

DAILY BEAST

Lincoln Chafee: 'I'd Be Open' to a Libertarian White House Bid

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August 22, 2019

The 2016 presidential election was not kind to Lincoln Chafee: the former Rhode Island governor, U.S. senator, and metric system enthusiast flopped when he mounted a long-shot campaign for the Democratic Party's nomination, becoming a punchline for the pundit class and a footnote in that year's brutal primary.

But Chafee is entertaining the idea that a new election cycle—and a new party—could be kinder to his White House hopes. Reached by The Daily Beast on Wednesday, the former Republican, former Democrat, and former independent confirmed that he's open to running again in 2020—as a Libertarian.

"I'm very motivated as an anti-war American, and also by the deficit," said Chafee in an interview. "Those are two big issues that, if the Libertarian convention next summer thinks that someone with a long record on those issues... if I fit that, then yes, I'd be open to that."

A member of one of New England's most prominent political families, Chafee recently left his home state and moved to Wyoming, citing his family's love of the outdoors. Upon arrival, he switched his official party registration to Libertarian, marking his fourth different party affiliation in his political career.

That news, [announced via op-ed column](#), got Libertarian Party politicians chattering about the possibility that Chafee could carry the party's banner for 2020. Despite Chafee's status as a political nomad and as a past backer of Democrats like Barack Obama, Libertarians held out hope he could juice their ticket, given that 2016 nominee Gary Johnson has ruled out a repeat run and the current primary field includes fugitive computer scientist John McAfee and oddball perennial candidate Vermin Supreme.

In conversations with The Daily Beast, several Libertarian Party officials and members mentioned Chafee as a possible candidate-in-the-wings for the party's nomination in 2020. Larry Sharpe, the 2018 Libertarian candidate for governor in New York, told The Daily Beast he is encouraging Chafee, along with other possible third-party candidates like Howard Schultz, to get in the race.

Chafee framed his jump to the Libertarian Party as a matter of principle, not opportunism, and explained that he didn't join the party with dreams of a presidential run. "People always say, Chafee jumps from party to party, but I've always been fiscally conservative and socially

liberal,” he said. “I’ve been very, very consistent... I was surprised how well the Libertarian Party fit when I moved to Wyoming.”

While Chafee holds some positions that are hallmarks of the Libertarian Party—he advocates a peacenik foreign policy, fashions himself a deficit hawk, and says he’s “passionate” about the Fourth Amendment—other parts of his record don’t exactly mesh with the limited government ethos. As governor of Rhode Island, Chafee received a “D” grade from the Cato Institute, a libertarian-aligned think tank, for his plan to increase taxes in order to balance the state’s books. He also earned an “F” rating from the National Rifle Association for his stances on gun control.

But Nicholas Sarwark, the current chair of the executive committee of the national Libertarian Party, welcomed Chafee’s conversion, and any presidential hopes that he fostered.

“He has experience running that race, he’s been elected, he’s got good instincts on a lot of issues that are important right now, like immigration and foreign policy,” said Sarwark. “The more the merrier, right?”

Should Chafee run, he may not be the only non-Democratic candidate seeking the unseat President Donald Trump. According to *The New York Times*, former Rep. Joe Walsh (R-IL) "is expected to announce he is running for president as early as this weekend."

Chafee told *The Daily Beast* that he would be likeliest to jump in the race if there was tangible clamoring among Libertarian activists for him to make a run. The party chooses its presidential nominee at the convention, rather than through a traditional primary process, which could be a way in for an unorthodox candidate, though activists tend to reward candidates who put in the early legwork.

“I’m new to the party and I’m still meeting people through phone calls, email, and in person,” said Chafee. “I’m at this stage learning what they might want... I’m new to the party, and I will help in any way I can.”