



**BEING
LIBERTARIAN**
BECAUSE FREEDOM MATTERS

An Interview with Former LNC Chair Bill Redpath

Jacob Linker

January 21, 2017

Bill Redpath was Chair of the Libertarian National Committee from 2006 to 2010. He was Chairman of the Libertarian Party's Ballot Access Committee from 1992 to 1996 and under his direction the Libertarian Party became the first non-major party to achieve ballot access in all 50 states plus DC in two-consecutive elections in United States history. He has been a six-time candidate for the party and today serves as Treasurer for FairVote.

Bill Redpath: Good morning

Charles Peralo: Yes good morning,

Jacob Linker: And what a wonderful morning it is

Charles: So I guess I'll get started. Hello there I'm Charles Peralo with beinglibertarian.com and here I am with my good pal Jacob Linker and also former Chairman of the Libertarian Party Bill Redpath. Hey Bill how are ya doing this morning?

Bill: I'm great Charlie and how are you?

Charles: Well I'm doing well. I'm glad to be talking to you. I mean we've met before I believe. Were you at the Orlando Convention?

Bill: I've been at every Libertarian Party convention, national convention, starting with the Seattle Labor Day 1987 Convention when Ron Paul was nominated – so yeah I was in Orlando.

Charles: Okay great – I mean we definitely had a fun time down there so I guess that the biggest thing to ask is what do you think of the results we got? We nominated Johnson-Weld, I voted for both Gary Johnson and Bill Weld, I liked the ticket a lot, Jacob was on the campaign as well – how do you think it went?

Bill: I think overall it went well. I think that it created a lot of interest among the general public. We got the Johnson-Weld ticket got more than 3.28% of the popular vote and over triple Ed Clark who got 1.06% in 1980, so I think there were some things that occurred that I rather we

could go back and change we would or probably anybody would, but overall the coverage that we got and the ballot access – we came out with I think 37 states plus DC – we came out with ballot access by far, I remember the days when it was in the low teens, the number of states where we had ballot access, so it's – things have definitely improved and the Johnson-Weld ticket and the very recent past certainly has a lot to do with that.

Charles: Well that is great. So Jacob what is the first question you have that isn't the Johnson-Weld campaign?

Jacob: So looking back at November, Maine became the first state in the nation to vote for Ranked-Choice voting, opening the door to multiparty democracy in the state. How do you look at this and what do you think this means for the push for a more effective democratic process going forward in regards to other states, cities, or districts doing what Maine did?

Bill: I think it's going in a positive direction nationally. Social change however happens very slowly and it's very interesting that the polls in Maine showed us way ahead but even late during the campaign in September and October – I saw polls – showing a significant undecided and usually in these situations undecideds, by a large majority, vote against change, but it did pass by 52 to 48 margin. I have learned of a group in Massachusetts that is going to work towards ranked-choice voting in Massachusetts. So, it's ... I think things are looking up and things are particularly good. Where it's happening however tend to be in areas that have liberal politics and its tough right now – and with the electoral college situation now, it is going to make it even more difficult to get Republicans on board with electoral reform. So overall I think that it's positive, but its gonna be tough to grow there's no question about it.

Jacob: So how much of what happened in Maine do you think is a product of the state's unique political culture? The US has two independent Senators, one of whom is Angus King of Maine who formerly was the Independent Governor of the State. It's also the state where Ross Perot came closest to winning back in 1992. Throw on top how out of place with national norms a Senator like Susan Collins is, and you have a pretty particular political culture in the state.

Bill: Right and I think that, certainly, Maine's political culture played a role no question about it. It made things easier there than it would have been elsewhere. Maine is an initiative and referendum state, it isn't going to be as easy in states that don't have initiatives and referendums, as we'll have to go through the legislature which is one-hundred percent composed of Rs and Ds. So, it's certain that that had something to do with it but the thing that we have to explain to do, we have to explain the benefits – we have to talk about more choices, more effective choices for people, because people want that intuitively. I see it out there, I've done petitioning over the holidays in Ohio for the Libertarian Party of Ohio, the party commission there is trying to get back on the ballot in Ohio as a political party, and it's clear talking to people that a lot of people are dissatisfied and are looking for alternatives.

Charles: Well if you want to talk about just how this changes the game, ... I didn't even know it was happening in Maine until Jacob and I, we were going to Queens to get people to vote Johnson and Weld and handing out some fliers, and I would say – Jacob what would you say – 80% of the reason people said they weren't going to vote for Gary Johnson was?

Jacob: What I heard most often, especially from people who liked the two of them, was the standard line about not wanting to waste their vote.

Charles: I know Maine is not going to do presidential races even though they could change that policy later on, but still for Senate races, gubernatorial races, congressional races, just having the Libertarian Party and the Green Party not have this curse of just being “oh your vote doesn’t matter” just not having that is such a basic – I would say 99% of the reason people don’t vote libertarian, don’t vote third-party just ended in Maine and I think that Rhode Island, Massachusetts – I think they’ll come a long way in the next few years.

Bill: Well you’re absolutely right that it’s the wasted vote syndrome that people – maybe they can’t name it but they feel it they know it intuitively – that whether they have a chance to win or if I’m throwing my vote away, there are several answers to that but I won’t go into those right now, I can if you want me to, but I don’t think ranked-choice voting or single-winner elections is going to make third-party candidates electable. I think that is going to require proportional representation in legislatures for that to happen; but what it would do – it would do a couple of things – it would do away with the wasted vote syndrome – what would that mean – much more earned media, I’m a many time candidate for public office and I’ve been asked multiple times by reporters “why should I cover you” and that question goes out the window – much more earned media and much more debate inclusion – now you’re going to have major party candidates possibly wanting – or perhaps the sponsors of the debates- all the candidates in because major party candidates would want to be third-party voters’ second choice vote. It would have a great and positive effect for the Libertarian Party even though I really don’t think it would lead to more libertarians being elected.

Jacob: One other advantage to ranked choice voting that I’d read up on is that it improves the quality of the political discussion. You can’t just attack or ignore other candidates because you’ll want to be their second choice. One anecdote I heard was a mayoral or state legislative candidate walking by and noticing someone putting up a sign for another candidate – the candidate talked to that person when they otherwise would have ignored them because they wanted to at least be that person’s second choice. Given how bad the political environment has been getting, am I just being optimistic here?

Bill: No you’re absolutely right, and you just can’t go negative ... you can’t just trash the other guy – which is what happens with the two older parties as they just ignore independents and third-party candidates and just focus so much of their energy on trashing the other older party candidate and I think that dynamic will change for the better. We had supposedly a tossup, my congresswoman Barbara Comstock in Virginia, the television airwaves, ugh. She ultimately won by a comfortable margin but there were basically two types of ads, pro-image ads for her but the vast majority of her commercials were trashing her Democratic opponent.

Charles: So it is interesting how that would change. I look at it this movement and the whole, how does it overlap with FairVote, and you mention the point of what it would take to get libertarians elected. You’re definitely right on state legislatures and obviously I think ranked-choice voting, that opens up the door a lot. Regarding the libertarian movement, one thing I noticed is just that – I voted for Gary in 2012 I voted for him in 2016 I followed third party campaigns before – one thing that always bothers me is, and I think about these third party

debates that normally happen, these campaigns like the Green Party, the Libertarian Party, Ralph Nader, it always just becomes “well you’ve got the two other options and we’re the third choice” it seems that the Libertarian Party has so much to advocate, and same for the Green Party, but they just kind of keep the same method that I don’t think anyone cares about, “that we’ve gotta stop the two big parties”. Do you agree on that?

Bill: I’m not sure I agree with your premise, if I understand it. I certainly think that there are problems, many problems, in this nation that the two older parties are not addressing. First and foremost, the national debt situation – this nation is sleepwalking to a fiscal crisis right now – and the solutions are out there and they’re not that hard to understand but there is a lack of political will, not just with the two older parties but with the American people. The war on drugs is largely bipartisan, not totally but largely. The foreign policy establishment is certainly bipartisan in this nation. So I think the message ought to be that we’ve got to change things in this nation and address issues and do things that the two older parties are absolutely unwilling to do. Beyond that, there are obviously major differences between the Libertarian Party and the Green Party. Years ago – and it’s a long platform today – years ago I read the entire Green Party platform and I agreed with about 40% of it and I disagreed with about 60% of it. So I think there are many common areas, issues, and certainly processes issues, on which the Green Party and Libertarian Party should be in total agreement and we should work with them on those and have our honest disagreements on other issues. But changing the status quo in this nation is certainly a valid message for both the Libertarian Party and the Green Party.

Charles: There’s definitely an alliance there. I just think that when it comes to the Libertarian Party, looking at the issues, definitely national debt is a big thing. I just always say that the Libertarian Party has this issue where it gets very philosophical, it gets very nonaggression principle, very personal liberties and personal property, things that do matter but it doesn’t seem to hammer in – at least at the party perspective – on the bread and butter issues. The war on drugs, deregulation, national debt, foreign policy – things which are very very simple but they try to go to very different extremes and that does create a problem.

Bill: I think that it depends from candidate to candidate. I say that maybe the Johnson-Weld campaign did things right to maximize their vote numbers. I would say it times it seemed to me that there was – and they may have been right – but for my taste I would have preferred a harder hitting campaign on the substantive issues. It seemed to me at times that both Johnson and Weld were focused too much on being well liked and likeable – and maybe that’s what scores, I’m probably several standard deviations from the typical American voter – I would also say this much – I am not an LP radical, I describe myself as a CATO Libertarian, the CATO institute does libertarianism the way I like it and I think it’s the way it should be presented – I’ve been a six-time candidate for office, I’m out there petitioning ... and I see little to no appetite in the general public for radical libertarian solutions to public policy problems. I do think they’re open to highly libertarian solution – and I think that we cannot jump, there has to be a path from here to there, and we can’t just make jump. If you want to keep social security as it is, then just propose doing away with it immediately – you will never get change if that’s the only other policy option. Social change is incremental and I just don’t see an appetite among the general public for radical libertarian solutions.

Charles: Yeah you're definitely speaking my language, you're definitely speaking Jake's language there. Look I have a lot of very radical views compared to most people, but when it comes to the Johnson-Weld campaign you brought it up and hit the nail on the head right there. I was looking at it and asking "why don't we have a formal social security plan, why don't we have a medicare plan, why don't we have a healthcare plan, why don't we have a tax and budget plan that makes more sense and is more detailed" they didn't really do that and that was a big problem there. It was disappointing and I think Jake has a question to follow up on this.

Jacob: One thing I remembered was that the lack of a Veterans Affairs section on the Johnson-Weld site was one of the reasons, more like excuses, that the IAVA excluded Governor Johnson from the Commander-in-Chief Forum. I actually went down to the forum and stood outside the venue along the west side highway with about 40 people in protest of the exclusion, not that we really got much attention for it. Do you think that not focusing on certain flashy issues hurt them? Of course looking at how the two big parties ran their campaigns, there just didn't seem to be much interest generally in issues...

Bill: I don't agree. There are some people who run for public office and they say – if you want to emphasize three issues okay fine – but sometimes I see people say that they only want to talk about three issues. I don't think that you can do that while running for office. There are certainly issues you can emphasize, and Veterans Affairs, there were a lot of issues addressed, I wanna say there were 15 on the Johnson-Weld website, you can't address all of the issues on there and Veterans Affairs may well rank below the top 15 or 20 issues. But you gotta pay attention, there was a Reason Magazine article written and I forgot written by who, on Social Security. Well Gary Johnson is the best of the candidates but his position is lacking specifics, and even non-radical libertarians are proposing what the average person perceives as radical changes to society and we need to have our ducks in a row. We are proposing major changes to society and we can't just shoot from the hip, we've got to be prepared, and we have to address specific plans as to how we are going to get from here to there and yes I would have liked to have seen more policy specifics in that regard from the Johnson-Weld Campaign.