



## Proclaiming Liberty in Central Pennsylvania

Tad DeHaven – 11/11/12

---

Supporters of limited government have little to cheer about today (and Romney winning wouldn't have changed that in my opinion), so I'm going to point out a small glimmer of hope. In Pennsylvania's 79th district, voters elected a local finance professor and radio host named John McGinnis to the state House of Representatives. A lot of Republicans talk a good game about liberty and smaller government – "Dr. John" eats it for breakfast.

Now I'm fully aware that unconventional candidates for public office generally have their best chance for success in lower profile races. The 79th district is also solidly Republican and so McGinnis probably had an advantage over his Democratic opponent. But I grew up in the district, and it is definitely not a hot-bed of libertarian thought. So I think it's pretty amazing that a guy who openly states that Ludwig von Mises is his favorite economist can win an election in a place that saw its best days when the railroads were dominant.

I came to know Dr. John (he has a PhD in economics) through his radio show. John had me on the show several times to preach the Gospel according to Cato. The show always began with his boisterous call to "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land!" John developed a reputation for getting under the skin of elected officials, and no politician was spared his wrath – particularly Republicans. So I was surprised when I found out that he had decided to quit his show and challenge the district's long-standing representative in Harrisburg – the epitome of a career politician – in the GOP primaries.

In both the primary and the general election, the word "libertarian" was used as a slur against McGinnis. "He wants to legalize drugs!" the opposition would cry. "He wants to dismantle public education and other public services!" the government employees screamed. Local politicians warned that McGinnis would be ineffective because he wouldn't bring home enough taxpayer bacon (for them to consume, of course).

Despite all that, McGinnis sent the establishment Republican packing in the primaries, and won yesterday's general election. And he didn't sell out his

principles to do it (here in Pennsylvania, most Republicans campaigned on a promise to protect Medicare from the Democrats).

For McGinnis, however, winning the election was probably the easy part. Now he's heading off to the giant pothole in the middle of the state known as Harrisburg. His Republican colleagues are, for the most part, as establishment as it comes. And they certainly won't be rolling out the welcome mat. Upon learning of his victory, McGinnis told a reporter that "If I have to be the skunk at the party, I'll be the skunk." And he said his fear is that he will be tempted to become "an insider."

I think Dr. John will know he's selling out if his establishment colleagues suddenly start telling him that he smells good.

*This work by Cato Institute is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.*