

Libertarians' Proper Allies

July 15, 2010 by [Jason Sorens](#)

Reason magazine [recently hosted a debate in its pages](#) over “where do libertarians belong?”

The question was really whether libertarians ought to continue a tactical alliance with Republicans and the right, embark on a “liberalitarian” project, or disassociate themselves from both sides. The Cato Institute’s Brink Lindsey had previously argued in favor of the “liberalitarian” course (indeed coining the term), but after lack of constructive response from the left and the record of the Democratic Party in power has come to the view that libertarians should see themselves as occupying the center of the political spectrum, occasionally throwing their support to one side or the other. Jonah Goldberg argues in favor of the traditional libertarian-conservative alliance, while Matt Kibbe wants libertarians on board with the Tea Party.

The main critique of Lindsey’s argument is that the U.S. political system simply does not allow libertarians to be represented in office as such. To get elected, libertarians will have to don either the Democratic or Republican label. Moreover, the “center” of the political spectrum is really not libertarian, but a David Brooks-ish, pragmatist mish-mash ([Pileus on Brooks](#)).

My response to the whole debate is, Why do we have to choose? Libertarianism is by its very nature a diverse, nonhierarchical, individualistic movement. We can retain a concept of ourselves as a movement while nevertheless working *both* sides of the aisle. I know elected libertarian state legislators (on whose campaigns I worked, no less) who are both Democrats and Republicans. Now, the Democrats come under much more pressure from party leadership to compromise their principles. It’s a harder row to hoe. But the Democrats have a history in this country of being something of a catch-all party, and their electorate still reflects that to some extent. There are lots of “weak Democrats” out there who are very much open to liberty-based solutions.

At the state and local level, at least in smaller states where state politics has not been professionalized, it’s particularly easy to work within both parties, because the primary campaigns are less high-profile and ideological and more centered around name recognition. Libertarian political activists need to think outside the LP box, start holding their noses, and get involved in their local Republican or Democratic parties. At the federal level, of course, the only constant is that things keep getting worse. Every time you think that there can be

nothing worse than the federal Democratic Party, the Republicans take over and prove you wrong, and vice versa. The best we can hope for there is gridlock and widespread disillusionment and mistrust of incumbents. We have no interest in defending virtually any incumbents at that level. (There are a few people I would make an exception for, like Ron Paul and Tom McClintock.)

Where do libertarians belong? Everywhere!