

# The Longer Libertarian Game

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by *Conor Friedersdorf*

In his latest column at *The Washington Examiner*, Tim Carney [argues](#) that President Obama and his hostility to libertarianism are evidence that Brink Lindsey's project to encourage an alliance between liberals and libertarians failed.

The column is pegged to Mr. Lindsey's departure from the Cato Institute.

Mr. Carney writes:

Libertarian donors tend to be small-businessmen, and when they look at the nation's increasing debt, regulation and taxes, they begin to see Obama as the devil.

Obama's excesses are making free-marketeers more partisan. The same entrepreneurs who two years ago cursed Republican overspending and Bush bailouts are now asking one question: How can we drive Obama, Pelosi and Reid from power?

In such an environment, ambiguity about Obama - maybe he's not the devil - comes across as lukewarmness for liberty. This is a problem, because it means Republicans - no heroes on limiting government - could get a free pass from donors and activists.

Blissfully removed from Washington DC, I haven't any idea whether or not Mr. Carney is correct in his speculation about why Mr. Lindsey and Cato parted ways. But his column, and the libertarian donors he is channeling, make the same mistake (one he astutely recognizes in their case): operating on an inadequately short time horizon. I don't know if a liberaltarian alliance is ever going to be a reality, or if the project is doomed to fail, but it's folly to evaluate it based on two years of a single presidency. This is especially so when practically speaking, pursuit of the liberaltarian project is perfectly compatible with staunch opposition to President Obama and every aspect of his agenda.

Mr. Lindsey's project has never been about the 2010 midterms, or the 2012 presidential election, it's been about gradually reorienting America's ideological coalitions in a way that makes liberals more friendly to libertarian ideas, and libertarians less captive to the worst aspects of conservatism. Libertarian donors ought to fund efforts to oppose President Obama in the short term. They also ought to invest in intellectual projects with longer time horizons that only bear on particular electoral and legislative outcomes indirectly. If they can't distinguish between those projects, or if they actually display thinking as immature and counterproductive as "Obama is the devil" and "maybe he's not the devil" equals "lukewarmness for liberty," they're inadvertently sabotaging their own cause. Were I a wealthy man, I'd help fund Mr. Lindsey if only to avoid keeping all the libertarian eggs in the right's less than reliable ideological basket (the short time horizons apparently extend backward too).

