



# BEING LIBERTARIAN

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## **Penn Jillette: The Ideal Libertarian Candidate**

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An eternal problem for Libertarian candidates is that they are not taken seriously. This is in part the product of the psychological and institutional duopoly created by the Democratic and Republican parties across the United States. Yet, it is also the product of never running candidates with serious name recognition in their own rights. That should change in 2018.

We should run for Governor of Nevada.

Penn Jillette has a mainstream profile in Nevada, and the broader country, that even the most influential libertarians can only dream of. As a magician and television personality, Jillette has built a dedicated following and a general reputation for intelligence and cleverness. He has also been a vocal advocate for libertarian principles on stage and screen, enough to earn him a position as a fellow of the Cato Institute.

In 2016, Jillette stepped up his involvement in the Libertarian Party proper. He moderated a presidential debate and was a firm advocate of Gary Johnson's campaign. Now he has to be convinced to run in his own right.

Nevada has always had a deep libertarian streak. From gambling to prostitution, the good citizens of Nevada have preferred a live and let live philosophy of governance. A Libertarian candidate could leverage that spirit and find points of difference from either major party.

The popular Republican Governor Brian Sandoval is term-limited, and his potential replacements are not nearly so exciting to Nevada voters. Meanwhile, the Nevada Democratic Party is fairly strong, thanks in large part to the electoral machine created by former Senate leader Harry Reid. As the GOP is saddled with a Trump administration that seems hell-bent on alienating the Latino community, and a Democratic Party ever more committed to nanny-state progressivism, Penn Jillette could be just the right man for the job of expressing and spreading a distinctly libertarian message.

Jillette has immediate name recognition and very significant personal financial resources, as well as a wide network of wealthy friends in the show business industry. There are few Libertarians who could boast either his profile or his resources. He has also been a Nevadan for many years, and has built rapport in the dominant industry sector.

Comedians and performers may seem like light-weights, yet Jillette has proven himself countless times to be both well-informed about, and gifted in communicating, ideas of liberty. And it is hardly without precedent. Al Franken, the former Saturday Night Live performer, is currently a senator from Minnesota (and was even considered a dark horse candidate for Hillary Clinton's running mate). Comedy can be persuasive and the ability to understand and play to a crowd are invaluable political skills, ones that Jillette clearly has in abundance.

If he could be convinced to run, it would be an opportunity for the party like never before. Our highest-profile candidates are usual on presidential ballots, but 2018 could provide the chance to make real electoral breakthrough. In our winner-take-all electoral system, we would only need to convince a plurality of voters. That is doable in a state like Nevada.

The problem, then, is getting Jillette to agree to run.

This is a mission the National Committee and Nevada state party ought to begin pursuing immediately. It would be a perfect chance to bring the disparate threads of party resources to bear on a key race. It should be treated like a presidential race, and be considered the cornerstone of a national campaign. Jillette's profile would garner national attention and could be leveraged to help down-ballot candidates and federal candidates in a few other prime target states.

Jillette would have to be convinced he could win. If the party worked to move volunteers and financial resources into the state to help that cause, he might well see it as a winnable opportunity.