



## FreedomFest 2013 highlights the diversity of thought under the libertarian banner

By: Launce Rake – July 17, 2013

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Judging by the number of financial advisors, real-estate dealers, investment companies and especially outfits trying very hard to sell gold and silver products (and many mash-ups of all of the above) at last week's FreedomFest, libertarians are a lot more concerned about their investment portfolios than, say, liberty.

Not that liberty wasn't on the agenda at the three-day libertarian-and-fellow-traveler conference held last week at Planet Hollywood. Liberty and freedom could be found among the exhibitors, right alongside many other ideas and strategies.

Here's a partial list of the exhibitors:

Gun Owners of America

Global Wealth Protection

Discover Enchanting Belize

Infinite Banking Concept

Rich Dad Education

Epilepsy Cure?

Libertarian Party

Eagle Financial Publications

Americans for Prosperity

Silver Circle

Global Gold

Free State Project

Gold Standard Institute

New World Rarities

MERX Mutual Funds

Comprehensive Wealth Management

Allied Energy

McAlvany Financial Group

CATO Institute

Heartland Institute

Galt's Gulch Chili

The Heritage Foundation

FreedomWorks

TEA Party Patriots

Owing Group

Oxbridge House

Forcefield Energy

Reef Oil and Gas

FreedomFest, honestly, is about more than strictly libertarian thought, which tends to be pretty expansive in its own universe. Participants spanned the ideological spectrum from hard-right, destroy-the-welfare-state Steve Forbes types to extreme social libertarians — who also want to destroy the welfare state — dressed up in plaid shorts with studded leather accoutrements. Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, whose dad, Ron, the Texas congressman, ran for president under both the Libertarian and Republican banners, attended, as did Wayne Allyn Root, who ran on the Libertarian presidential ticket in 2008 but was a featured guest of the Nevada GOP at the party's own political action committee winger-palooza last weekend. (The fact that the GOP meeting came right on the heels of FreedomFest, and featured many of the same speakers and participants, is probably just a huge coincidence.)

The conference, billed as the “world's largest gathering of free minds,” had as its theme this year, “Are We Rome?” Sadly for fans of irony everywhere, similarly themed Caesars Palace had to cancel the convention and push the libertarians across Las Vegas Boulevard to Planet Hollywood. But it still looked as if a few thousand people crowded into Planet Hollywood's relatively small convention center this year.

When they weren't dining on conference food and drinks (*There's no such thing as a free ... ooh, is that prime rib?*), the assembled libertarian and liberty-sympathetic multitudes did a good job of filling up the largest conference rooms to bask in the reflected glory of their heroes. Some of the highlights would be a live broadcast by anti-government-regulation fulminator John Stossel of Fox Business News, Rand Paul and the ghosts of Ayn Rand and Friedrich Hayek. Former Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman also attended, signing copies of his new kinda-autobiography, *Being Oscar*, which we read and enjoyed at *CityLife* and, we suppose, fits FreedomFest because the bad guys in Goodman's memoir are the agents and lawyers of the federal government cracking on his allegedly mobster clients and/or paragons of the free market.

So, sure, the folks at FreedomFest spanned a vast universe of ideas, from radical anti-government conspiracy theories to radical anti-government economic theories, but you can find some interesting anomalies if you dig a little.

One of the reasons to go to FreedomFest is “Anthem,” a libertarian-themed film festival. The movies include the bromides against the federal reserve and government economic intervention, and a preview of the newest Ayn Rand cinematic treatment, but they included some outliers that one wouldn't automatically assume would be part of a conservative circle jerk: a broadside against the war on drugs, criticism of foreign interventionism and *Downwinders*, which examines the federal government's record of atomic weapons testing, an issue with distinct regional importance.

Jo Ann Skousen, an English teacher at Mercy College and at Sing Sing prison in New York, is the wife of the FreedomFest organizer and the director of the Anthem film festival. She said the diversity among the film reflects diversity among libertarians.

*Downwinders*, for example, is “libertarian because the government said we were perfectly safe, but we weren’t.”

Skousen says she doesn’t agree with an extreme anarcho-libertarian outlook that all government should be jettisoned. She says she believes the government needs to have a legal framework to protect property rights, but she doesn’t want the government to be a “nanny state.”

She says outsiders don’t understand her kind of libertarian. They’re not trying to turn their backs on the have-nots, Skousen says.

“We all see the same problems,” she says, such as the homeless and poverty. But where “a socialist would see the government as the solution, a libertarian sees a free-market solution.”

“I’m not a Tea Party libertarian,” Skousen continues. “I see the problems. It doesn’t mean I’m selfish or unconcerned.”

Another festival participant says he came to embrace libertarian principles because the Democratic and Republican parties both support seemingly endless wars.

“To make a long story short, my dad was a dyed-in-the-wool, antiwar liberal,” says Kyle Platt, campus coordinator of Students for Liberty at the University of Central Oklahoma, a public university in Oklahoma City. “The reason I turned towards libertarianism is that neither party was antiwar. ... Someone needs to say, ‘Enough already.’”

Platt ruefully admits that not everyone at FreedomFest shares his belief in small government. I point out that a video loop of Tea Party Patriots celebrates the success of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker in avoiding a voter recall; the week before the festival, Walker made national headlines by approving a state law mandating a medically unnecessary “transvaginal probe” and ultrasound for women seeking to terminate their pregnancies in Wisconsin. Government-ordered insertion of medical instruments does not, I suggest, sound like “small government.”

“They agree with us on economic issues,” he says. “But we, or at least I, don’t view them as truly libertarian ...

“What does ‘libertarian’ mean? A philosophy of liberty, but there’s no purity test. To truly be a libertarian, you have to have a robust sense of liberty. It has to be all the way around, 100 percent.”