



Cruz Makes Play for Libertarian Voters. Is Anybody Game?

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As he moved from evangelical Iowa to fiscally conservative New Hampshire, Sen. Ted Cruz didn't waste a minute in changing his tune.

In his Iowa victory speech Cruz gave a shout-out to libertarians, who are thick on the ground in New Hampshire. He declared, "That old Reagan coalition is coming back together, ... conservatives and evangelicals and libertarian and Reagan Democrats all coming together as one, and that terrifies Washington, D.C."

One friend asked on Twitter, "When was the last time a presidential candidate even mentioned the word #libertarian?" Well, Rand Paul and Ron Paul did, of course, and Republican-turned-Libertarian Gary Johnson. And so did Ronald Reagan, who said in various speeches just before he launched his 1976 campaign that "the very heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism." And so indeed did Barack Obama, once, in libertarian-leaning Wyoming in March 2008: "You can be liberal and a libertarian, or a conservative libertarian," he told a crowd in Casper. But "there's nothing conservative" about President George W. Bush's antiterror policies. "There's nothing Republican about that. Everybody should be outraged by that."

Still, libertarians are pleased when a candidate appeals to them by name. And with Sen. Rand Paul out of the race, the libertarian vote doesn't have an obvious home.

That libertarian vote is bigger than Paul's 5 percent in the Iowa caucuses. David Kirby and I found that 13 to 15 percent of American voters hold libertarian values on a range of questions. In three separate analyses Kirby found that libertarian strength among Republican voters had risen to between 34 and 41 percent by 2012. Paul's father, Rep. Ron Paul, garnered 21 percent in the Iowa caucuses and 23 percent in New Hampshire, not far off that mark.

That's why Cruz is now lowering the volume on social issues and trying to sound like Rand Paul. CNN reports, "Gone Wednesday morning was the vow to investigate Planned Parenthood. In was [Rand Paul's] punchline about the White House tapping your cell phone." He's talking about the Fourth Amendment, eminent domain, and auditing the Federal Reserve. He's downplaying the social issues that he emphasized in Iowa. (Maybe he'll bring them back next week in South Carolina.)

But will libertarians buy it?

Cruz's appeal to libertarians rests on his apparently strong commitment to free-market economics and the limited federal government established by the Constitution. He name-drops economists Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, who are idolized in liberty circles. He filibusters against Obamacare, albeit without a coherent game plan. Just this week he introduced a bill to reinstate school choice in the District of Columbia. Compared with far less ideological establishment candidates such as Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio, or the megalomaniacal Donald Trump, he's got an advantage.

Iowa gave Cruz one big selling point with libertarians. *The Wall Street Journal* exulted that he was the first candidate to win the caucuses without supporting the federal ethanol mandate. The ethanol industry and popular governor Terry Branstad spent millions to stop Cruz. Libertarians reveled in the victory over corporate welfare. As was once said of Grover Cleveland, they love him most for the enemies he has made.

Cruz talks a lot about his commitment to the Constitution and the constraints it places on government. He memorized and recited the Constitution as a teenager. His campaign website says, "Ted Cruz has spent a lifetime fighting to defend the Constitution [which] was crafted by our founding fathers to act as chains to bind the mischief of government and to protect the liberties endowed to us by our Creator." Words to warm a libertarian heart.

Even there, though, a closer examination gives libertarians pause. Roger Pilon of the Cato Institute and Damon Root of Reason have pointed out that Cruz seems not to understand "the proper role of the courts in limiting legislative and executive excesses, federal, state, and local." In both the seminal *Lochner* case of 1905 and the gay marriage case of 2015, Cruz has insisted that the Supreme Court defer to state legislative decisions rather than uphold individual rights.

Get beyond economics and some constitutional issues, and Cruz's record is far less libertarian.

Take foreign policy. Cruz has tried to position himself between Republican uber-hawks such as Sens. John McCain and Rubio, and the non-interventionist positions of Rand Paul. He has questioned nation-building and the toppling of Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi. And the interventionists have denounced him for it.

But Cruz is no non-interventionist. On the campaign trail he talks about "bombing ISIS back to the Stone Age," "carpet-bombing," and even making "sand glow in the dark"—a surprisingly unremarked threat to use nuclear weapons for the first in 70 years. It's hard to see such loose talk about bombs attracting much support from libertarian voters.

And then there's his hostility to immigration and gay marriage. Cruz promises to deny immigrants a path to citizenship, deport illegal immigrants, build a wall on the border, triple border patrols, and step up surveillance and biometric tracking at the border. That's not the attitude that welcomed tens of millions of immigrants, including Cruz's father, to this country.

Meanwhile, Cruz has been embracing a truly startling array of antigay extremists. I don't mean that he says the Supreme Court exceeded its authority in striking down state gay rights bans—though of course he does—or that he has been endorsed by numerous members of Congress who

support a constitutional amendment to take marriage rights away from gay couples—though he has. I mean that he has shared stages with people who ought to be beyond the bounds of any aspiring president. On caucus day in Iowa Cruz brought in Virginia pastor E. W. Jackson, who has called gays "perverted," "degenerate," "spiritually darkened" and "frankly very sick people," to campaign for him.

The night before the caucuses, making his final pitch to Iowans, Cruz brought *Duck Dynasty* star Phil Robertson with him to Iowa City, and Robertson told the crowd that same-sex marriage "is evil. It's wicked. It's sinful.... We have to run this bunch out of Washington, D.C. We have to rid the earth of them." In November Cruz appeared at a "religious liberties" conference organized by pastor Kevin P. Swanson, who railed at the conference, as he had said many times before, "YES! Leviticus 20:13 calls for the death penalty for homosexuals. YES! Romans Chapter 1, Verse 32, the Apostle Paul does say that homosexuals are worthy of death.... And I am willing to go to jail for standing on the truth of the word of God."

Those are not alliances likely to appeal to libertarians, not to mention moderates, independents, swing voters, soccer moms, or anyone who wants a president with a modicum of judgment.

Ron Paul supporters and other libertarian-leaning voters may swoon when Cruz says, "There are a whole bunch of areas that the federal government has no business sticking its nose in. I will fight every day for you, for your freedom, for your right to run a small business, for economic growth and for keeping government the heck off your back." But if they look more closely, he's going to have some awkward conversations.

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