

---

# Libertarian Strategy Gazette

Volume 4 Number 9

September 2004

---

## The Strategic Plan is Dead

by Sean Haugh

Until a couple months ago, I was running a series in this space on each goal and strategy of the Libertarian Party's Strategic Plan (SPT). I've always been a huge fan of SPT, and wanted to do everything I could to market it to the party at a grassroots level.

It's a rather detailed Plan, the product of a year's work by some of our best and brightest. SPT was chock full of great ideas, with a reasonable level of focus around our Mission Statement ("to move public policy in a libertarian direction by electing candidates of the Libertarian Party to public office"). It required acceptance and implementation by the party at every level, but that was part of its grassroots beauty. It was a well refined toolbox with something for everybody. It just needed an effective salesman.

Well, at least that's what I thought.

I said at the beginning that I reserved the right to suspend the series at any time if it didn't generate enough interest. I did receive many kind comments, and some not so kind, to many of the articles. But when I stopped running them, the only person who seemed to notice was my editor.

All that says is that maybe I am not the best salesman for this product, or maybe I chose the wrong way to promote it. But then came the convention.

Michael Gilson De Lemos, probably the most ardent Champion of SPT, offered a resolution to the convention delegates to affirm the Strategic Plan. It failed.

Now, some advocates of SPT are perfectly willing to try again next convention, or move forward with SPT simply because of its perceived value. One could argue that the resolution was hastily presented, or that maybe more salesmanship can win over more party members. The vote could be second guessed from just about any angle.

As for myself, I place ultimate stock in the will of the convention. After all, it is supposed to be the grassroots voice of the party. I also am of the opinion that our party members are a pretty sharp bunch. So the "no" vote can only be interpreted one of two ways, probably both in some combination. Either the delegates knew about SPT and rejected it, or they didn't know enough about it and took a pass.

Either way, we failed in selling it. SPT Final Report is dated August 18, 2001. We've had almost three years to gain acceptance for the Plan from state and local parties, and from the membership.

They ain't buying. SPT is dead.

In fact, I'm beginning to think that the whole concept of strategic planning, at least as we conceive of it, is not possible in such a decentralized organization.

Here in NC, we have begun our own Strategic Planning Effort (SPE, to distinguish itself from SPT), which is in its information gathering stages. These local meetings have for the most part been very poorly attended. (Those Wilmington guys are the exception - as usual they are on the ball, God bless 'em.) Of course, it's early yet, and our SPE could pick up steam. It's also true that maybe we could be doing a better job of promoting it. Maybe my dear cherished colleagues here in NC can make something of it yet - if anyone can, it's them.

But even if we are successful in developing a plan which makes perfect sense on the surface, we face the same problem that did in the national effort. We have to get the county parties and local activists to buy in.

Maybe a strategic plan could be sold and we just didn't come up with the right one in SPT. One SPT participant noted that "a toolbox isn't a plan." SPT had six Goals and 20 Strategies. It might have worked if we had boiled it all down to one goal with tactics to back it up - how to elect Libertarians.

On the other hand, probably not. Libertarians are a notoriously ornery lot. We distrust all authority unless we appoint it personally and subject it to a constant job performance review. If you took your average Libertarian, didn't feed him for three days, then gave him access to a hot meal and had a stranger in a uniform command him, "Eat!", he'd most likely flip the guy the bird and walk away.

Similarly, we have no real reason to think that if some distant authority within the party commanded that everyone must work to elect Libertarians anyone would pay it any mind, even when we all pretty much agree that this is our reason to exist.

A friend of mine once explained how he got every idea to improve the business he worked for adopted, even though he was an entry level employee. The trick, he explained, is to get the boss to think it was his idea all along.

Every Libertarian is the boss of his or her own activism. Given our fierce individualism, this is far more true of us than any other party or movement. You have to convince the bosses it was their idea.

Good leaders in the party do this. They sell an idea by doing it themselves. If others like it, they join in the activity. People love success, and they want to be a part of it.

A little over ten years ago, we started gaining more public policy influence and started electing Libertarians in greater numbers, simply because we realized that's what political parties do. Before then, our efforts had been diffuse, with many different fundamental ideas of what the purpose of the Libertarian Party should be.

But once some found a successful path in the electoral arena, most of our activity coalesced around running candidates. The Mission Statement passed in convention in 1994 distilled the essence of this process into a single sentence.

Sure, the debate about what the Libertarian Party should do to change public policy in a Libertarian direction continues. It will probably always be with us. And the truth of it is, as long as we don't forget to put candidates on the ballot, it's all good. It's fine to use the party to educate voters or write issue papers or promote private charity or whatever. The candidates can use it all. Do what you want, just Do Something. And hey, if they like what you do, the candidates probably will make it their own idea and join in.

Yet the vast majority of the membership now accepts that political parties like ours exist to run candidates and try to get them elected. They bought into this notion not because of any great and glorious plan, but because people went out and showed the way.

I'm beginning to think that's the only way anything will ever get done in this party - people just going out and *Doing Something. Maybe we will never need a Plan, just Action.* I'm also beginning to think that's a really beautiful thing.

Sean Haugh is the Treasurer of Freedom Ballot Access, a 527 political organization that last month raised \$12,000 and was instrumental in putting Michael Badnarik on the ballot in Ohio, Connecticut, Alabama, and was helpful in many other states. This column appeared previously in Liberty For All libertyforall.net. To read about Freedom Ballot Access [www.freedomballotaccess.com](http://www.freedomballotaccess.com).

**Be yourname@4liberty.net**  
**NOW ONLY \$14/**  
**MONTH**  
**TO LIBERTARIANS**  
**www.excell.net**  
**Providers of Internet Services**  
**[http://excell.net/excellnet\\_national-dialups.htm](http://excell.net/excellnet_national-dialups.htm)**  
**Dialup in most states and Canada.**  
**\$14.00 per month special rate**  
**Libertarian Owned!**  
**Libertarian Operated!**  
**Supporters of the**  
**Pioneer Valley Libertarian Association!**  
**National Dialup Service**  
**[excell.net/excellnet\\_national-dialups.htm](http://excell.net/excellnet_national-dialups.htm)**  
**Available in most states and some in**  
**Canada. \$14 per month to**  
**Libertarians.**

Let Freedom Ring  
 c/o George Phillies  
 87-6 Park Avenue  
 Worcester MA 01605

the difficulties the Christian traditionalists have after they capture county or state committees. Their opponents hound them for skulking behind the scenes, accusing them of secretive political conspiracies. Fair or not, the charges are damaging. I don't recommend trying to capture another party. Self-Reliance: There is no real historical precedent in the United States for marching out and starting a successful political party. Plenty of people have launched third parties. The parties of Teddy Roosevelt and Henry Wallace and John Anderson are one with the snows of yesteryear; parties of George Wallace and Ross Perot are fading rapidly. The closest you can find to a party created by self-reliance is the Republican. They floundered until they absorbed the fragmenting Whig Party.

As an approach, self-reliance is easy to explain. We are going to start a new major political party using the same election laws that the Democrats and Republicans often obey. We will have candidates, supporters, campaign committees and funds. We have the same objective of winning election. As an approach, self-reliance is easy to defend. We aren't trying to corrupt their politicians into supporting our ideas. We aren't sneaking around behind people's backs trying to steal the party they worked hard to build. We're simply trying to do what the Democrats and Republicans have already done -- become a major party.

If no one has successfully launched a third party before, so what? If our ancestors only did the things their parents had done, we would be staring across the Bering Sea and the Atlantic and the Rio Grande, gazing at an unpopulated America. Doing something new is as American as apple pie and maple sugar. Our parents did something new, and we can, too.

**Discussion: Historical Aside -- Has Anyone Been Here Before?** Hasn't anyone built up a political party from ground zero before? When the Constitution was adopted, the founding fathers believed that American would not have political parties. Indeed, as soon as political parties appeared (election of 1800), the Constitution suffered catastrophic failure. The Presidential Election of 1800 went to the House of Representatives because the original Electoral College scheme did not work with partisan elections.

Our original parties symbolized the interests of two of the founding fathers, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. The Federalists faded from electoral significance. After a period ('Era of Good Feelings') of one-party government, the two parties resurfaced as the Democratic Republicans and the Whigs. The Democratic Republicans became the modern Democratic Party. The Whig Party crumbled. The Republican startup failed in the election of 1856. If not for the incredible political ineptitude of President Buchanan, the Republicans would likely have gone no further. Instead, Buchanan drove much of the Whig Party political apparatus and membership into the hands of the Republicans, leading to the two parties that have endured to this day.

In the 20th century, a long series of third parties have appeared. Most have gone by the wayside. Some, such as

Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose party and John Anderson's Presidential campaign, were one-man efforts that vanished with their candidate. Henry Wallace's Progressive Party was somewhat more substantial. George Wallace's American Independent Party and Ross Perot's Reform Party rose beyond their patron founder, running candidates for Congress and other office and establishing functional parties in some states. In the United States, explicitly ideological parties have been rare. In post-WWI America, the socialists elected Congressmen and state legislators.

Many socialist ideas were later put into effect by the Democrats and Republicans. Recent ideological parties include the Greens (environmental activism), Natural Law (religious), and of course the Libertarian Party. All of these parties have one thing in common: none of them have thrived or taken power.

### Chapter Two Paths to Libertarian Victory

There are three widely-discussed strategic plans for advancing the Libertarian movement:

- Membership Recruitment
- Local Organization
- Moral Armament

This Chapter introduces these plans. Each plan has implementation proposals, though in most cases those implementation proposals were never formally adopted. I'll describe each plan. I'll give reasons to conclude that no strategic plan has proven its value yet.

Membership Recruitment focuses on increasing the number of dues-paying, card-carrying members of the national Libertarian Party. This strategic plan is the de facto basis for national Libertarian Party activities. Perry Willis's Operation Everywhere describes a detailed implementation path for Membership Recruitment. However, Operation Everywhere is often claimed to be a draft; it has apparently never been officially adopted.

The Membership Recruitment strategy proposes that the national Libertarian Party should assemble hundreds of thousands of members. These members will give the Libertarian Party the resources and public presence needed for electoral victory. Associated with Membership Recruitment are massive fundraising mailings, the Unified Membership Plan, and Project Archimedes. At the 1998 Libertarian Party National Convention, Membership Recruitment was championed by the successful candidacy of David Bergland for National chair.

The Local Organization strategy focuses on local action, local political campaigns, and appropriate state and national structures to support the groups that will Make Liberty Happen! Local Organization is the major alternative within the Libertarian Party to Membership Recruitment. Local Organization has been discussed for many years, but without an implementation proposal. Stand Up for Liberty! is that implementation proposal. Local Organization is associated

with libertarian town clubs, masses of candidates for community and state legislative office, and donors encouraged to keep their money close to home. State and Federal organizations have important, specified roles in support of local organization. At the 1998 Libertarian Party National Convention, Local Organization was associated with Gene Cisewski's unsuccessful candidacy for National Chair.

Third, Moral Armament focuses on libertarian education and the don't-vote-it-only-encourages-them philosophy. This strategy, represented by Ayn Rand's critique of the Libertarian Party, Claire Wolfe's "101 Things to Do...", and specific-interest civil action groups, arises from the assertion that electoral action is certain to fail. In contrast, moral education and private organization to ignore the state will bring us a libertarian society. At the 1998 Libertarian Party National Convention, Moral Armament was symbolically associated with None of The Above's unsuccessful candidacy for National Chair.

In short, Membership Recruitment would advance the libertarian movement by expanding a single large national organization. Local Organization would advance the libertarian movement by cultivating local groups. Moral Armament would advance the libertarian movement by educating individual people.

Now some detail on each strategy:

**MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT:** The Membership Recruitment path to Libertarian victory is described in the 104 pages of the book Operation Everywhere, which remains the most explicit implementation proposal for Membership Recruitment. This eclectic volume has a remarkably broad sweep, spanning everything from general strategies through to a style manual for fundraising letters and a list of questions new members should ask their party officers.

The grand strategic objective outlined in Operation Everywhere is to build a Libertarian electoral majority at every level of government. The Conversion and Capture options are specifically rejected. To find good strategies for the Libertarian Party, Willis first considers various approaches: focus on one campaign, recruit billionaires, get equal media coverage, don't run a Presidential candidate. He concludes that a successful campaign needs candidates, contributions, volunteers, and voters. His volume implicitly claims that there is only one source for all these resources, namely members of the national Libertarian Party. It is Party members who become Libertarian candidates. It is Party members who volunteer their time and contribute their wealth to build strong campaigns. Finally, it is Party members in the form of Libertarian-registered voters who Vote Libertarian! to provide the core vote for electoral victory.

Clearly there are a variety of paths to getting candidates, contributions, volunteers, and voters. Willis advocates concentrating our efforts on raising money, and using that money to recruit more members for the national Libertarian Party. Willis demonstrates where this path leads when he urges budding Libertarian activists to contact their state

party and ask Willis's suggested questions. Of 39 questions, 24 deal with fundraising, members and donor databases, and recruiting and retaining members. Four questions deal with who is running for or in office. The notion that the budding activist might volunteer to help in a campaign does not arise. Instead, Willis suggests volunteering to help local activists take care of their databases. The balance of questions reveals the core plan: recruit a group of donors and volunteers, whose primary objective is to recruit more donors and volunteers.

Where do you find these people? Operation Everywhere advocates recruiting national Party Members from the ranks of registered Libertarian Party voters and members of other groups of Libertarian bent. The first part of this approach is restricted at most to the 28 states having registration by party. Operation Everywhere further advocates what it views as a rational division of labor, with the national party hiring professional staff and renting space, doing massive fundraising for advertising and direct mail campaigns, and circulating knowledge between state and local parties. Once they have the resources, larger state parties are expected to professionalize (i.e., hire staff and rent space), do direct mail and advertising, and support local organizations. Local parties and state parties in small states distribute literature, post signs, have booths and public speakers, and do social events.

Under the plan described in Operation Everywhere, local Libertarian parties do run candidates. The purpose of their campaigns is to mobilize volunteers. The volunteers work to identify prospective Libertarian Party members; they don't work to get their candidate elected. At some future date, when there are hundreds of thousands of Libertarian Party members, we will have more volunteers and more money than our opponents. Then we will start winning elections.

Operation Everywhere specifically rejects the notion of advancing to Libertarian victory by winning local elections. Local electoral victories are seen as a distraction: "...diverting important resources from more viable projects." Under Operation Everywhere, local elections will be won after national growth has happened; local victories are not a path toward national growth at a later date.

**LOCAL ORGANIZATION:** The local organization approach to politics takes its theme from the Late Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill, Speaker of the House of Representatives and party organizer. In 1948, O'Neill wrested control of the Massachusetts State Legislature from the Republicans. In O'Neill's words: All politics is local!

O'Neill's words recognize legitimate places for local, state, and national Party groups. Groups at each level have their legitimate tasks, tasks that are most effectively performed by that level. Tasks focus around running candidates and winning elections, and on building the party to run and win in the future. To perform these tasks, we need to raise money, recruit volunteers, organize, and develop information systems. However, donors, volunteers, groups, and information are prized because they help win elections, not because they are valuable by themselves.

How do we build a party that wins on every level -- local, state, and Federal? The local organization strategy says that our best path is to create local Libertarian clubs. We then elect aldermen, county commissioners, and perhaps state legislators. Each local group must cover enough area to include a critical mass of activists. Each local organization must be local enough that every member sees positive results flowing from her or his personal actions. Local Organization says that elections and outreach should be the focus of the party. Fundraising and membership drives are useful tools that help us win elections and do outreach, but fundraising and membership drives are not our primary objectives.

In the local organization strategy, political campaigns are judged on victory, synergy, and foundation building. Campaigns are judged on how successful they were, how they reinforced each other, and how they built for the future. Isolated campaigns by third party activists usually lose. Exploiting the synergy between local, state, and Federal campaigns is more productive.

What is synergy? Synergy is the process that lets weak processes reinforce each other, so that their consequences are stronger than the sum of the parts. Consider the Libertarian Presidential campaign. It is unlikely that our AD 2000 Presidential candidate will win. However, by spending her time meeting the press and appearing with local candidates, the Presidential candidate can generate publicity for local candidates. Thanks to the Presidential campaign, local candidates become more likely to win.

The link between local and higher candidates works both ways. A Libertarian activist who has been elected to local office creates an updraft, strengthening campaigns for higher office. In Wales, Massachusetts, local Libertarian activist John Brickner has been a Town Finance Committee member. In 1998, Libertarian candidates for Massachusetts statewide offices got two, three, or more times the vote than they did a few towns away.

**MORAL ARMAMENT:** A third approach to a libertarian future comes from Ayn Rand's critique of the Libertarian Party. While Libertarian Party activists say that political organization causes change, Objectivists say that electoral success reveals that you have already changed the system. You don't make people into Libertarians because you win elections; you win elections because you have already turned people into Libertarians.

Libertarians are said by Objectivists to put the cart in front of the horse: You can't make the sun rise by making the rooster sing. Similarly, say the Objectivists, you can't win elections by organizing a political party. Instead, you persuade people to support libertarian principles; once people become libertarians, the party takes care of itself.

How do you cause change, if not through politics? The Objectivist position is that change comes from moral education. When enough voters and politicians choose to behave mor-

ally, government will become moral. Moral education comes from philosophers and moralists. By capturing the institutions of higher learning, the schools of ethics and philosophy, future leaders will be taught correct morals. Correct morals will then triumph. Objectivists urge us to compete in the marketplace of ideas, by recruiting college professors, writers, philosophers, and intellectuals. It is these people who will lead the thoughts of the younger generation to libertarian principles.

An alternative form of moral armament is implied by Claire Wolfe's book 101 Things To Do 'Til The Revolution, a volume by an avowed pacifist anticipating that non-violent action will fail. Wolfe's position is profoundly pessimistic. She writes: "America is at that awkward stage. It's too late to work within the system, but too early to shoot the bastards. On the road to tyranny, we've gone so far that polite political action is about as useless as a miniskirt in a convent...The "revolution" of the book title may never be a shooting war. I hope to hell it isn't..."

Wolfe's approach to moral armament is to encourage you: to support freedom, to learn what your freedoms are, and to guard yourself against people who want to take your freedoms away. She urges you to take non-violent action, consistent with your moral principles and sense of personal safety, to resist efforts to take away your freedoms. Wolfe proposes that events happen when it is their time. She hopes that the state of freedom will improve in this country, preferably dramatically. However, improvement will only happen when enough people choose to take freedom for themselves.

Wolfe is obscure about how people will take back their freedom. Of the electoral approach, she notes that voting is compulsory in many dictatorships. Perhaps we will all stop taking the villains seriously, so their authority collapses under waves of laughter. Wolfe proposes that the solution will involve people spontaneously organizing themselves. Until we are much closer to taking back our freedoms, we are not going to know what we are going to do. At the critical moment, if freedom succeeds, the right deeds will become totally obvious. (When will all this occur? That's hard to predict.)

These are the three strategic plans, outlining three possible paths to Libertarian victory.

As I said in the previous Chapter, our ultimate objective is a Libertarian America. The grand strategy I advocate is to get the Alphabet and the Numbers, the tools we need to win elections, leading us to the Vs of Victory.

I've described three strategies that the Libertarian movement could follow, three potential paths to our ultimate objective: Membership Recruitment, Local Organization, and Moral Armament.

\*Membership Recruitment proposes that libertarians should pool their resources into a single big national group. The group's leaders develop the movement by recruiting more

members and doing more fundraising. At some future date, enough members and resources will be in place, and the Libertarian Party will finally grow from the top down into a Libertarian electoral majority.

\*Local Organization proposes libertarians should develop local groups in their home towns, run candidates, and do outreach. Local activists build on their successes, positive results coming together into a successful national movement built from the bottom up. When town, village, and county governments have fallen into Libertarian hands, state and Federal governments are sure to follow.

\*Moral Armament proposes that we develop individual libertarians by converting Americans to libertarian ideas. We will know we succeeded when Libertarian candidates win elections regularly.

Most people understand that each strategic plan could include pieces of the other two plans. Membership Recruitment does not have to exclude local groups and outreach efforts. Local organization does not exclude running someone for President or searching for new Libertarian issues. Moral armament requires running some candidates for office: Without candidates, how can you tell that the American public has been persuaded to support your cause?

HAS ONE OF THESE STRATEGIES BEEN PROVEN CORRECT?

None of these strategies has worked. Yet.

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT is a sophisticated version of the general strategy Libertarians have followed since the party's formation. The Party began in 1972 by running a Presidential candidate. We have had heavily funded -- by Libertarian standards -- Presidential campaigns ever since. Most Libertarian Congressional campaigns spend hundreds or a few thousand dollars.

In each of the past five election cycles, the Libertarian Party focused on its Presidential campaign. Results were mixed. Over the last fifteen years, every campaign has spent hundreds of thousands or several million dollars. Each candidate received a half-million votes (within a factor of two) and finished between third and fifth. Each candidate ran limited advertising. Some debated other third-party candidates. The most significant progress has been with ballot access; we are getting more efficient at putting our Presidential candidate on the ballot in all 50 states.

Membership Recruitment for the national Party is based on the Unified Membership Plan (UMP) and Project Archimedes. The UMP defines members of participating state parties to be national members. UMP thus increases the membership of the national Party by defining state party members to be national members, too.

