted into the mainstream of practical politics.

There are some issues with which we need to take baby steps, and on others we must never sacrifice one inch. We should never compromise our principles, but we clearly need to be selective about which battles to fight.

Wider Range of Political Issues

While decidedly not proud of the fact, I used to be a Republican. What attracted me to the LP was its steadfast position on limited government and decreased taxation combined with a no compromise approach to the Second Amendment. I still feel that way, and tax increases are still my favorite political issue to combat.

However, many people approach the LP from what the mainstream media call “the left” and others are natural libertarians. As a national party, it is crucial that we target a wider range of political issues.

As an example, I remember looking at the LP website one day months after the war started. I recall there were over 20 mentions of taxes on the front page – but not one mention of our undeclared war. I went back to the site every day for quite some time, and still found no indication that people were dying daily in Iraq. We squandered a lot of political capital over our reluctance to properly prioritize our political agenda.

The national party does need to be mindful of state and local affiliates when broaching new political targets. A popular issue in New York or California may be detrimental in Alabama or Ohio. A lesson personally learned from the Badnarik campaign is that national political entities must communicate about any change in the political agenda with state and local affiliates, to the extent time allows.

It is past time that we restore a proper balance to our political agenda.

Reallocation of Political Resources

Since becoming a Libertarian, I’ve engaged in many political battles. From personal experience, I will tell you that it is much easier to obtain a greater level of media coverage and enjoy positive public relations when dealing with political issues and referenda than it is to get a Libertarian elected to public office. In dealing with issue-related campaigns, one much more easily establishes positive relations with the media, other activists engaged in the same battle, and the general public. As with the candidate who becomes well known and admired for championing some cause or another, the Libertarian Party should likewise become known and admired.

We need to allocate significantly greater resources toward issue-oriented campaigns and coalition activities until such time as our candidates have a greater likelihood of winning public office. Our recent work with organizations such as the Marijuana Policy Project, attendance at the CPAC Conference, and similar activities are a great start in this regard. We need to amplify such efforts in order to increase the viability of our candidates for public office.

Better Utilization of Technology

Libertarians were once renowned for being leaders in the use of the Internet for political purposes. Over the past few years, not only have we failed to lead the way, but we fell significantly behind our political competition. The Internet successes of the Russo and Badnarik campaigns should have awakened the national party to this shortcoming – but complaints fell upon deaf ears or the excuse of insufficient resources was offered. As an example, bloggers were not credentialed as members of the press at the LP Convention in Atlanta - unlike the Republican and Democratic conventions.

To be sure, I am very pleased with very recent changes in direction that Shane Cory is taking with LP.org, and I would like to greatly increase the amount of support made available to him.

Considering how inexpensive Internet technologies are when compared to competitive media outlets, there is no excuse for the national office not to have every reasonably available Internet resource at their fingertips. Additionally, there is a great level of Internet expertise available among party members – members who are aching to assist with the LP with Internet issues. These volunteers need to be continually utilized to keep the LP website (and other Internet activities) a minimum of one step ahead of the other political parties.

Likewise, national television and radio campaigns are a must for any political idea or candidate to succeed in the 21st century. It is imperative that we better utilize all electronic media to a much greater degree.

Better Utilization of People

We are neither human resources nor personnel assets. We

are people. As such, all of us have much to offer the Libertarian Party and libertarian cause. I've known of people who would not return calls to party members unless they had contributed significant amounts to Libertarian coffers. These elitist practices need to end immediately.

We also need to utilize our activist base more effectively by allowing and encouraging volunteer assistance. The national party and members of the LNC should devote more of their time to listening to active, prospective, and lapsed members of the Libertarian Party. To some degree, this will require better use of weblogs and other electronic forums. But telephone calls should always be returned .

It is important for us to remember that all party members are not equally financially gifted, but most (when reasonably asked) are willing to provide the most valuable asset of all - our time.

Libertarian ideals can be at the forefront of public policy and Libertarian candidates can succeed – but a great deal of our success depends on the actions of the leadership of the Libertarian Party. We must change the direction of the Libertarian Party by reforming our National Committee. I am asking for your help and support.

...Stephen P. Gordon

(Continued from page 1) **[Eliminate the Pledge?]**
get for a pledge than the rank and file.

I offer the following Pledge for discussion:
I agree with The Libertarian Party that achieving greater personal individual choice and freedom, to be obtained by engagement in the political process, is the overriding goal of the Libertarian Party. As a Libertarian Party Candidate or Officer, I will uphold this principle to the best of my ability.

This pledge is a POSITIVE statement. It does the same thing as the present pledge, but it does not contain multiple meanings according to what the reader is pre-disposed to believe, and it targets those who seek leadership in the party and those who seek to run for public office under our banner. If we are to have a pledge, that is where such a thing belongs.

I think this could be a good compromise between the factions in the LP and serve as a uniting pledge, rather than a dividing pledge such as the one we have now. This missing link completes the makeover that the LP so sorely needed to broaden its base.

Timothy West

