

GOProud, libertarians and CPAC

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I read Melissa Clouthier's [post over at RedState on libertarians with interest](#). The title, "Should Libertarians Be Banned From CPAC" is obviously one that will attract very strong opinions, though she isn't suggesting that we actually be banned.

Clouthier rightly notes that conservatism is made up of three legs - fiscal conservatives, social conservatives and "defense hawks"; adding that "Republicans are NOT necessarily Conservatives, although many Republicans are conservative":

Some politicians hold socially conservative beliefs but don't like talking about them because it's icky. More of them, especially in the Senate, are socially liberal.

Republicans killed their brand by nearly abandoning any form of fiscal conservatism. They believed in keeping taxes, but not spending, low. This caused the government to grow and the future debt obligations foisted on future generations to grow with it. The Democrats have since made the Republicans look like pikers in comparison, but the Republicans still have a ways to go to undo their image and action problem.

Clouthier then brings up GOProud, an organization comprised of gay conservatives that has been involved in a high-profile controversy due to their sponsorship of CPAC, noting their support of gay marriage. However, she also notes that GOProud has at least two of the three legs of conservatism by supporting a strong national defense and free markets.

She then brings up the libertarian position on gay marriage by referencing the platform of the Libertarian Party:

[T]here are Libertarians of the Ron Paul variety. Last year, they notoriously won the CPAC straw-poll (a function of a bunch of college Ron Paulians being shipped to the conference to stuff the voting). You can [look at the Libertarian's platform here](#). There is little about social issues, and in fact, many Libertarians are pro-Gay Marriage and pro-abortion. Or, they believe that these are personal choices and not to be part of the government at all. As to foreign policy, many libertarians are frankly anti-war, period. Some others believe in border protection with the rest of the world on its own. Others believe that America is only obligated to fight back when they're attacked (and the 9/11 attack was not a real attack).

I take issue with this. Remember, Clouthier opened her post by saying, "Republicans are NOT necessarily Conservatives, although many Republicans are conservative." I understand her point, but applying the arbitrary platform to speak for all libertarians is a little ridiculous.

Just as all *conservatives* are not Republicans, not all *libertarians* are Libertarians. While many subscribers to the libertarian philosophy may be active in the Libertarian Party or vote for its candidates, it's my experience that the party doesn't necessarily speak for all of those in the liberty movement...far from it. Moreover, most think tanks-types and libertarian activists I've encountered believe that the Libertarian Party has set the movement back because of, what they view as, a dogmatic approach to the philosophy and a poor approach to politics; both relevant critiques.

My friend George Scoville [adds his own thoughts](#):

Libertarianism isn't the Libertarian Party (of which I am a former member), and it's not a gaggle of rabble-rousing college aged Ron Paul supporters (I did not and would not vote for Ron Paul), or a flock of misguided Ayn Rand devotees (she's on my bookshelf, but so is Karl Marx).

Libertarianism is a political and moral philosophy that predates the United States itself, one could argue, [going all the way back to the pre-Magna Carta days](#) in England, or to the [old days of the Roman Republic](#).

Its modern instantiations include the philosophies of [John Locke](#) (also known as Lockean liberalism or classical liberalism), [James Madison](#), and [Thomas Jefferson](#).

Its contemporary instantiations include the philosophies of [Robert Nozick](#) and [Charles Murray](#), the same Murray whose seminal work [Losing Ground](#) (1984) laid out the moral case against the failed Great Society programs and continued dependence on the American welfare state during the Reagan presidency.

Brian Doherty, senior editor at [Reason](#), wrote an excellent book about the libertarian movement a couple of years ago. It's called, [Radicals for Capitalism: A Freewheeling History of the Modern American Libertarian Movement](#), and it traces our history back centuries. It should be a book that anyone reads before attempting to write a piece about libertarianism and its history.

Clouthier adds:

The conservative movement swings. And different issues come to the fore depending on the circumstances. It is not being overly dramatic to believe that America faces a dire fiscal crisis and it is *the* defining issue for the next two years. That doesn't mean all other issues are irrelevant. It just means that fiscal conservatism is at the fore.

Since Libertarians occupy the fiscal conservatism circle, they're getting more attention and validation than they've had in years. Being that many of them are so annoying on other issues, it can be grating to have them be center stage when they aren't conservative in any other meaningful way. Still, that doesn't mean that

some ideas that had been out in libertarian land aren't now mainstream conservative ideas—auditing the Fed comes to mind, cutting whole government departments comes to mind. Ideas that were once unthinkable are now at least being considered. How do we put these fiscally conservative ideas into practice?

I'm sure you see where I'm going with this...

The answer to the question about whether Libertarians should be at CPAC..is well, yes, they should be there. And so should GOProud. They have every right to try and convince people of their ideas. The Conservative world is not the Borg. It is not some monolithic hive-mind like the Left enjoys. There are debates and the circles expand and constrict.

The fiscally conservative circle was nearly non-existent for years. I'm glad it's back. I hope it can make a difference policy-wise and through concrete legislation.

There are no doubt attendees of CPAC that would prefer that us libertarians not show up. Tax Hike Mike Huckabee [is one of them](#). They're entitled to their opinions. I'll admit that I'm not a fan of social authoritarian beliefs. Like David Boaz, executive vice president of the [Cato Institute](#), wrote yesterday at the *Los Angeles Times*, [social conservatives tend to not offer real solutions to problems](#), at least not consistent with the views they claim to hold. Instead, most of their answers increasing the size and scope of government:

When Huckabee says that “a breakdown of the basic family structure” is causing poverty — and thus a demand for higher government spending — he knows that he's really talking about unwed motherhood, divorce, children growing up without fathers and the resulting high rates of welfare usage and crime. Those also make up the “high cost of a dysfunctional society” that worries DeMint.

But the “Family Values” section of DeMint's Senate website talks about abortion and gay marriage, along with adoption. There's no mention of divorce or unwed motherhood.

Or take a look at the key issues on the website of the Family Research Council, the chief social conservative group. It recently listed eight papers on abortion and stem cells, seven on gays and gay marriage, and one on divorce. Nothing much has changed since 1994, when I reviewed the Council's publications index and found that the two categories with the most listings were “Homosexual” and “Homosexual in the Military” — a total of 34 items (plus four on AIDS). The organization did show some interest in parenthood — nine items on family structure, 13 on parenthood and six on teen pregnancy — but there were more items on homosexuality than on all of those issues combined. There was no listing for divorce. Since that time, the out-of-wedlock birthrate has risen from 32% to 40%.

Back then, conservatives still defended sodomy laws. These days, after the 2003 Supreme Court decision striking down such laws, most have moved on. Now they just campaign against gays in the military, gays adopting children and gays getting married.

Reducing the incidence of unwed motherhood, divorce, fatherlessness, welfare and crime would be a good thing. So why the focus on issues that would do nothing to solve the “breakdown of the basic family structure” and the resulting “high cost of a dysfunctional society”? Well, solving the problems of divorce and unwed motherhood is hard. And lots of Republican and conservative voters have been divorced. A constitutional amendment to ban divorce wouldn’t go over very well, even with the social conservatives. Far better to pick on a small group, a group not perceived to be part of the Republican constituency, and blame it for social breakdown and its associated costs.

That’s why social conservatives point to a real problem and then offer phony solutions.

In some respects, the animosity towards libertarians and GOProud - though the latter isn’t associated with the former, [despite attempts to link them](#) - is because social conservatives are becoming increasingly irrelevant as acceptance of gays is becoming more common, especially among the up-and-coming generation of conservatives.