



Who Are We?

The liberty movement in the Trump era

Jack Hunter

January 9, 2017

Libertarians emerging as Trump resistance,” Politico declared in a recent report on how liberty movement political leaders and organizations—Rand Paul, Justin Amash, Campaign for Liberty, Young Americans for Liberty—have quickly become the primary faction on the right willing to criticize Donald Trump.

Campaign for Liberty head Norm Singleton (disclosure: Norm is a personal friend) told Politico, “There’s a tendency, especially in the honeymoon period, that people can be unwilling to criticize a president-elect.”

“The liberty movement, though, because it tends not to view politics through a partisan lens... they’re more willing to not view it as, ‘Well, we can’t be as critical of Donald Trump as we were of Barack Obama because he’s our [party’s] president,’” Singleton added.

Singleton is right. Our movement, originally born out of Ron Paul’s antiwar challenge to George W. Bush, flourished and matured as an oppositional force during the Obama years, and now, despite a tumultuous 2016 election, remains standing as the Trump era dawns.

Criticizing the political establishment, Democrat or Republican, has always been a primary and critical liberty movement function.

Yet, though Politico’s picture of the liberty movement was comprehensive enough, it was still incomplete. The necessarily limited focus was on the most popular face of political libertarianism in the United States—Paul family-related, Republican-aligned, center-right figures and groups.

But within the liberty movement coalition, there are non-conservative and left libertarians, most of whom reflexively loathe Trump. There are anarchists and “paleolibertarians” who have cheered Trump. There are conventional conservatives who have leaned liberty in the past, but are now so giddy over Trump that they seem annoyed libertarians would dare criticize the president-elect on anything.

All of these categories have been important parts of the liberty movement throughout its history. We've been a broad coalition from the very beginning.

But right now, there seems to be more dissension as we begin 2017 than there has been at any time in the history of the movement.

After the election I began putting together my thoughts on where the liberty movement might be headed and it turned out to be a much longer analysis than I originally envisioned. A 700-word column just wasn't going to do the subject justice. Our movement has too many moving parts.

But I thought doing so, surveying the movement, albeit from my perspective, could be helpful. Clarifying, even.

The natural tendency of political movements is to factionalize. Given our hyper-individuality, libertarians are particularly prone to this. I have long thought it more interesting to find points of commonality for the greater good—to try to hold things together as much as can be expected. Despite some of my critiques in this piece, that is my purpose here.

My hope is that moving forward, the liberty movement will continue to fight for the same principles and ideas that originally brought us together. I'm certain we will.

There's as much to be hopeful about in the Trump era as there is to fear.

I have been in this movement from day one. It is the center of my professional life, and much of my personal life. Many of my friends and allies have similar biographies. Needless to say, I care deeply about the liberty movement's future and success.

So, in this unusual moment in our movement's history and our country's, let us reflect on who we are, what we believe, and what the future might look like for liberty under President Donald Trump.

Who are we? The liberty movement has always been both political and philosophical

Some of us came to the liberty movement as fed-up conservatives, some came from the left (often progressives who already agreed with us on foreign policy or civil liberties and began to see the light on economics), and others were cured of their apathy.

So many were young, discovering libertarianism for the first time. Some were longtime libertarians reenergized by Ron Paul. There are so many journeys and so many different stories. I love hearing them, actually.

Yet despite liberty movement's members' different origins and the various factions they would form or become parts of, the movement in its totality has also always been something particular.

Yes, libertarianism as a philosophy and movement that has been around for a very long time. However, what is today called the liberty movement didn't begin until 2007, when a professorial Ron Paul explained to an angry Rudy Giuliani on a debate stage how our wrongheaded foreign policy emboldens America's enemies.

That historic moment marked the first time libertarianism in the United States began to explode as a new and potentially formidable political force. Paul's political enemies who declared his campaign dead after that exchange couldn't have been more wrong.

Libertarians had always been thinkers. Now they would be political players, too.

At the beginning of the movement, The American Conservative's Daniel McCarthy (also a personal friend and Ron Paul campaign 2008 staff member) described how it was taking shape: "The Ron Paul 'revolution', as it is known to its adherents, has made deep inroads into an area where Republicans are otherwise weak: energizing and mobilizing young people."

"Already, Paul has inspired other Republicans, mostly young themselves, to campaign for Congress on his antiwar, fiscally conservative platform," McCarthy observed in 2008. "A new youth movement is also coming into being as Students for Ron Paul reconfigures into a permanent libertarian-conservative activist organization, Young Americans for Liberty."

McCarthy was talking at the time about emerging Republican liberty candidates like North Carolina's B.J. Lawson and Michigan's Justin Amash, and also a libertarian youth organization that today is the largest in the country, surpassing even College Republicans.

In 2015, I described Ron Paul's political impact in context, "There was a libertarian movement before the liberty movement, in the same way there was a conservative movement before Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan. The conservative movement just mattered much less before Goldwater and Reagan. These men helped popularize conservatism. Particularly Reagan. Few conservatives would disagree."

"Libertarianism mattered less before Ron Paul. He helped popularize it. He made it mainstream."

But it was also Ron Paul, the politician who ran for president as a Republican twice and inspired his son Rand Paul, Justin Amash and Kentucky's Thomas Massie to take up his liberty torch in Congress, who also emphasized the primacy of philosophy over politics.

Pragmatism vs. radicalism: Are we an educational or political movement?

A defining feature of much of libertarianism has long been that many adherents reject politics. Yet a prominent, and I would argue primary, aspect of the liberty movement is that it has been a political vehicle for that philosophy, something libertarians had never really enjoyed before (with apologies to the good people of the Libertarian Party, who, despite achieving more in 2016 than ever, are still relatively incomparable to the larger movement Ron Paul sparked).

As with any movement, there are factions. There has always been an argument within the liberty movement over whether it's more important to use politics primarily as a platform to educate the masses about libertarianism, or to play to win electorally, to advance and implement liberty policies materially.

More simply put: Should we educate or be political?

The answer has always been both. The liberty movement has always done both. Nor are they mutually exclusive.

Arguably the greatest single educational liberty act in the movement's history was also an overtly political one. Rand Paul's historic 2013 filibuster over the targeted drone killings of U.S. citizens succeeded in swinging public opinion by a whopping 50 percent in the direction of liberty, galvanizing left and right around constitutional principle.

When Edward Snowden educated the global public in 2013 about the U.S. government's controversial mass surveillance practices, between the Democrats who defended the Obama administration and Republicans hawks who literally wanted Snowden dead, it was Rand Paul and Justin Amash who sounded the alarm most in Congress. Others who eventually did the same were mostly following Paul and Amash's lead.

If Paul and Amash had not been there, Snowden's revelations would have mattered less. But the political stances they took were also educational.

Again, the liberty movement has always done both.

Ron Paul did, and does, both politics and education. As noted, Rand Paul, Justin Amash and Thomas Massie do both. The more political activist-oriented Young Americans for Liberty still does both. Students for Liberty, which specifically focuses on education, still does both. Reason does both. Lewrockwell.com does both. FEE's Jeffrey Tucker has done both. Sheldon Richman does both. FFF's Jacob Hornberger does both. Libertarian pundit Julie Borowski does both. Anti-political, right-leaning anarchists and paleolibertarians also do both (this paragraph can only be so long, sorry to all I left out!).

Even so, education and politics are still different, with both featuring different inherent pitfalls.

Important differences between philosophy and politics

When dealing primarily with philosophy, you have the luxury of being as radical as you like because it's theory, and philosophers often do go to extremes. For example, many of the overtly non-political libertarians I know, from academics to activists, believe the inevitable end to their anti-statist philosophy is anarchism. Many even try to outdo each other in their anarchism.

When working in politics, being too radical or extreme can be a benefit or a hindrance depending on the context precisely because you're dealing with actual people in the form of voters. Pragmatism is necessary for politics, but there is always justified fear that moderating too much might surrender the philosophy, and thus defeat the purpose of pursuing a political agenda in the first place. I've seen some go too far in this direction, once even watching someone attempt to sell libertarians on the supposed liberty value of Mitt Romney. I've seen others give establishment Republicans too much credit.

The philosophers will wag their fingers at political "sell-outs." Political types dismiss the philosophical types as "crazies." We all know this drill by now.

From the beginning of the liberty movement, there has been a tension between libertarians who feared politics would corrupt their philosophy, and those who saw no point in subscribing to that philosophy if it wasn't going to be advanced politically. Along the same fault line, there has been a chasm between those who believe that few libertarian ideas are too extreme, contrasted with others who believe there can be no libertarian concept of governance without addressing practical concerns.

I believe this divide tells us much about what happened in 2016 election with our movement, and what the future of liberty politics might be under President Donald Trump.

For those unaware, I should be clear about where I stand.

I came to the liberty movement because of politics. My broad agreement with fellow libertarians on limited government, individual and constitutional rights, a more non-interventionist foreign policy and Austrian economics is not something I explore philosophically often because there are so many great minds within our movement that can do it better. I have always, from the beginning and for the foreseeable future, been most interested in how to advance these ideas politically.

Thankfully, today our movement is such an enduring force that we should hope to have influence on Trump's administration, in tandem or opposition.

What do we believe?

The movement Ron Paul inspired has meant different things to different people over the years, but here are five broad areas where most can likely, or hopefully, agree.

1. A sincere dedication to smaller, constitutional government that both parties ignore (big government also being anti-free market).
2. The promotion of a restrained, prudent and more non-interventionist foreign policy.
3. Standing up for civil liberties that both parties abuse.
4. Putting principles before parties, or shattering what some have called the "false left-right paradigm."
5. Championing individualism over the collectivist ideologies that plague left and right.

To recap: Less government. Less war. Less partisanship. More liberty. More individualism.

Acknowledging this formula, libertarianism as a philosophy and as a more recent political movement has largely embraced the best parts of the right and left, while rejecting the worst parts.

While as a liberty conservative, I believe our most comfortable political home in the U.S. is on the right because of significant disagreements with progressives on core economic beliefs, there are left and right libertarians and always have been.

There always should be. This transpartisan dynamic is integral to the character and continuing success of the liberty movement.

The 2016 election was turbulent for the entire movement, with the explicit liberty presidential candidates like Rand Paul and later Libertarian Gary Johnson falling short, and much of the movement falling into pro-, anti- or neutral Trump camps as the cycle progressed.

Different factions and individuals—including me—were wrong about many things, and others were proven right when few thought they would be. No doubt, this will continue over the next four years.

Now let's look at what various liberty factions did in 2016 and what these distinctions all might mean going forward.

Rand Paul or bust: Political right libertarians

Americans desperately wanted something different than just another establishment politician in 2016. Rand Paul banked on that, running as a “different kind of a Republican” who would meld traditionally non-GOP voters with the existing party base, using liberty issues to create a new coalition that could include a majority of conservative Republicans, but also more independents, young people and minorities. If you look at the primary polling, it was often Paul who did best with these groups.

Then Donald Trump began to rise.

Looking back, it's almost impossible to fathom how any would-be anti-establishment Republican candidate—and certainly any establishment candidate—was going to overcome the Trump phenomenon in 2016. I've heard some try to make the argument that it was possible, but not a single one convincingly.

Being angry or bitter that Rand Paul, or Ted Cruz or Marco Rubio—or whoever any Republican voter's favored candidate was—didn't win is something very different than saying they could have won.

What political right libertarians got wrong

As a pragmatist, Paul thought an approach that could be key to mainstreaming libertarianism might be to explain our positions in more appealing ways, particularly to conservative audiences still leery of libertarians. This is a standard method for most political right libertarians, and has long been a professional goal of mine.

As Amash said in 2014, “I don't see much space between classical liberalism, conservatism in the American sense, and libertarianism. I think they're basically the same philosophy.” Many libertarians also believe that our positions are ones most Americans would agree with if only explained in the right way, often pointing to polling data that back up these claims.

The neoconservatives have always portrayed Ron Paul as not a “real” conservative, and as more on the left began to find civil liberties and foreign policy champions in Ron and Rand Paul and

their GOP allies, the progressive establishment was always quick to say these libertarian Republicans were just as bad as any other red meat right-winger (one of my primary jobs as Ron Paul's 2012 campaign blogger was to counter these attacks from both right and left against Dr. Paul).

The neocons and anti-libertarian left have always been justified in their fears about our movement. Libertarianism is something different and in so many ways, something better than what the conventional right and left has had to offer. The Republican and Democratic establishments did not want their constituents to discover this. It was up to libertarians to broadcast this effectively, against our enemies and in sync with a majority of voters.

This was part of the messaging war Rand Paul had planned to wage during the election. Unfortunately for him and our movement, few wanted to hear it. The mood among voters wasn't even in the vicinity of this script. If there is a libertarian moment to be had, the 2016 election didn't appear to be it. The full-bore, populist red meat strategies of Trump and even Ted Cruz proved to be more successful.

But it turned out Americans really did want a different kind of Republican: Donald Trump. They wanted someone who acknowledged their pain, particularly the white working class who felt abandoned by political and cultural elites. Perhaps Paul could have also tapped into what Trump did. It's arguable. But realistically, I just can't see how anyone in the 2016 GOP field could have possibly outTrumped, Trump.

Has Paul been too political at times? Too pragmatic? Too eager to build coalitions as opposed to always standing alone, come hell or high water ("like his father," goes the refrain)? Perhaps, and perhaps not. But the perception in 2016 was, by too many, is that he was too pragmatic, or at last compared to Trump or Cruz. Donald Trump being the exact opposite (and having zero political record) paid off significant dividends including the White House, but Trump was also a special creature where things he said or did would have destroyed most candidates, and yet he emerged each time virtually unscathed.

In retrospect, Rand Paul probably would have performed better if he ran around naked screaming. I'm only half-jesting. That kind of outrageous behavior would have gotten him more attention than simply being a reasonable libertarian Republican who wanted to chart a new course for the party. Still, I can't fathom anyone thinking this would be good political advice for Paul or any other Republican candidate in 2014 and 2015.

Also, in retrospect, the liberty movement might not have also ever taken shape if Donald Trump had decided to run in 2008 (which he teased), or if Ron Paul's first Republican presidential foray was in 2012 or even 2016. Or perhaps Trump would not have got the same traction in 2008. We simply don't know. It's impossible to know. The conditions on the electoral ground were different in each cycle.

We do know that the pragmatists, Rand Paul chief among them, miscalculated. I did too.

What political right libertarians got right

Unfortunately for Paul in 2016, he wasn't willing to lash out wantonly and make sweet-sounding promises he probably couldn't have kept. It was liberty principles that inspired him to run, and it is adherence to those principles that continues to animate him today.

The primary national political players in today's liberty movement are separate individuals with different personalities who are passionate about liberty, but each is in Washington for all the right reasons and that consistently shines through. We need 100 more like them (as of this writing, there are potentially at least two more on the horizon in 2018).

Perhaps most importantly, liberty Republicans offer something different. In 2016, voters undeniably wanted change, but, again, it happened to be Trump. Political right libertarians must, and I believe are, trying to learn lessons from the election about how they might do better in the future.

All of American politics got its head rung in 2016, including libertarians.

In the meantime, we should all thank God that Paul, Amash and Massie are in Congress right now. For every promising thing Trump had said about foreign policy or the Federal Reserve, there are a dozen more times he's vowed to do demonstrably anti-libertarian things.

In the Republican Party, those most likely to stand up to the president will be liberty Republicans. Rand Paul has already thrown down the gauntlet more than once in defiance of Trump.

The political libertarian right is by no means limited to these congressional figures. The youth activist arm is Young Americans for Liberty, there is the Ron Paul-founded Campaign for Liberty, and you can read about the activities of political right libertarians at sites like Rare, Reason, The American Conservative, The Libertarian Republic, and Antiwar.com (sorry to the many I no doubt left out).

Political right libertarians were right to stick to principle, then and now, and not to attempt to refashion themselves in some Trumpian mold to adjust to the popular fury of the moment. Pragmatism is one thing. Selling out is quite another.

Even for political libertarians, philosophy must always be a priority.

Libertarians for Trump: Philosophical right libertarians

As a former Republican congressman, Ron Paul is both a political and philosophical right libertarian, with very deep roots in the latter. Paul predictably supported his son for president in 2016, but was outspoken against Trump and never endorsed the Republican nominee.

But many of Ron Paul's friends and allies basically did.

There are different types of philosophical right libertarians. For my purposes here, I will focus on one of the most high-profile figures, who has had one of the closest relationships with our movement's founder, and who has also been one of the most integral thought leaders in the liberty movement.

LewRockwell.com (LRC) has long been one of the most popular liberty websites, named after its founder, Ron Paul's former chief of staff and Mises University Founder and CEO, Lew Rockwell. Rockwell coined the term "paleolibertarian" in the 1990s to describe certain types of radical right libertarians, though he has since abandoned it. (I use it occasionally here not out of disrespect, but as an easy identifier many of my paleolibertarian friends haven't seemed to mind.)

LewRockwell.com was Ron Paul central during the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, and of course long before that.

But throughout the liberty movement's existence there was little to nothing about Rand Paul, Justin Amash or Thomas Massie at Lewrockwell.com or related sites. When you did read something there, there was a decent chance it was criticizing these prominent libertarian Republicans. After all, they are still politicians.

Philosophical right libertarians—anarchist, paleolibertarian, or otherwise—reject politics wholesale and therefore virtually all politicians. Their one exception to this rule was Ron Paul.

Until Donald Trump happened.

In fact, for at least the latter half of 2016 and still now, there was more news and opinion about the day-to-day activities of Donald Trump at LRC than about Rand Paul's monumental filibuster, or Justin Amash's heroic play to end mass surveillance in 2013 that only failed in the House by 12 votes.

There is logic in philosophical right libertarians' outsized interest in politics when it comes to Donald Trump: Being anti-political, philosophical libertarians want to challenge and disrupt the system. Many (but not all) see Trump as their best opportunity to do it. They see him as the anti-politician—a solid anti-establishment hero for a libertarian faction with an aversion to politics.

Not all philosophical right libertarians reject politics. In my experience, the younger you skew among this group, the more you will find a nuanced approach to politics. Some of their intellectual leaders even supported Rand Paul for president originally, most notably Walter Block.

But the overarching theme among right philosophical libertarians is still anti-politics and yet now pro-Trump.

Many only appeared to get excited about the 2016 election when Trump began to rise, and have continued to see other non-Ron Paul or non-Donald Trump politicians as dangerously directing libertarian minds toward the supposedly fruitless effort of politics.

What philosophical right libertarians got wrong

If a constant danger for political right libertarians is being detrimentally pragmatic, philosophical right libertarians often dart hard in the other direction—they go extreme.

My favorite thing about liberty icon Murray Rothbard is that he insisted libertarians should be involved in politics, to the chagrin of many of his fellow radicals. But Rothbard—who promoted anarchism—would also end up attaching himself to the most extreme movements available, no matter how socialist, racist or authoritarian. (No one should construe this as an attack on Rothbard or philosophical right libertarians; it's an attempt to help explain in a larger context how some libertarians have ended up allying with controversial or even anti-libertarian movements.)

The general argument then, and now, was that any formidable anti-establishment grassroots movement represents a genuine challenge to elites and the existing political order. It need not be a libertarian movement to help achieve libertarian ends, goes the logic.

Before Ron Paul's movement, I would have defended and even participated in this type of thinking. But I have since come to believe there has to be something more substantive to achieve long term victory—particularly results—than merely being anti-establishment at any cost.

Rebelliousness is part of any worthwhile revolution, but by no means the whole.

My major disagreement with philosophical right libertarians over most of the last decade is that Ron Paul's political accomplishments in 2008 and 2012 should have been capitalized upon institutionally, and thankfully they were. Paul's electoral defeats should never have been a cue to reject politics wholesale and revert back to mere philosophy or academics alone (for example, after antiwar Republican Pat Buchanan made an impact in the 1996 GOP primary, no Buchanan-style political figures or groups followed).

But political organizing or strategy is simply not what most philosophical right libertarians are interested in.

They prefer to raise hell.

In the 2008 and 2012 elections, Ron Paul was the most “extreme” thing to support, so to speak, but he was also, conveniently and heroically, the most libertarian thing. Dr. Paul was the logical choice for president for libertarians of any type.

In 2016, Donald Trump was simply the most extreme thing. In comparison, however it was rationalized at various junctures during the election, the underlying reason the actual libertarians in the 2016 election (Paul and Johnson) were rejected by many philosophical right libertarians is precisely because they were perceived as too mainstream or moderate.

To radicals, right and left, the worst possible thing you can be is mainstream.

But now, for the first time ever in modern American politics, the most extreme thing has actually won the White House.

So now what?

Since the election, I've watched anarchists and people who supposedly hate politics try to defend or ignore obvious anti-libertarian things related to the incoming administration, with

some even declaring their absolute loyalty to Trump, right or wrong. Today, Lewrockwell.com, a diehard anti-establishment site that throughout the aughts condemned GOP voters who elected George W. Bush as “red state fascists,” now regularly defends a Republican president that other radical libertarians worry is an actual fascist.

It’s weird.

It’s the more pragmatic political right libertarians that Politico cites who are most willing to criticize the incoming president of their own party, while many libertarian radicals continue to be forgiving of Trump. There are also philosophical right libertarians who have criticized Trump and his picks, and even Lew Rockwell would probably not claim to be a supporter in the same way Walter Block has been—but there is undeniably a pro-Trump arch currently in this faction of the liberty movement.

With Trump’s victory, much of the philosophical libertarian right has been turned on its head.

Rockwell said of libertarians in 2012, in a great and defiant quote that even became a popular meme, “We don’t beg for scraps from the imperial table, and we don’t seek a seat at that table. We want to knock the table over.” But now LRC is one of the likeliest libertarian sites to find favorable news on who, quite literally, might sit at Trump’s table.

Prioritizing extreme things is how you end up in the bizarre place of believing Rand Paul and Justin Amash aren’t worth libertarians’ time, but Donald Trump is. Philosophical right libertarians right now are too often in the strange position of defending the incoming regime in the name of being against regimes.

There is another unavoidable irony on the liberty movement right. I highlight it only to help foster, hopefully, an important point of agreement moving forward.

Some of Trump’s picks have been good and others have been bad from a libertarian perspective, but there’s only one surefire way that he and future presidents will have a better, more liberty-friendly pool to choose from: *Having more libertarians involved in politics.*

Philosophical right libertarians have long said say there’s a limit to what can be accomplished in politics, but now, with Trump’s victory, we’re learning more definitively that there is also a limit to defining libertarianism purely as permanent revolution.

Simply put: Once you overthrow the establishment, what do you replace it with?

However you look at this dilemma and whichever side you favor, pragmatic political right libertarians have an important role to play here. If Trump’s administration is favorable to liberty ideas, it will be due to pressure and influence from within or without by liberty movement figures and allies.

And if more libertarians do continue to become involved in politics, chances are those candidates are going to look more like Rand Paul, Justin Amash or Thomas Massie than something more radical.

There are limits to political pragmatism. There are limits to extremism, too.

What philosophical right libertarians got right

The most obvious thing philosophical right libertarians got right is the same constant point their left philosophical brethren preach—without a solid liberty philosophical foundation, there's no point to even thinking about politics.

Sites like LRC, organizations like the indispensable Mises Institute, figures like Mises President Jeff Deist, Rockwell, Tom Woods (still arguably the best right libertarian speaker in the movement), economist and karaoke king Robert Murphy of the Free Market Institute, Antiwar.com's Justin Raimondo and others, continue to educate and inspire countless libertarians, particularly young people.

But most pertinent to this election and Donald Trump, philosophical right libertarians got two big things right.

The first was a need to challenge elites even if it took supporting an un-libertarian candidate to do so. Those ideologically and emotionally wedded to the success of Rand Paul's campaign (none more so than me) were slow to see that Trump did pose a direct challenge to libertarians' natural political enemies—the neoconservatives, the larger Republican establishment, political and cultural elites on the left. Sen. Paul called Trump's victory a “repudiation of the liberal elite” the day after the election, and it certainly was, among other things.

I could not vote for Trump because he was too virulently anti-libertarian on too many issues. For every criticism of the Iraq War or bashing of the Federal Reserve, there were calls for national stop and frisk, more mass surveillance and even the execution of whistleblower hero Edward Snowden, to begin a very long list of offenses. My political pragmatism has its limits.

But am I still glad Trump defeated Hillary Clinton? You bet.

I'm optimistic that there is a chance for libertarian figures—and more importantly, liberty policies—to flourish under President Trump than ever could have been hoped for under Clinton, or even any other Republican president not named Paul.

A second significant thing philosophical right libertarians got right—or perhaps this was just Lew Rockwell—is the inherent messiness of what any pro-liberty political process might look like.

There is not—and never was going to be—an uncompromised liberty safe space for our movement to exist within, between what Ron Paul started and what any libertarian political successes might look like moving forward. The calls for purity at any cost, and against accepting politics or any political realities, have typically come from philosophical libertarians, both right and left.

But Rockwell wrote something particularly poignant in December: “So the Trump years will, no doubt, include their share of statist idiocy and outrages. That’s been true of every presidential administration any of us living today can remember.”

Rockwell continued (emphasis added):

But it’s unreasonable to expect the changes we hope for to occur according to a neat playbook. Presumably, we all assumed that before we could reach the libertarian goal we’re striving for, the major institutions that have poisoned the public mind against liberty would have to be shaken up, and the public alerted to their true nature, one way or another.

Amen. I hope this quote becomes the next popular Lew Rockwell meme.

“One way” for libertarians to challenge elites and their institutions was Ron Paul—and the elite knew it. “Another” way is what Rand Paul, Justin Amash, and Thomas Massie have done—all of whom have also been constantly and repeatedly been targeted by elites, fearful of these libertarian Republicans’ growing influence. Most of the elite attacks against Rand Paul have come from neoconservatives within his own party(I should know).

And yes, another way to challenge elites has been Donald Trump. But a significant problem with Trump, as opposed to these other explicitly liberty examples, is after elites are challenged or weakened, you simply don’t know what you’re going to get. We generally know what a Paul, or an Amash, or even a Supreme Court justice appointment like the liberty-friendly Mike Lee would probably do based on their ideologically driven careers. With Trump, it’s a crapshoot.

Trump could now just as easily bolster the elites he’s challenged. Of course, unlike these liberty Republican examples, he’s also going to be president of the United States. But whether in his administration or a future one, you will ultimately need leaders ideologically committed to liberty to see any such progress occur in the political realm.

Still, Rockwell’s larger point stands. Any political endeavor is always going to be messy by its very nature. Four years ago, I made a similar argument to right and left philosophical libertarians, that what our political success might look like in real-world terms would probably never look like the “neat playbook” many of them imagined.

Gary Johnson or bust: Left and non-conservative libertarians

As a libertarian conservative who comes primarily from the Ron and Rand Paul world, I must admit I’m not as intimately familiar with much of left libertarianism, though I call a number of left-leaning libertarians friends and certainly allies.

Among those figures, the Libertarian Institute’s Sheldon Richman comes to mind. I first met left libertarian Anthony Gregory of The Independent Institute when he was the editor at Campaign for Liberty. Gary Chartier has had an impact. There’s Angela Keaton who describes herself as a “right-anarchist objectivist formerly aligned with paleos, now aligned with the left-libertarians.” Influential left-friendly libertarians Lucy Steigerwald and Jonathan Blanks have contributed at Rare. Bleeding Heart Libertarian Steve Horwitz has been an influence within the movement. Many of the wonderful people at Students for Liberty have always fashioned their group as a

more left-leaning and philosophical counterpart to the more conservative Young Americans for Liberty (again, sorry to any obvious people I'm overlooking).

It's also important to note that some of the types of libertarians discussed in this section do not identify as "left" nor do I consider them on the left—most of the writers at Reason, for example—but they still generally eschew conservatism. They are probably better described as non-conservative libertarians, or, as I suspect they would prefer, just "libertarians."

Throughout the liberty movement's history, I've watched left liberty lovers argue that conservatives have no place in the movement, and conservative libertarians argue the same of left libertarians.

Both groups are wrong.

Not only are left-libertarians integral to our coalition, but provide a needed balance to some political right libertarians who could easily turn the movement into something that looks too much like mainstream conservatism, or philosophical right libertarians whose characteristic extremism sometimes leads them in troubling, anti-libertarian directions (the reverse is also true, with right libertarians providing amovement check on their left extremist counterparts).

It is also worth noting that both left and right libertarians, in their respective political and philosophical camps, are also similar.

Like political right libertarians, non-conservative or political left libertarians have typically supported liberty Republicans like Rand Paul and his congressional allies despite their conservatism, just as a good number of political right libertarians (including me) supported the more left-leaning Gary Johnson in 2016 despite some major policy disagreements.

Pragmatists right and left are generally willing to overlook some ideological faults to support the most obvious overall libertarian candidate.

Like philosophical right libertarians, philosophical left libertarians are often not fans of Rand Paul or some of his political allies (some on the left don't even like Ron Paul due to his conservatism) and usually for the same reasons (politics is undesirable, Paul's perceived moderation or more aptly, his perceived lack of extremism).

Purist libertarians right and left are generally far less willing to overlook anything they perceive as unorthodox. Both libertarian philosophical camps are also more likely to identify as anarchists.

In that radical vein, philosophical left libertarians, just like the right-leaning ones, are also titillated by extreme things, with a few on the left in 2016 even being attracted to socialist Bernie Sanders' insurgent Democratic primary campaign, similar to right liberty radicals' ongoing Trump dalliances.

In fact, we learned in 2016 that many one-time Ron Paul libertarians from across the ideological spectrum were simply more anti-establishment than anything else.

For many left libertarians in 2016, particularly after Rand Paul dropped out of the Republican primary (many non-conservative and left libertarians supported Paul), Gary Johnson became *the* libertarian.

In an unusual election, where the Libertarian candidate has an opportunity to be a potentially formidable alternative to Trump and Clinton, Johnson was everything a non-conservative or left libertarian could want—a pro-choice, “socially liberal” but “fiscally conservative” ex-governor who abhorred the religious right and seemed to be at war with conservatives as much as he was for liberty.

Left-leaning libertarians have never been entirely comfortable with so much of the liberty political action happening within the Republican Party or it being attached to conservatism. If successful, Johnson—a former Republican governor who was technically more moderate than left—could have been a prominent figure inside the liberty movement different from the right libertarian politicians who have thus far prevailed. Most non-conservative and left libertarians have long believed that the social conservatism associated with the right has always been a significant factor in holding libertarianism back.

A formidable Gary Johnson would have been a way to prove it.

What left and non-conservative libertarians got wrong

When discussing non-conservative and left libertarians, in addition to the labels political and philosophical, I would also like to introduce another word: *Respectable*.

While there is no doubt that a conservative echo chamber exists, and many right libertarians have been caught up in it, our popular culture and politics have long been saturated by the left. Part of the reason Trump won was a backlash against the excesses of political correctness that too many voters perceived as being shoved down their throats. In Trump’s wake, observers on the right and left have begun to analyze this. Reason’s Robby Soave in particular has done a remarkable job in outlining this phenomenon.

Most non-conservative and left political libertarians have wanted more Americans to see libertarianism as something that fits nicely within the mainstream, as defined, by design or default, by our generally liberal-leaning culture. In this vein, both types of left libertarians—definitely the pragmatists but even some radical ones—have sought to make libertarianism more respectable.

On this point, I agree with my non-conservative and left libertarian friends. There’s nothing scary about what we believe, and we should hope more come around to this view.

Making libertarianism respectable *should be a goal*.

But taken too far, particularly in a left-dominated political culture, it can also become a hindrance. This is part of what happened with Johnson 2016.

Given what might have been possible for the Libertarian Party last year, Gary Johnson was a disastrous Libertarian candidate. This is not non-conservatives' or left libertarians' or anyone else's fault. It was solely Johnson's.

His campaign on paper had so much promise, even polling in double digits early on, and then he proceeded to make every mistake imaginable and even some no one could have imagined. Many voters knew he was a Libertarian, but too often Johnson seemed very confused about what it meant to be a small-l libertarian. He did a poor job of educating voters.

But Johnson's failure to perform was not because his ideas and even the temperament he represented aren't appealing (as many right libertarians and more conventional conservatives were eager to declare)—it was because Johnson was a uniquely bad candidate.

His campaign was actually counterproductive to what most non-conservative and left libertarians had long sought. To the degree that the 130 million voters paid attention to Johnson, he made what we believe look less mainstream. He was a libertarian cartoon.

Many Americans still see libertarians as little more than pot-smoking weirdoes divorced from reality. Johnson probably did not help dissuade them of this view. Some Johnson supporters were disappointed he never made the debate stage. In retrospect, I don't share that view.

Contrary to his mission—Gary Johnson ended up making libertarianism look *less* respectable.

Johnson's apparent goal of portraying libertarian politics as something non-right was also not only philosophically inaccurate, but politically unwise.

The real winning coalition to be had in 2016 was the youth, independent and minority votes that Clinton won and Johnson tried to win, but also the right-leaning and blue-collar Democrats Trump corralled. Clinton handily won the popular vote with the former, and electorally Trump will be president because he tapped into the latter.

That was Rand Paul's original plan—to be the genuine conservative the GOP base might like, but also to represent something better than just that, a new kind of political Republican brand that could grow the party. Paul's pitch was always to both progressives and conservatives—taking the best parts of left and right as his father had—to create a new winning Republican coalition more in sync with today's changing political environment.

Again, Johnson's pitch was to ignore or insult right-leaning voters (some of whom were desperate for an alternative to Trump) and to promote a libertarian brand that ultimately became perceived as too conventionally Democratic (running mate Bill Weld arguably did the most damage here). Most of the voters they tried to reach simply went for Clinton anyway.

If the liberty movement and its candidates need left-leaning libertarians, and they do, our movement will never thrive politically without simultaneously reaching out to the millions who will continue to lean Republican for the foreseeable future. Many non-conservative and left libertarians imagine their philosophy to be more metropolitan, but it was non-urbane America that delivered Trump the election and who shouldn't be ignored by liberty candidates in the future.

Furthermore, no one, particularly libertarians, should mock or dismiss people who are genuinely hurting or crying out for help. This goes for black citizens systemically abused by police, as much as it does the poor whites of the Trump coalition who see their jobs and senses of purpose dwindling away. Old-fashioned classical liberalism, or libertarianism, demands both.

Philosophically, libertarianism as defined by the liberty movement has always included the best elements of conservative and progressive ideology. Politically, left *and right*-leaning voters will always matter in any election.

If 2016 didn't teach left libertarians this, nothing likely will.

What non-conservative and left libertarians got right

After Rand Paul dropped out, as bad as Gary Johnson was, he was still the clear explicit libertarian choice left in the presidential race.

Principled libertarian positions should count for something.

Libertarians who voted for Johnson shouldn't regret doing so. It was a matter of principle. Johnson was my fourth vote for a third-party candidate in a presidential race. Each time that vote was based on principle first.

More importantly, from a practical standpoint, and as critical as most libertarians were of Gary Johnson in 2016 (as I have also been here), he still far outperformed any other Libertarian candidate in history by a significant margin.

This suggests that if getting votes is a goal—and it should be—there might be more important things to consider in elections than just what we libertarians think.

Still, this is not the most important thing non-conservative and left libertarians got right in 2016 and continue to get right.

The 2016 election had the lowest voter turnout in 20 years. The older, white working class that delivered Trump the White House, numerous as they are, are still significantly out of sync politically and temperamentally with Millennials who will become the largest voting bloc in the near future (many stayed home in this election, to Clinton's detriment).

In many respects, 2016 was a race to the bottom, where a more formidable Democrat with the ability to tap into Trump's working class coalition—Joe Biden or Jim Webb, for example—might have bested the current president-elect. At the moment, Trump might represent the future of American politics, but demographically, he's just as likely to be a last gasp. Time will tell.

Also, despite his noxious rhetoric and depending on his actions, Trump could also still play well in this changing America. We know he can adapt to different environments and usually does (as much of the country will, in turn, adapt to him). The expectations are so high among Trump's supporters, and fears equally high for his detractors, that it's highly likely he will end up somewhere in the middle. Left and non-conservative libertarians who join right political libertarians in saying the old politics must "evolve or die" into something more compatible with

our age were not necessarily disproven by Trump's victory. The new president's failures, and perhaps even his success, could potentially help prove it.

Furthermore, while what we believe does pose a challenge to the status quo, libertarianism is not inherently an extreme philosophy. Practically, it is a governing principle that can feasibly appeal to the widest number of people, beyond what conventional right and left are capable of. Gary Johnson seemed to believe this, even if he couldn't express it. Rand Paul believes this, but never got much of a chance to broadcast it in 2016.

For radical ideas to succeed, ultimately and inevitably, they will have to end up becoming more mainstream. Ron Paul's Audit the Fed bill is a good example—a once fringe issue few paid any attention, but that today is supported by a majority in Congress.

Becoming mainstream is what success will look like in real-world terms, something too many libertarians, long accustomed to being marginal, have a hard time adjusting to. This obvious natural progression from marginal to mainstream is likely to remain anathema to left and right philosophical libertarians who tend to prioritize extremism, but it is something political left and non-conservative, and also right libertarians have always welcomed.

They are right to do so.

What now? The liberty movement in the Trump era

Ron Paul recently outlined his hopes for President Trump and Congress in 2017. He included auditing the Federal Reserve, bringing American troops home from overseas, repealing Obamacare, and cutting taxes and spending.

Not surprisingly, each falls within the five liberty movement principles stated earlier: less government, less war, less partisanship, more liberty, more individualism.

Needless to say, none of these principles should change moving forward. They're why we're all here. They're who we are and have always been.

They're what we do.

But I do have two primary concerns.

Principles over partisanship

I'm not particularly worried that most libertarians will suddenly become advocates of big government, reckless wars or less liberty under Trump.

I do worry about the damage partisanship could do, both within our movement and without.

I worry pro-Trump libertarians might begin to minimize too many of his statist offenses with the argument that other more conventional presidents have done the same: "Bush started wars," "Obama was anti-civil liberties," "Bush and Obama were both big government."

These are not good arguments. This is the kind of hackery Republican and Democrat skills have wallowed in forever to defend their own presidents' bad actions.

Luckily, even among generally pro-Trump right libertarians, I have already seen criticisms of the president-elect. I hope this continues and increases accordingly.

In a larger sense, I worry about partisanship having a detrimental effect on the liberty movement's popular influence. So many Republican voters who have been onboard with Ron or Rand Paul and their allies are so excited about Trump that I fear this new loyalty will erase any liberty sympathies they may have once had.

For example, in 2013 the backlash against Obama's NSA metadata collection program was so great that the tea party successfully condemned it in the Republican platform—will those same grassroots conservatives also be against Trump if he calls for more mass surveillance after a terrorist attack? Or will those conservatives now be angry with Rand Paul or Justin Amash for taking the exact same stand, because it would now be perceived as anti-Trump?

Unfortunately, we probably already know the answer.

During the primaries, I desperately did not want Marco Rubio to become president because I couldn't imagine anything worse than the Republican Party reverting hard to the neoconservatism of the George W. Bush years, something the reliably hawkish senator's election would have virtually guaranteed. That particular fear about the neocons hopefully—I pray—won't manifest itself with the Bush-bashing Trump, but there are still genuine concerns that similar anti-liberty dynamics could take shape depending on the issues and what transpires over the course of the new administration.

As libertarians, we know that in times of fear the state can do great damage. Trump has shown that he's not afraid to stoke fear, and also that he might not keep a cool head during crises.

History also tells us the Republican base will almost always go along with their President's program—choosing partisanship over principle, every time, and despite what positions they might have held prior. Hypocrisy might outrage us as libertarians, but most in politics don't seem to have much of a problem with it. They really do put party before principle.

Right now we even see many once-rigid free trade Republicans throwing up their hands and declaring themselves protectionists. How many more drastic flip-flops can we expect? And in what direction—pro-liberty or against? We do not and cannot know. But the liberty movement must doggedly stick to principle.

We have always represented something better than blind partisanship, and we shall continue to do so.

Individualism first: When left or right libertarians become more consumed with being left or right than libertarian, they become less libertarian

If your primary focus or goal is to “defeat” the left or right—as if either side actually gets most things correct and the other doesn't, an infantile proposition—chances are you're probably not a

libertarian. This is the kind of jousting conventional conservatives and liberals live for. Part of Ron Paul's appeal is that he rejected this false ideological dichotomy.

Libertarians' goal is to limit the state, left and right.

But in 2016 more libertarians than usual began to talk like this. Being a certain kind of left or right seemed to excite some of them more than simply being a libertarian.

Proverbs tells us idle hands are the devil's workshop. The same goes for bored libertarians.

Over the course of 2016, I became somewhat concerned about our movement's commitment to individualism.

This concern is a big one.

Without this principle—the belief in the primacy of the individual—we abandon everything we believe as libertarians. While the liberty movement has largely withstood this threat, hyper-emotional reactions in favor of and viscerally against Trump have driven some libertarians, or perhaps former libertarians, into the waiting arms of collectivists, left and right.

If the culture war played a significant role in defining this election, the left's so-called "social justice warriors" (SJWs) and the right's so-called "alt-right" were the most popular expressions of these extreme ends of the ideological spectrum. SJWs are the screaming "snowflake" activists found on college campuses who shout down anyone they find running afoul of their hyper-PC values (basically everyone); the alt-right are typically Twitter-based trolls who bully minorities and anyone else who betray their racist values.

Both believe in the primacy of collectivism over individualism. SJWs see whites, men and the West as inherently evil. The alt-right also sees skin color first, with many even considering non-whites subhuman.

They are both racist movements, albeit in different ways.

Ron Paul wrote about racism a decade ago, "Racism is simply an ugly form of collectivism, the mindset that views humans strictly as members of groups rather than individuals."

He continued: "Racists believe that all individuals who share superficial physical characteristics are alike: as collectivists, racists think only in terms of groups."

Social justice warriors are anti-libertarian

Part of what we stand for as libertarians is something that could fairly be described as "social justice:" Opposing the drug war; criminal justice reform; opposing police militarization and brutality; refusing to demonize immigrants; standing up for religious minorities, among other issues.

There is nothing wrong, and much that is right, about the phrase “social justice” and many left libertarians use it accordingly. But there is a significant difference between wanting social justice and being a *social justice warrior*.

Are we thoughtful activists who don’t want to see damage done to minorities by the state? Or are we rude bush league fascists, hell-bent on shouting down anyone who disagrees with us in the most cartoonish ways imaginable?

The general public does not find this kind of behavior appealing. Most progressives I know don’t even like SJWs, or at least their antics.

As noted, certain types of libertarians have always been attracted to extreme things, and this was certainly true of a few left libertarians who embraced SJWs in 2016. Their willingness to do so seemed to increase with Trump’s worst anti-liberal rhetoric and positions. As the alt-right started to become a phenomenon, some left libertarians seemed to think SJWs provided a needed counter (this is the same circular logic the alt-right subscribes to concerning the left).

No libertarian should embrace this extreme collectivist movement. SJWs are also authoritarian, in that they seek to squelch the classically liberal values essential to free societies to impose a hard left, anti-free speech agenda.

“Censorship from the right is to be expected,” left-leaning comedy legend George Carlin said back in 2002, well before anyone even used the term SJW, “[but] censorship from the left took me by surprise. And I’m talking, of course, about what originated as campus speech codes at eastern universities and has come to be called politically correct language.”

Social justice is a laudable and even libertarian cause. But social justice warriors are an anti-libertarian and irredeemably collectivist movement.

The alt-right is anti-libertarian

As discussed, there have always been philosophical right libertarians instinctively drawn to extreme things for ideological reasons. There are also cantankerous personality types within our movement who have been drawn to extreme things for what are ultimately more emotional reasons. They’re angry. They want to lash out. Ron Paul was once a good way for some of them to rebel, but they always could have easily moved on to other ways of expressing their frustrations if any such vehicles had come along.

Which brings us to the alt-right.

Working with so many young libertarians in this movement, there has always been a sense that what we stood for was something better, even more enlightened, than our parents’ conservatism. So much of the right has long defined itself not by what it stands for, but whom it’s against—LGBT, immigrants, racial minorities, Muslims—with the groups changing with the news cycle. Many older conservatives consider being socially intolerant to be a badge of honor. To give even an inch on gay marriage or immigration reform would be to sell out to the left—even if what conservatives are fighting for no longer makes sense, if it ever did. It’s posturing for the mere sake of appearing conservative. The left does this too.

It's dumb.

Most in the youth-driven liberty movement have sought to move past these retrograde attitudes. On this front and many others, the liberty movement has always been an alternative to the mainstream conservative movement.

But that's something very different from the alt-right.

If the liberty movement combines the best of right and left, the alt-right takes the absolute worst parts of the right and amplifies them times 100. The views described above are not something the alt-right movement avoids—its mission is to expand and promote rightwing intolerance precisely to replicate, and yet somehow defeat, the hard left's intolerance.

Not surprisingly, racism is central to the alt-right.

The University of Alabama's George Hawley described the movement in November, "the core of the alt-right is white nationalism — or, at least, white identity politics. That's what the people who are really pushing that movement forward stand for, even if not everyone who identifies with the alt-right or is an alt-right fellow traveler is fully on board with that message."

Whatever else the alt-right might stand for—anti-globalism, anti-feminism, anti-political correctness—it is at heart a racist movement. It is also an authoritarian movement.

Like its left-wing mirror image, the social justice warriors, the type of collectivist thinking represented by the alt-right is a drastic departure from and rejection of what the Ron Paul movement has always stood for.

Last spring, I wrote an op-ed taking provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos to task for helping to popularize the alt-right (to which he responded, and I also responded). I was worried not that the alt-right would have a significant impact on our greater politics, and am still not, but that young libertarians might be led in anti-liberty directions due to the popularity of Trump.

I understand well the power and allure of personalities, particularly during periods when libertarians might be disappointed with politics.

More than a few young people reached out to me over the last year, including a number of members and leaders of Young Americans for Liberty, saying they were concerned about the direction some of their libertarian friends were taking. A few were beginning to call themselves "nationalists." Some began capitalizing "White." Once, someone on social media insisted to me that the alt-right wasn't racist, but that libertarians should still discuss and embrace "race realism."

You get the drift.

It was a minority of people trending in this direction, but enough for concern. Yiannopoulos—who first became famous, heroically, for taking on SJW lunatics on campus—has unfortunately become a significant part of this trend.

As a celebrity. That's key.

Some libertarians have wondered over the years why I talk about Ron Paul, Rand Paul, Justin Amash and Thomas Massie so much, harping on figures instead of just libertarian ideas. Because I believe that it is human nature that people will flock to personalities they feel embody their beliefs, as opposed to the ideas themselves without any context.

If you were ever a liberty event organizer over the last decade, tell me—could you draw a bigger crowd when Ron Paul was running for president or during non-election years? Might Judge Andrew Napolitano talking about civil liberties draw a larger audience than just a general discussion on the issue?

People want champions. Celebrities often inspire people, even in politics. For good or ill, wanting to cheer people who reflect our identities is in our DNA.

It took a person, Ron Paul, to take libertarianism to new heights in our politics and culture. Ron Paul was and is a symbol. Paul, Amash and Massie are ideological symbols, particularly in our movement. Conservatism needed a Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan to become more than what it had been before them. Progressives needed a Bernie Sanders in this election, and socialism got a respectable public hearing and renewed interest in 2016 due almost entirely to him.

Historically, you will be hard-pressed to find political movements that did not center on personalities.

There wasn't a groundswell of support for nationalism or protectionism before Donald Trump in 2016. People were drawn to this man first, who I don't believe is a racist, but whom racists have latched onto. People are drawn to Milo Yiannopoulos, who I don't necessarily believe is a racist, but whom racists have latched onto (and whom he has also helped promote). But the alt-right phenomenon would have never happened without Trump or ancillary figures like Yiannopoulos. It took popular figures to fan those flames, intentionally or not.

It always does.

So, in 2016, if you were a right libertarian, who was already warm to Trump, who might have even admired Yiannopoulos, and you were already predisposed to being attracted to extreme things—were you going to flirt with the alt-right?

Some did unfortunately.

All libertarians—right, left and beyond—should oppose political correctness and the authoritarian left. But increasingly, during the election and even now, some seemed more concerned with taking on the left and social justice warriors than promoting libertarianism.

Which inevitably made them less libertarian. It always does.

For these libertarians, the alt-right represented yet another anti-establishment movement that challenges the status quo. That alone is enough for them.

What's worse, many right philosophical libertarians attracted to the alt-right, or even dismissive of its inherent racism, aren't even necessarily racists. They not only find great value in extreme things, but also feel as if criticizing a movement like the alt-right—particularly when the mainstream is piling on—would somehow make them establishment skills.

It's a no-enemies-to-the-right mentality, combined with the impulse to defend extreme things—anything that places the defender outside the mainstream.

This puzzling, contrarian mindset among certain libertarians unfortunately is not new.

When the Ron Paul newsletters containing racist passages came to light in 2008 and 2012, many young libertarians wondered how something so unrepresentative of Paul could have happened in the first place. So many in our movement were completely dumbfounded. The passages sounded completely unlike anything that had ever come out of Ron Paul's mouth over a four-decade political career.

Because Ron Paul didn't say or write them, and never would.

But they were done in his name (without his knowledge, and until it was too late, has always been my understanding). So by default, those nasty words and ideas promoted 20 years ago were done in libertarianism's name

Despite being virulently anti-libertarian.

From the O.J. Simpson trial to the LA riots, extreme racial politics flourished in the 1990s, and of course certain types of libertarians played in that sandbox, racist or not. In 2008, The American Conservative editorialized:

The New Republic's revelation that Ron Paul's old newsletters occasionally included paranoid and genuinely offensive statements caused the usual round of Beltway tut-tutting about "populism" and "racism." The radical libertarian guru Murray Rothbard knew that in matters relating to race people tend to strategize for political gain.

Many in ambitious Washington hold vicious beliefs about race privately yet hide these thoughts when composing boring studies of economics. The authors of Paul's newsletters may be the first people in history who secretly wanted to write about monetary policy, but concealed their true selves by pretending to be racists.

In my view, as a 42-year-old who remembers that time well, and also who read some of the paleoconservative journals of that era, the above synopsis has always sounded fairly accurate to me.

If anyone is still confused about how something as shameful as those newsletters could have ever happened, observe the degree that certain types of libertarians today are comfortable playing footsie with the alt-right.

Not everything extreme is good. Hopefully some libertarians will finally learn this invaluable lesson. Thankfully, most Americans still haven't heard of the alt-right.

Liberty in its most base form is the recognition of the inalienable rights of individuals. Libertarians should not be in the business of doing left or right collectivists' advertising for them.

Abandoning liberty in the name of extremism is a vice.

Conclusion

I almost didn't write this. As stated prior, I'm far more interested in holding things together than infighting or factionalizing. I'm also far more interested in the movement's success than personally being proven right. But I believe actions taken that are destructive to liberty should be called out, just as acts that help promote it should be praised. Many libertarians will no doubt disagree with my premises and conclusions in this piece. I welcome those disagreements.

Our movement is large and complex, and I could have written a few more volumes this size about what we have built together. There's just so much to cover. I'm just proud to be a part of it. Maybe it will be worth revisiting at this kind of length again after President Trump's first term.

I'm optimistic it could be a good next four years for us.

The key now, as always, is vigilance.

As I have told so many libertarians over the years who reached out to me who were happy or upset about something Rand Paul has done, or radical libertarians have done, or left libertarians have done—or I have done—that there's always been a fairly reliable liberty movement gauge that helps keep us centered.

Ron Paul.

In 2016, Ron Paul endorsed Rand Paul for president, opposed Donald Trump, and did not endorse Gary Johnson. There are different factions within the liberty movement who cheered and denounced all of these positions.

As it should be—that's the diversity of our movement.

It is the many different types of libertarians I have described here, both in their positives and their flaws, that have always made up the liberty movement. We have never agreed with each other completely and probably never will. That's healthy.

Also, the overwhelming majority of people I have met and continue to meet over the course of a decade do not necessarily fit neatly into each of the categories I've outlined here. Most are mixtures of each—some more or less right, left, philosophical or political than others. Hopefully our various talents are put to good use in their proper channels. This movement has always been a genuine grassroots revolution that none of us could have ever planned. We've always been organic.

In 2007, a lone congressman undertook a long shot presidential bid that kick-started a movement that changed many of our lives in countless ways, leaving a footprint that has made an impact in every election since.

As unusual as 2016 was, we were still a part of American politics that could not be ignored. I predict the liberty movement's presence will be felt even more so over the course of the Trump administration, as we hopefully work with the president in areas where we agree, and defy him if he chooses to abuse liberty.

In 2011, I sat on a stage at CPAC with Ron Paul, Rand Paul and Tom Woods. I asked Ron that night if he was surprised by the movement he inspired—the crowds, the flourishing of libertarian ideas, his popularity and continuing influence.

“It's been more than I ever could have anticipated,” he said. “I used to think, maybe I'd serve in Congress, then I'd leave, and no one would remember I was ever there.”

Ron Paul couldn't have been more wrong. History won't forget him. He made a difference.

We all have. We will continue to.

In the era of Donald Trump, and beyond.