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Letters on Libertarian Strategy Detailed and Unstructured Strategic Planning

What is a Strategic Plan?

Strategic Planning is not a new idea. Successful businessmen have been doing strategic planning for millennia.

25 years ago, it was understandable that the newly-founded Libertarian Party would have done little in the way of strategic planning. In 2000, a quarter-century later, the elected National Committee should routinely treat strategic planning as a primary task. Failure to treat strategic planning as a primary task -- as marked, for example, by the lack of a long-since-approved strategic plan based on analysis and outcome assessment -- would represent a gross failure of the national party leadership.

What do we mean by planning?

In some cases, we can be quite detailed. In other cases, we must be far less specific. In every case, we must remember that we are a party of individuals, many of whom are strong individualists. Libertarian Leadership usefully consists of proposing projects, mobilizing support for activists who are actually doing real work, and leading from the front by doing real work yourself. Efforts to lead by telling other people what they should do are relatively less effective.

Suppose that we adopted "every voter should be able to Vote Libertarian! at least once in every major election" as a major party objective. That objective ensures that the party name -- whether printed on the ballot or spoken by candidate and surrogates -- is kept at least slightly before the voting public. That objective demonstrates that we are not a Here Today, Gone Tomorrow Party like the "parties" of Henry Wallace, George Wallace, John Anderson, and Ross Perot.

A partial path to that objective would be to insure 50-state ballot access for our Presidential candidate, as was done in 1980, 1992, and 1996.* To travel that path via strategic planning, one would identify well in advance what had to be done in each state. Strategic planning would ensure that any needed fundraising took place in early 1999 -- leaving plenty of time for unexpected contingencies. Any needed commercial petitioners would be hired in 1999, as needed state by state, getting low 1999 petitioner prices without disrupting other Party operations. In contrast, without effective strategic planning, fundraising might be a late 1999 emergency, disrupting normal Party operations and leaving it uncertain if petitioners could be hired before their rates rose to election-year levels.

[Strategic Planning] (Continued on page 2)

Poster

The poster on page 3 advertises the PVLA/LfM Rally to And the War On Iraq. You may reprint. For color PDFs: <http://www.libertyformassachusetts.com/home/antiwarrally2.pdf>

Local Organization: The Path to Victory

From the Editor's book Stand Up for Liberty! Available at <http://www.3mpub.com/phillies>

Chapter Three

Local Organization The Path to Libertarian Victory

In this chapter, I discuss the reasons that Libertarians should use to choose their party's strategy. The reasons are answers to questions of principle, questions of substance, and purely practical questions. All reasons support the same choice of strategy.

Principles are our Libertarian understanding about how the world works. Our principles reveal that small government, low taxes, the entire Bill of Rights, and the invisible hand of the market will bring us to the Libertarian future of peace, prosperity and freedom. Our principles also tell us why freedom and the market give better results than any other approach: A small leadership elite can never have the depth of information and wisdom that is held by the populace as a whole.

Issues of substance are limitations imposed on us by the outside world. Some policies work better than others because they make more effective use of resources. Others are less effective because they ignore how human nature works. Questions of substance have the same effect on every political Party: Democratic, Republican, Green,...., and Libertarian.

Practical issues arise because some people are imperfect. They may be lazy or shortsighted or just plain crooked. A good strategy recognizes that some people may create challenges. A good strategy minimizes the damage such people can do. A sound strategy will protect the Libertarian movement from the consequences of unwise or unscrupulous leadership.

Questions of Principle

Why should we act as our moral principles dictate? There are two reasons.

The less important reason that we should follow our principles is that we preach Libertarianism to society. If we run our Party on non-Libertarian lines, our fellow citizens will see we are hypo-

[Local Organization] (Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1) [Strategic Planning]

Detailed strategic planning for 50 state ballot access can be done state by state, by local and state organizations with national support. We cannot always predict every step; the Democratic-Republic duopoly party can always change the rules on us. However, most of the time we can anticipate most of the needed steps, and that is usually good enough. For other strategic paths, planning is necessarily far less precise.

Consider Federal politics. One of our party's objectives is a working majority in Congress and a series of elected Libertarian Presidents.**

What is the path to that objective? Will we first elect a President, and rise into Congress on her coat-tails? Or will the Chief Executive be the last position to fall to our Party, captured after town councils and state legislatures are solidly Libertarian from sea to shining sea? That's close to unpredictable. Perhaps we build from the foundation up. Perhaps some future Dwight David Eisenhower experiences the Libertarian apotheosis, writes a good Libertarian book, spends several years investing his talents in our party, and then asks for our Presidential nomination.

No matter the path, this objective will not be reached in the near future. We have never elected even one Libertarian to the United States Congress, nor to the Senate. Despite the heroic efforts of Neil Randall and Don Gorman, we don't even have an enduring presence in a single state legislature. In the next few election cycles, it is unlikely that we will be more than a small Congressional minority.

When the objective is very removed from the present, detailed planning is impossible. The best one can do is to create the circumstances that appear necessary for Libertarian Political victory. We may not know exactly how we will take a majority, but we can identify foundation stones that we must emplace before we succeed. At first, our efforts will lead to skeletons that are shadows of the structures created by the other major parties. As time goes on, these skeletons will gain the solidity and effectiveness of the corresponding structures maintained by the Democratic-Republicans.

In the next letter "The Iron Pentagon" I will identify some of those foundation stones. I'll do some strategic analysis. My analysis suggests things that we need to do for the future. My analysis also shows things that our national leadership should be doing to assist us.

*Observe the difference between "50-state ballot access" as described here and as described by some other authors. To some authors, 50-state ballot access is a deed of self-validation proving to us how good we are, an end in itself, no matter whether or not there is any evidence that having 50-state rather than (say) 46-state ballot access directly improves our party's position. Here 50-state ballot access is identified as a method to achieve a quantifiable objective, namely improving public recognition for our Party by ensuring that in alternate Federal elections every voter sees a Libertarian on the ballot.

(Continued from page 1) [Local Organization]

crites: Obviously, we don't really believe in Libertarianism, because if we did our party would follow Libertarian principles in its own organization.

The more important reason that we should follow our principles is that our principles are right. Our principles correctly describe human nature, and how best to use human nature to build a better world: Society should be allowed to organize itself, rather than suffer organization from above by an elite cabal. A political Party -- any Party, Libertarian or not -- structured on non-Libertarian principles won't work as well as a party whose organization is consistent with Libertarian principles.

What do our principles dictate?

Libertarian principles include individual freedom, individual choice respectful of other people's rights, and the practical and moral superiority of the market. Most Libertarians realize that a socialist central government is essentially always less effective than the invisible hand of the market and the collective wisdom of millions of human beings.

In his book *Libertarianism A Primer*, Boaz shows that planning works only for the simplest processes. Central planning can build an air traffic control system that directs a few airliners. For this task, the Federal Aviation Administration requires huge numbers of computers and employees. To control the far larger number of cars driving on a Saturday morning, a Federal Automobile Administration car traffic control system is just plain impossible. There is no alternative to the simple rules of the road and spontaneous self-organization successfully used in real cities every day of the year.

The catchphrase "strong, effective, central planning" is a hopeless oxymoron. The incompetence of central planning is not merely party dogma. Central planning's failure is a demonstrated fact. An inner circle of bureaucrats in a distant capital essentially always has less brainpower, a poorer grasp of the facts, weaker motivation, and smaller responsibility than the people on the scene. A coal industry run by a National Coal Board really is worse than a coal industry run by competing private entrepreneurs. Central bureaucracies also get hijacked by special-interest groups with their own agendas. That's a practical issue discussed below.

The market provides the invisible hand that guides men and women toward effective decisions. Monopolies spontaneously fail in the face of competition, because the cost of creating a true monopoly creates inefficiencies which cause the monopoly to fail and be replaced. Competition roots out inefficiency, allowing the best ideas to rise to the top.

The invisible hand works as well in the marketplace of ideas as in any other marketplace. In the intellectual free market, a group sells itself by providing goods and services (newsletters, events, candidates, publications, candidate support) that party members want to support. If the group keeps promises and provides good services, it grows and thrives. If the group fails to keep promises and delivers poor services, it suffers at the market's invisible

hand. It loses volunteers, voters, and donations. The invisible hand steers the group *or its successor* to more effective policies.

I stress *or its successor*. The market cannot compel a group to adopt sound policies. A group can certainly keep making bad decisions until the invisible hand writes mene mene tekkel upharsin: You have been weighed and found wanting and shall now become one with the snows of yesteryear. We clearly prefer that the Libertarian Party succeeds, rather than going so badly astray that it fails and is replaced. Replacement is slow and expensive. However, the outcome is up to us. We recognize the validity of the market, so we recognize that the judgement of the market may turn irrevocably against a vendor who makes too many bad decisions.

What do our Libertarian principles say about the competing Libertarian strategies of Membership Recruitment, Local Organization, and Moral Armament?

In the Membership Recruitment strategy, the Unified Membership Plan means that state groups effectively become franchisees of a single national apparatus. Activists, donors, and voters who want to support the local group must support the national organization, and vice versa. Local groups grow when the national Party's recruiting efforts succeed, rather than gaining or losing members in response to their own successes or failures.

There are private businesses that run very successfully as franchises. Successful national corporations with franchises have stiff standards and strong internal controls for franchisees. Political parties based on volunteers are incapable of instituting such controls, at least without repelling so many volunteers that they wither and die. Without stiff standards to guarantee quality, the franchise model does not work for fast food chains or for the marketplace of ideas.

Under Membership Recruitment, local membership and income are largely independent of local performance. Indeed, under this strategy local income is an undesirable side effect. Party income is supposed to go to the national Party to support membership recruitment, and not be diverted to local campaigns and local activities. Local political campaigns that try to win are a diversion of scarce resources from critical projects.

Under Membership Recruitment, local groups no longer have the invisible hand of the intellectual marketplace on their tillers. They are under no pressure that moves them to perform right deeds. Eventually they go irretrievably astray.

Our principles clearly predict the negative consequences of pooling all our resources in one national organization. Under Membership Recruitment, party income is concentrated in the hands of a single Washington headquarters. A single small group of people -- no matter how chosen -- decide how to spend the bulk of Libertarian financial resources from coast to coast. In any group under centralized control, the people at the center see most clearly their own needs, and see far less clearly the needs of the people in the field. This

is not incompetence or corruption; it's simply how human vision works.

Centralization of spending on administrative apparatus is immediately understood by anyone associated with a university campus: the Administrators have the best-appointed buildings, the largest offices, and the most staff support. The faculty, the people who actually teach students and do research, go to the rear of the line when money is distributed. Libertarians will recognize how centralization of spending is related to Libertarian principles: Central fiscal control is one more reason why central planning can't compete with entrepreneurs and a free market.

Membership Recruitment thus stifles competition in the marketplace of ideas, except in the narrow sense that Membership Recruitment as a strategy is in competition with other more effective strategies. Focusing resources into the National Party reduces resources available in the states for the candidates, election campaigns, and local groups that actually do the Libertarian Party's work.

In contrast, Local Organization creates competition between Libertarians in the marketplace of ideas. Local organizations choose which activities they will perform, and which activities they promise to perform if they get the needed resources from their supporters. Individual Libertarians choose which activities they will support, based on the appeal of the promises and the track records of the groups making the proposals. As a structure within which to work, Local Organization is entirely consistent with Libertarian principles. Local Organization uses the invisible hand of the intellectual marketplace to improve our programs.

From the standpoint of marketplace competition, Moral Armament is a type of local organization. Instead of investing in political groups to promote Separation of School and State, supporters of Moral Armament invest in private and home schooling and in tools making home and private schooling more effective. When everyone sees that private schools and home schooling are superior to state schools, school and state will separate. The coming success of Libertarian ideas demands the development of strong private civic structures to replace ineffective government civic structures, in education, charity, and other arenas. It is entirely appropriate for Libertarian supporters of every political strategy to invest in Moral Armament.

In summary, the Local Organization strategy is highly consistent with Libertarian Principles. Moral Armament is also consistent with Libertarian principles. In contrast, the Membership Recruitment strategy is not consistent with Libertarian principles. The inconsistencies between Membership Recruitment and Libertarian principles are basically the same as the inconsistencies between socialist state planning and Libertarian principles. Just as socialist planning does not work in the real world, Membership Recruitment -- especially if it succeeds in creating a single national Libertarian Party controlling almost all Libertarian resources -- guarantees its own long-term failure.

Issues of Substance

Issues of substance are the practical questions that constrain which strategies we can adopt. No matter our desires, the laws of nature and the principles of human nature say that some strategies are sure to fail. Issues of substance determine how successful our strategies are likely to be.

It is easy to forget that a political movement cannot assign its resources entirely as it sees fit. Some resources can be moved at will. Some can not. Some donors are only willing to invest in the excitement of a Presidential campaign. Other donors don't want their money out of their sight, not even to their own county committee. Still others deeply prefer to trust political technicians to choose the best strategies for the party faithful.

A large part of Libertarian Party resources comes in the form of volunteers and volunteered time. Volunteer resources are only available for issues the volunteer cares about. You can make some progress expanding the notion of 'caring'. Some volunteers do care about the Party as a whole, not just their home town. Others understand the value of making a trade: "We'll help collect your signatures if you'll help with ours." In large part, volunteers care about helping friends, people they know personally from their own town or county. Party leaders must remember that volunteers are there because they want to be there. If the Party leadership treats volunteers like employees on a 1940's assembly line, most volunteers will go away.

Even when a volunteer is willing to help, travel time limits where a volunteer can work. In 1999, when one of our own ran for State Representative in western Massachusetts, Libertarians from adjoining towns helped him get on the ballot. A few Libertarians came from further away. Except in the most extraordinary cases, such as the 1998 Illinois ballot access litigation, Libertarian volunteers simply can't get directly involved in Libertarian actions hundreds or thousands of miles from their homes.

We can talk about focusing our resources on interesting races and referenda, but many of our resources come with geographic tags limiting where they can be invested. A strategy that does not include activities in each tagged geographic area necessarily wastes those resources: volunteers, contacts, money. By giving volunteers something to do in their own home towns, the Local Organization strategy captures vast resources that would otherwise go to waste.

Local Organization also softens factional disputes. The Libertarian Party is subject to strains that other parties are not. Unlike the other two major parties, our Libertarian Party has principles. We are here to use electoral action to put specific policies into effect. We are not, however, centrally controlled. Libertarians expect to put their own libertarian ideas into effect, not to serve as mindless robots parroting the aphorisms of a Libertarian Central Committee. A natural consequence of our party's nature is that members routinely have strongly held ideas that do not agree with each other. Disagreements over policy issues, even on less important topics, can keep Libertarians from working together to Make

Liberty Happen! via electoral victory.

How may complications from policy disputes be reduced? A non-hierarchical organization allows people who hold contradictory deeply-held views to support the Libertarian party without confronting each other. Even when they can't stand each other's company, people can agree not to sabotage each other's work. Local organization means Libertarians who disagree about policy can stay away from each other but still work to Make Liberty Happen!. In contrast, the unitary central organization of the Membership Recruitment strategy forces people who disagree into each other's arms, where policy disagreements lead to paralysis.

Local organization has other practical benefits for the party. In any given race, many people focus on a few top races. Voters who are rigidly attached to the Republican or Democratic parties are most likely to support their party at the top of the ticket. As they work down the ballot from Senator to State Representative through Alderman to Weigher of Coal, voters are more likely to respond to a person and not to her party tag. Furthermore, the smaller the district, the easier it is for a Libertarian candidate to press the flesh and meet a reasonable fraction of his voters. The lower the office, the more likely it is that people will respond to a Libertarian candidate's personal reputation rather than to abstract party loyalty. Libertarian opportunities for victory are thus typically higher in lower races.

[Having won those races, Libertarian winners are then obliged to show voters that all Libertarians are dedicated to doing their job while standing up for low taxes, private property, and all ten amendments of the Bill of Rights. If I am the Libertarian town dogcatcher, the way I perform my duties reflects for better or worse on the entire Libertarian Party.]

In summary, Local Organization captures and shepherds the volunteer resources that Membership Recruitment would lose. Local Organization neutralizes the internal ideological disputes that Membership Recruitment exacerbates. Local Organization encourages activists towards races we are likely to win in the near future, and away from races we are likely to lose. With respect to questions of substance, Local Organization is systematically better than Membership Recruitment. Moral Armament has essentially the same advantages that Local Organization has.

Practical Issues

Practical issues matter because sometimes people have flaws. They have bad judgement. They're lazy. They have hidden agendas no one would support -- if they weren't hidden. Some people are simply crooked, motivated mostly by a desire to get their hands on our till. Practical issues include leadership, financial diversion, and ideological diversion.

Perhaps someday our leaders will all be saints and geniuses. I don't recommend holding your breath until that happens. In the meanwhile, we hope our leaders are flawless but arrange our affairs to minimize the damage that flawed people might do.

Practical Issue: Consequences of Leadership.

The most important practical issue is leadership. The harm that a bad leader can inflict is almost limitless. A good leader at best provides a multiplier on available resources.

How do we protect ourselves from stupidity, against which the gods themselves struggle in vain? How can you tell if leadership is good or bad? You look at the record. You compare different people and groups. This is relatively easy with state and local organizations. You ask which state parties run candidates, and which talk about running candidates some other year. You ask which state groups support candidates, and which do successful fundraising but are flat broke when their candidates ask for aid. You ask which groups have made progress on several practical indices, and which groups have had electoral success. This comparison reveals which organizations are more effective, and which groups still need improvement. You can tell which policies are more effective and which should be recommended to our opponents.

At the national level, you can't make these comparisons. Right now, the libertarian movement has only one national Libertarian

Party. That National Party follows at most one set of policies at a time. You can compare the success of those policies with promises made when the policies were adopted. However, until another policy goes into place, alternative policies offer promises, not results. Comparing the current policy's results with other policies' promises is comparing apples and oranges. Promises always sound better than real results.

Comparison thus cannot be used to test how well our national Party is doing.

What then should we use as the yardstick of success?

What then do we do?

How do we protect ourselves against the reality that people sometimes make bad strategic decisions?

To Be Continued

