



Outsiders vs. Insiders: Are libertarians wrong to pick a fight with the new Donald Trump GOP?

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Does Donald Trump upset your libertarian soul?

It's a question conservatives and Republicans are asking of late, especially in the wake of the president's unbending defense of his America First trade policy and always front-and-center advocacy for sealing America's southern border (as well as his travel ban and other proposed shifts in immigration procedure that would effectively limit the number and types of legal immigrants). Trump's fondness for big government resolutions and big spending has the liberty movement upset. It's a crack in the GOP coalition that could easily widen if not addressed.

Such Trumpian measures reek of system generated "solutions," something dyed in the wool libertarians profess to abhor. There aren't many such (pure libertarian) creatures in elected politics these days – at least not in the Washington swamp – but those who are here are becoming restless with Trump's willful use of state power and resources to achieve his aims.

In a piece titled "*Donald Trump and the libertarian crack-up*," [W. James Antle III](#) wrote at the *Washington Examiner* last week, "Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., confirmed on Monday he would vote for Trump's Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh despite concerns over his Fourth Amendment jurisprudence. Rep. Justin Amash, R-Mich., has opposed Kavanaugh from the beginning..."

"Amash ... sees Trump as someone who hasn't materially altered the country's post-Sept. 11 foreign policy or succeeded at his diplomatic overtures while imposing tariffs, increasing spending, and growing government (Paul has also opposed Trump on these fronts). Ideological consistency prevents him from granting partisan assent..."

"The split mirrors a dilemma faced by the party as a whole: to connect with, and try to lead, an unruly base, and risk association with a president who may discredit Republicans in the eyes of new voters they need to reach. Or, alternatively, to risk going hunting where the ducks aren't."

Granted Amash's down-the-line purist views aren't exactly representative of the rank-and-file in the GOP, but he's right -- it *is* concerning that principled libertarians are growing so disenchanted with the president. Trump never campaigned as a champion of small government so it's understandable how many conservatives/libertarians are bothered by his lack of emphasis

on shrinking the federal leviathan, but there's also a sense that this (Trump) is about as good as we're going to get under the existing political circumstances.

The ugly truth is Trump *must* succeed in order for more Republicans of Amash's philosophical bent to win elections. If the current president is brought low by the Bernie Sanders wing of the Democrat party – or even by the Democrat establishment – then the GOP would arguably be finished as an effective national entity.

Unless Democrat coalitions (minority voters, single-issue voters, unions, limousine liberals and academics, young and gullible Millennials) begin to erode there just aren't enough potential voters to sustain the GOP at the national level (individual states are a different story). If Trump's ideas don't produce results then there may never be another Republican president – or at least one who will so unabashedly fight for the grassroots' favorite themes.

Libertarians in Congress can't have their cake and eat it too. It's either Trump and most of a loaf or a Democrat who will run roughshod over any and all efforts to uphold constitutionally granted rights, appoint originalist judges and minimize government's interference in the economy.

It doesn't help that conservatives and Republicans can't even agree on what "libertarianism" really means. Ronald Reagan made it clear on how he understood the concept of libertarianism: "If you analyze it I believe the very heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism. I think conservatism is really a misnomer just as liberalism is a misnomer for the liberals — if we were back in the days of the Revolution, so-called conservatives today would be the Liberals and the liberals would be the Tories. The basis of conservatism is a desire for less government interference or less centralized authority or more individual freedom and this is a pretty general description also of what libertarianism is."

Reagan was correct; the notion of a "liberal" has completely flipped over the course of time. Perhaps because the word "liberalism" was once so closely associated with the cause of liberty modern-day lovers of all-things-government-control choose to call themselves "progressives," which is another misnomer. The "progress" Democrats and leftists crave would essentially return us to virtual totalitarian rule by silencing all critics of "progressive" politicians and mandated surrender of most of what we have left of our guaranteed First Amendment rights of speech, assembly, religion, petition and the press.

These "Progressives" overturn metal barriers on college campuses, toss urine bombs during "protests," break store windows and wreak all kinds of havoc. They're also fond of disrupting Republican campaign rallies and pepper-spraying people wearing "Make America Great Again" hats or shirts. Their idea of a forward-moving society means not owning guns or maintaining personal privacy of information (the government would take good care of it, right?).

Reagan's might be a reasonable general description for libertarianism but it doesn't necessarily incorporate some of today's self-described libertarian thought. While I often tell folks I hold many libertarian beliefs, I still wouldn't describe myself as a libertarian.

Why? The word itself has taken on a decidedly negative connotation in today's political lingo,

mostly because of the movement's embrace of fringe causes such as legalized marijuana (or *all* drugs), radical prison reform (decriminalizing drug sales and releasing all convicted offenders) and open borders. Libertarians are better known for *zero*-government causes than limited government ones these days. The anarchists that made headlines recently in Portland, Oregon, for example, urged the total elimination of ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement).

In order to advance their phony crusade these social rejects terrorized local business that service ICE employees, taunted and intimidated ICE workers and made a spectacle of themselves by suggesting our government purposely harms children by separating them from their parents.

One might think this anti-ICE craze is just another looney leftist pipedream but there are reputable libertarians who apparently believe similar things. Pat Buchanan blogged the other day, "In *USA Today*, Jeffrey Miron, director of economic studies at the libertarian flagship think tank Cato Institute, wrote last week: 'The solution to America's immigrant problems is open borders. ... Open borders means no walls, fences, screenings at airports, ICE ... deportations, detention centers or immigration courts.'

"And what would happen after we declare open borders?"

"Immigrants will not flood into America. ... Crime will not skyrocket. ... Even if values and culture change, so what? ... Who says America's current values — some of them deeply evil — are the right ones?' Bottom line for Cato's Miron: If we throw open America's borders and invite the world to come in and to remake who we are as a nation, 'Think about the money we could save and make.'"

This quote was contained within a larger argument Buchanan made about globalists (to him, free traders and open borders proponents) plotting their own resistance to Trump and his America First MAGA agenda. While it's true free traders have harshly criticized Trump's tariffs and quasi-protectionist government policies, Trump himself conceded that the new boosted levies on imports are likely only temporary and don't signal a long-term shift towards waging trade wars.

Of course Buchanan is an unapologetic trade nationalist who believes high tariffs are great no matter what — which is the exact opposite of what true libertarians believe. If you've ever wondered where the dividing line between conservatism and libertarianism lies, it's with trade policy...and open borders.

With all due respect to Miron-type libertarians it's hard to make a credible case for having no borders at all — at least in the United States. "Progressive" communist countries have borders — they're sealed so no one can leave. Some countries likely have lightly patrolled (or no enforcement whatsoever) borders, probably because they don't need them. If a nation is so poor and its people so utterly impoverished that it's not worthwhile to live there, why devote resources to keeping people out?

And didn't the family von Trapp (of *Sound of Music* fame) escape over the alps to enter Switzerland? Were there Swiss guards at the top of the peaks on the border with Austria?

“Open borders” is extreme to say the least. It seems for libertarians, the best political approach to get what they want is to follow the lead of someone like Senator Rand Paul. Rand may not be as highly regarded in libertarian circles as his dad was, yet the Kentucky senator has firmly established his own niche in American politics as a frequent principled dissenter who expresses his views and still manages to accomplish something.

Libertarian Jack Hunter wrote at the *Washington Examiner*, “Here’s the truth: Paul is arguably the most principled leader in Washington and in the Senate, with respect to others who belong in that conversation, like rigid constitutionalist Mike Lee, R-Utah, and consistent civil libertarian Ron Wyden, D-Ore. This is something I can say with confidence not only because of the senator’s record, but also as a former staffer, collaborator, and fellow libertarian traveler who’s watched him closer than many since day one.

“Paul takes whatever approach he deems necessary depending on the circumstances of the issue, precisely because he’s most interested in advancing an overall libertarian and conservative agenda. He’s never above taking a lone or quixotic stand to make a point, and often does, but he also doesn’t limit himself to a career of doing only that, even if many of his foes and fans believe he should...

“Trump Derangement Syndrome is real. So many on the Left and Right are so emotional about this president that they can’t even think rationally anymore — about Rand Paul or anything else.”

Rand Paul is one of those rare politicians who occasionally earns the ire of *both* ends of the political spectrum – Democrats despise him because he’s adept at pointing out the flaws and distortions in their arguments concerning civil liberties or bloated big government programs. Likewise, (some) Republicans resent Rand for his realistic foreign policy views, reluctance to quickly go to war and stubborn refusal to rubber-stamp deep state invasions of privacy such as drone surveillance.

If anything Paul is seen as kind of a lone wolf in the Senate, part traditional Republican, part libertarian holdout and part staunch conservative Trump advocate. Trump and Paul sparred memorably during the 2016 primary debates but ever since he’s become president the New Yorker has forged a trusted friendship with the junior senator from the Bluegrass State. Rand still threatens to defy Trump from time to time (such as on Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination) but there’s little doubt Paul is one of the most reliable senators in the upper chamber for conservatives.

Needless to say Paul is one of only a handful of senators from either party who regularly highlights excessive government spending and actually puts policy proposal muscle behind his words – Rand’s “penny plan” would balance the federal budget within five years if implemented. Paul’s the type of senator this country could definitely use more of from a family of principled politicians who aren’t afraid to buck the trend or rock the boat.

As a libertarian, Paul is also a reliable commenter on the flaws inherent to the criminal justice

system. Unlike Senator Elizabeth Warren (who definitely is *not* a libertarian), he doesn't lie about its problems, however. Rich Lowry wrote at *National Review*, "[I]t's entirely fair to argue that different rates of offending are a function of the vestiges of racism, and that it is urgent to pursue criminal-justice reform given how the status quo affects black families and communities. But the idea that we are living in a latter-day apartheid South Africa, with a system designed to jail and immiserate blacks out of sheer maliciousness, is contemptible, poisonous, and wrong.

"It is telling that Elizabeth Warren is going there. There are two reasons. One is that she has a Bernie Sanders problem: She is (to all appearances) a white politician who has overwhelmingly devoted herself to economic issues. She needs to play identity politics catch up. Two, in reaction to Trump, the Left is embracing a sweeping indictment of America as undemocratic and racist at the core.

"Warren's performance shows that the party is prepared to consider no critique of America too radical or out of bounds."

Rand Paul has neither a Bernie Sanders problem nor a need to play catch up on identity politics. Libertarians in general are equal opportunity ideologues – they're against *everything* that smells of government overreach.

Debate will continue as to libertarianism's place within the larger body of conservatism. To remain viable the GOP must appeal to all believers in small or limited government, something Donald Trump needs to understand. Will the GOP congressional leadership go along as well?