

The Anniston Star

HOT BLAST: The other 'L-word'

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Writing in The New York Times magazine, Robert Draper asks: Has the 'Libertarian Moment' Finally Arrived?

He offers this:

Libertarians, who long have relished their role as acerbic sideline critics of American political theater, now find themselves and their movement thrust into the middle of it. For decades their ideas have had serious backing financially (most prominently by the Koch brothers, one of whom, David H., ran as vice president on the 1980 Libertarian Party ticket), intellectually (by way of policy shops like the Cato Institute and C.E.I.) and in the media (through platforms like Reason and, as of last year, "The Independents"). But today, for perhaps the first time, the libertarian movement appears to have genuine political momentum on its side. An estimated 54 percent of Americans now favor extending marriage rights to gay couples. Decriminalizing marijuana has become a mainstream position, while the drive to reduce sentences for minor drug offenders has led to the wondrous spectacle of Rick Perry — the governor of Texas, where more inmates are executed than in any other state — telling a Washington audience: "You want to talk about real conservative governance? Shut prisons down. Save that money." The appetite for foreign intervention is at low ebb, with calls by Republicans to rein in federal profligacy now increasingly extending to the once-sacrosanct military budget. And deep concern over government surveillance looms as one of the few bipartisan sentiments in Washington, which is somewhat unanticipated given that the surveiller in chief, the former constitutional-law professor Barack Obama, had been described in a 2008 Times Op-Ed by the legal commentator Jeffrey Rosen as potentially "our first president who is a civil libertarian."

Ed Kilgore has a different take:

It sure does not look apparent to me, even if you assume Rand Paul can beat the long odds against winning the 2016 presidential nomination. As I've argued here and elsewhere, what Draper and others seem to view as a "libertarian" tendency within the GOP is actually a "constitutional conservative" ideology that owes more to the Christian Right than to anything traditionally identified with that other "L-word." So it's not at all clear millennial voters will find much attractive in a Republican Party that hates government because it's not controlled by reactionary culture-warriors.

Jonathan Chait chimes in:

The premise underpinning Robert Draper's *New York Times Magazine* cover story on the "Libertarian Moment" is that libertarians offer the cure for the Republican Party's political difficulties. The story has lots of problems — a failure to account for recent history, in which the GOP already moved toward libertarianism after 2008, and is now moving back, not to mention a general credulousness toward its subjects — but the central problem is that its major thesis is rooted in a complete misuse of public-opinion data. I criticized Draper's misuse of data last week. Draper and his primary source have both replied, and their replies show that the article's erroneous conclusions turn out to be even worse than I initially described.