

# ***COMPLETE COLORADO***

## **Armstrong: Liberty the loser in Colorado's GOP/Libertarian alliance**

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The Libertarian Party of Colorado is now committed to electing . . . Republicans. That's provided those candidates are sufficiently "pro-liberty." Apparently, then, we're going to start seeing Republican candidates run on a platform of legalizing all drugs, keeping abortion legal, expanding immigration, protecting LGBTQ freedoms, reforming criminal justice to reduce police abuses, and repealing zoning laws, right? Of course not.

What neither today's Libertarian nor Republican party cares about is liberty by any robust conception of the term. Granted, the newly allied parties want to preserve gun rights and lower taxes—important issues. Beyond that, what they mostly seem concerned about is conspiracy mongering.

The standards by which Libertarians will judge a Republican candidate sufficiently pro-liberty remain murky. Judging from a conversation in which Libertarian chair Hannah Goodman **falls all over herself** praising Republican chair Dave Williams, such candidates will look a lot like . . . Williams himself.

### **The spoiler effect**

My question for Libertarians content to elect Williams-like Republicans to office is this: Why not just become Republicans? Activism would be a lot more effectively spent working within the Republican Party to push (or become) pro-gun, low-tax candidates. I think all Libertarians, including those with a more-robust understanding of liberty (i.e., actual libertarians), should quit that party and work within the major parties. But if you're not even ideologically distinct from today's Republican leaders, there's zero point in registering Libertarian—unless you just get a thrill out of being a medium-sized fish in a very small pond.

On paper, a Libertarian strategy of not acting as "spoiler" makes a certain amount of sense. I have long advocated approval voting (vote for as many candidates as you want) to eliminate the "spoiler effect," and I think that should be a top priority especially for minor parties. In our winner-take-all system, absent **approval voting** or ranked voting, candidates with similar views tend to draw from the same pool of voters. So, in a three-way race, the least popular candidate is

most likely to hurt the contender with the most-similar views. As I've reviewed, Libertarians plausibly cost Republicans some races in the last election cycle.

However, Libertarian candidates do not only pull votes that otherwise would go to the Republican. Some of the votes otherwise would go to the Democrat or other third parties or not be cast at all. In the last cycle Dan Ward may have cost Barbara Kirkmeyer her Congressional seat, yet Ward cast himself as a "Libertarian Socialist" and campaigned among the heavy metal crowd—hardly a Dave Williams clone. (Despite this, Williams suggested to Goodman that Kirkmeyer would be an appropriate candidate for Libertarians to run against if she tries again.) Years ago, when I was active in the LP, a candidate for governor led with legalizing marijuana (a goal since largely achieved) and intentionally aimed his message largely at unaffiliated and Democratic voters.

Since I left the LP, I've spent hours arguing with Libertarians about the "spoiler effect." What Libertarians used to tell me is that the only wasted vote is one cast for a candidate you don't believe in and that Republicans have no moral right to Libertarian votes. Times have changed.

Now, by explicitly working with Republicans to protect Republican candidates, the Libertarian Party has positioned itself as a de facto wing of the GOP and allied itself with social conservatives. This, to my mind, is a complete betrayal of libertarianism. Libertarianism is supposed to be neither left nor right, to be liberal in the classical sense, to be "fiscally conservative and socially liberal," to be as opposed to conservative variants of statism as to progressive variants. Now the Libertarian brand is just Republican Lite.

### **Williams' anti-libertarianism**

Dave Williams is a social conservative, not a libertarian. Let's start with LGBTQ issues. The libertarian Cato Institute was on the forefront of fighting for equal rights for gay couples, including equal protection under the marriage laws. Williams took the anti-liberty side, signing onto a bill to ban gay marriage and even ban adoption by gay couples. Bluntly, for the LP to openly ally itself with such an anti-gay bigot as Williams is despicable.

What about immigration? Recently I interviewed Matt Zwolinski, co-author of *The Individualists*, arguably the most important book on libertarian history ever published. Zwolinski as a "bleeding heart libertarian" has many disagreements with economist Bryan Caplan, another leading libertarian of our age. Yet the two agree that among the most important policy reforms for libertarians today are (as I summarized): "1) remove legal barriers to building more housing and 2) expand immigration." The most important libertarian intellectual in Colorado, Michael Huemer, has written an important essay defending open immigration.

Does that sound like Dave Williams? No. Rather, Williams wrote to Trump asking him to "increase ICE raids and enforcements."

As for housing reform, most Republicans opposed Jared Polis's proposal to preempt rights-violating local zoning restrictions that forcibly prevent people from building higher-density housing on their own property if they wish to do so.

Libertarians are split on abortion. Some take the religious conservative view that a fetus is a person with rights, so government can forcibly stop a woman from getting an abortion or at least punish her for getting one. The dominant view within libertarianism, though, is that generally a woman **has a right to get an abortion**, perhaps excepting some late-stage cases. (That's my view.) Anti-abortion "libertarians" tend to look more like intrusive-government conservatives in this regard.

Williams sponsored a **bill to outlaw abortion** from the moment of fertilization, which would ban even some forms of birth control and most cases of in vitro conception. By my lights, Williams's bill is radically anti-liberty and extremely oppressive. Yet now the LP apparently has committed itself to the position that a candidate who wants to ban all abortion from the moment of conception—and to impose the Orwellian government mechanisms required to enforce such a law law—nevertheless can be "liberty minded."

Again, some of Williams's positions overlap standard Libertarian positions, especially on guns, taxes, and some economic regulations. But Williams is hardly consistently pro-liberty from a libertarian perspective, and in important ways he is anti-liberty. You'd think that would matter to a group calling itself the Libertarian Party.

### **Conspiracy mongering**

One thing Williams and today's LP have in common is a penchant for conspiracy mongering.

Recently the **state LP publicly claimed**, without any evidence, that "a bio-weapons lab is being installed in our state." The source for the claim is an anti-vax conspiracist. (Notably, Heidi Ganahl, who destroyed her campaign for governor by such nonsense as her anti-furry crusade, was quick to join this new round of conspiracy mongering.) For a non-delusional take on the facility in question, see a 9News **report** or a **media release** from CSU.

Williams too comfortably **spouts bullshit conspiracy** theories, saying, for example, "Joe Biden is not a legitimate president" and "legitimate concerns regarding election fraud have been raised by President Donald J. Trump." That's the sort of dangerous nonsense that encouraged the Capitol assault of January 6, 2021. (That said, there was a bit of election fraud in Colorado last year—and it was allegedly committed on behalf **of a Republican candidate**.)

For today's Libertarian Party, neither Williams's betrayals of liberty nor his betrayals of reality matter. Today's LP leaders would rather whine for scraps from the GOP's table than ring a clear and consistent voice for liberty for all.