

## Young 'Little-L' Libertarians Choose Principle Over Power

By: Tim Skillern – April 3, 2013

---

Gauging the clout of libertarian politics in the United States depends a great deal on whether you capitalize the letter "L."

There are "Big-L" Libertarians-those registered with the Libertarian Party and represented by Gary Johnson in the 2012 election. The former New Mexico governor secured 1,275,950 votes, or nearly 1 percent of the national vote, a statistically insignificant figure but a record for Libertarian candidates nonetheless. Numbers at state levels are relatively small, too. Take California, for instance: According to Feb. 10 data from the secretary of state's office, 109,636 voters-or 0.63 percent-are registered with the party.

Then there are the "little-L" libertarians-those who aren't necessarily registered but tend to adopt libertarian-tinged philosophies and talking points. Their numbers grow depending on how wide you cast the net. The Cato Institute, a conservative think tank, illustrated that idea in 2010: The more liberally you define libertarianism, the more people you can count. To wit: Fifty-nine percent of respondents to a Cato-commissioned poll dubbed themselves "fiscally conservative and socially liberal;" forty-four percent said they were "fiscally conservative and socially liberal, also known as libertarian." That's a huge numerical difference from registration figures.

Anecdotally, fervor has risen for both libertarian and Libertarian candidates, especially among younger voters. Consider the passion for Johnson and Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., who won a straw poll at the Conservative Political Action Conference in March, and for his father, Ron Paul, in the 2012 primaries.

To glimpse into how small-government principles have drawn those young voters, Yahoo News asked libertarian-minded Americans to share their stories. Here are excerpts from first-person accounts they wrote this week.

Libertarian thought a source of optimism

In high school, Piyali Bhattacharya had a bleeding heart-she says she was a "very proud and outspoken liberal"-and questioned U.S. involvement in wars and believed in free health care and education for all. She re-evaluated those political leanings in college when she found "Google Ron Paul" scribbled in chalk on a sidewalk. Now 24, she works for Young Americans for Liberty, a nonprofit organization in Washington D.C.

In her words:

Less than ten minutes of research confirmed that I had found a candidate whose stances resonated with my own on nearly every issue. But more importantly, this man had been consistent for years about the importance of civil liberties, of a

limited, constitutional government, of free market Austrian economics-and just how far politics and policy in America had strayed from those tenets," she writes.

War is still unpleasant when we are engaged in unconstitutional, unsustainable, and costly foreign intervention. I still believe in the rights of women and homosexuals-not because they belong to those groups, but because they are individuals and should be treated as such. And my bleeding heart hasn't hardened, but a deeper understanding of free market economics had led to the knowledge that limiting government and encouraging private charity are the best way to help those in need.

A libertarian foreign policy is based on peace

Jayel Aheram's "weird but good journey" to what he calls the "Liberty Movement" began with studying intellectual property rights and dovetailed politically with Ron Paul's celebrity relationship with some young voters. Aheram, 29, served with the Marines in Iraq, an experience that cemented his views.

In his words:

As a fellow veteran, I felt that he made it acceptable for me-a Marine and an Iraq War veteran-to hold antiwar views.

Thanks to Ron Paul's impact on our national, political conversation, it is now permissible for me to not want my brothers and sisters in the armed forces to have to die for a lie. It's *because* of my experience in the military-not because I'm ignorant or naïve about what war entails-that I don't want my brothers and sisters in the armed forces to have their minds destroyed by mental trauma, their hearts broken by grief, and their consciences ravaged by guilt in their participation in a moral injustice.

The libertarian foreign policy isn't isolationism; it's an understanding that if we are aggressive toward others, they'll respond with aggression toward us.

And this foreign policy based on peace and prosperity resonates deeply with my own convictions and experience in Iraq, in sharp contrast to the neoconservatism of the Republican Party during the Bush years (defined by the two costly and horrible wars, one of which is still raging to this day) and the macabre liberalism of the Democratic Party under Obama (epitomized by the Kill List, drone strikes, and military interventions in over 40 countries).

Early adherence to libertarian ideas leads to political activism

"I doubt it."

That was Cory Chenard's reaction in 2007 to a friend's guess that Chenard would support a guy running for president named Ron Paul. After discovering that the Texas congressman's economic beliefs coincided with his, Chenard, 25, focused on ideas about free markets and personal liberty. By 2012, Chenard was working as a field director for Paul's campaign.

In his words:

I believe that liberty has proven to be the most effective way to improve quality of life for people of all economic classes. Today we hear so much about "progress" and "moving forward," but the policies promoted by people using these slogans achieve the opposite effect. It is not progress to expand the size and scope of government. It is not progress to centralize power. The idea that a small, elite group of people can make more informed decisions than individuals about their lives is an ancient one, and it has been proven time and time again not to work.

By comparison, liberty is a young concept. It isn't a coincidence that in the past 300 years we've seen more progress (real progress equating to higher quality of life) than in all prior years combined. Yet, most politicians advocate more centralized control and less individual liberty-policies that are directly antithetical to the cause of the (relatively) recent enormous economic boom.

From astrophysics to politics and a change in philosophy

While at the University of Iowa with aspirations of working at NASA, Ani DeGroot found little intrigue in politics; being a Republican was only important on Election Day. But after learning more about libertarian principles, she changed her studies from natural sciences to political science and economics. Now 25, DeGroot worked on Paul's 2012 presidential campaign and was the youngest delegate from Iowa to the Republican National Convention.

In her words:

As my own political philosophy developed, I soon came to the conclusion that the libertarian philosophy was indeed the only political ideology rooted in logic throughout its entire application.

It became quite clear to me that most "representatives" in Washington had no interest in liberty or the Constitution. The burden caused by bad policy and an ever-increasing national debt that would be thrust onto the backs of my generation while both major parties treated endless borrowing and spending as the solution for nearly every problem. Though there are some principled exceptions, neither party's Establishment seems interested in principle when power is at stake.