

Libertarians And President Trump

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In December Politico argued that libertarians were emerging as the opposition to then President-elect Trump, and Nick Gillespie, one of the editors at the flagship libertarian publication, Reason magazine, agreed. James Hohman and Matea Gold wrote in The Washington Post about how libertarian philanthropist Charles Koch was emerging as a major force of opposition to the Trump administration.

On immigration policy that may be true, but as several writers have pointed out the Koch-seeded world of libertarian-lite non-profits that attempt to influence the GOP have many connections to both Vice President Pence and to the people likely to staff the Trump EPA. If you apply for a job listed with one of the many Koch-connected firms – FreedomPartners, I360 – and ask the recruiter (as I have) why so many jobs are open at these campaign and data science firms, you may be told that it is because many people have left their old jobs to work for the Trump administration.

But what about the young people?

You might expect the oppositional, radical, protesting, “left libertarians” to be found among the young. This weekend marks the 10th International Students for Liberty Conference, where a couple of thousand libertarians descend on D.C. for their own 3 day version of next week’s CPAC (the Conservative Political Action Conference). The libertarians have even moved — as they’ve grown — to the Woodley Park Marriot Wardman Hotel, which was the venue for CPAC through the last CPAC that flame throwing publisher Andrew Breitbart attended before he passed away. (Officially CPAC moved out to the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center because it had outgrown the Marriot, though if you check the number of voters – before and after the move – in its presidential straw poll, the numbers did not grow. Some say it moved to the inaccessible Gaylord – in Oxon Hill, Maryland – because Occupy protesters – some hired off Craigslist — were protesting CPAC. So far, they don’t protest the libertarians.)

SFL was started by a small group of east coast, mainly Ivy-educated students, including Alexander McCobin, who very ably ran and grew the group to a huge international federation operating on every inhabited continent, while simultaneously trying to finish a graduate degree in philosophy. McCobin, who speaks at ISFLC this weekend, has left the group to run an SFL for adults, Whole Food’s founder John Mackey’s organization Conscious Capitalism. Besides a change in leadership, this year’s ISFLC seems to have a change in political coloration.

In the past the libertarian students’ keynote speakers have included former Mexican president Vicente Fox (best known as an answer to a trivia question about Libertarian presidential

candidate Gary Johnson's memory lapse) on ending the drug war, and featured panelists have included film maker Oliver Stone and *Intercept* founding editor Jeremy Scahill. Edward Snowden has Skyped in as a speaker.

This year's keynote speaker is Senator Rand Paul, only a day after appearing on TV standing behind President Trump with Senator Manchin and other coal country union leaders and politicians, as the President signed directives easing regulations that had decimated that industry. Other speakers include Steve Forbes, tax cut advocate Grover Norquist, and historian Amity Shlaes.

The optics are more accommodation and less opposition, or if opposition definitely a GOPish, right of center, free trader, #NeverTrump opposition.

These more GOP-leaning, conservative-seeming panelists are mainly Friday afternoon and evening. Saturday and Sunday pick up with a more left-leaning or "liberal-tarian" assortment of speakers: AntiWar.com's Angela Keaton, Israel critic Sheldon Richman, Institute of Justice litigator Rob Pecola on civil asset forfeiture, Electronic Frontier Foundation anti-surveillance state critic and organizer Shahid Buttar, and Cato Institute pollster Dr. Emily Ekin on the central question for libertarians now "*President Trump: How did we get here, and where do we go now?*"

For the past several years many of the major speakers at ISFLC would be featured on John Stossel's Fox Business show, which mined ISFLC for content in a happy symbiotic relationship. No one else (Kennedy? Tucker?) seems to have picked that up this year, so to learn what the future of the libertarian movement is thinking, you'll actually have to travel to Woodley Park.