

Libertarian Party State Chairs Meeting



Indianapolis Radisson Hotel

February 10-11, 2001

Representing Missouri

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Introduction

Greg Tlappek and Bob Sullentrup represented Missouri in Indianapolis on February 10 and 11 at the LP State Chairs meeting. What follows are my notes from the state chair sessions at that meeting.

Saturday afternoon featured a strategy session at which the attendees and LNC in joint session produced 400-500 “blue-sky” items, which await categorization, prioritization and distribution. I will make them available as soon as I have them.

One or two people, including Alaska and Hawaii, represented most states. The handful of states not represented was DE, LA, MS, ND, SD, NM, CT, WI, VT and NV. DC was represented.

The best state organizations appear to be MI, GA, IN, NC, CA.

Mission

Steve Dasbach was called upon several times to state the mission of the Libertarian Party. Since it bore repeating several times, it is presented here to start:

The mission of the Libertarian party is to move public policy in a libertarian direction by building a political party, which elects Libertarians to public office.

Most Useful Point

Nick Dunbar of the national LP during the introductions noted the “Law of Unintended Consequences” that emerges just by organizations being active. Synergies, relationships and opportunities inevitably emerge as a byproduct of activism, alliances, and activities.

Fundraising

Unfortunately, Sara (Cotham) Chambers had a death in the family and was unable to give the presentation on fundraising. However, her colleagues from Indiana noted the following:

- Have a focus for your fundraising, such as funding an executive director or radio ads
- Be shameless in fundraising, but proud to do so, and just ask for the money
- Be well prepared with 5-6 individuals at a state convention to work it
- The personal touch in fundraising works best, as opposed to donation letters
- Indiana has a credit card pledge program only. Monthly check writing lags.

I asked the group to report their experience with fundraising from PACs or companies like Smith & Wesson, AB, Microsoft, Phillip Morris, pharmaceuticals, chemical

companies and so on. “Unless you can show how the LP can affect public policy, no bucks will emerge”. (But Washington’s LP candidate siphoned enough votes away from the R to give the election to the D, and create a 50-50 split).

Bottom line on fundraising ... establish relationships. The money will come.

Building an Army of candidates

Juan Ros from CA reported on his state’s experience.

He advised going for low level offices. They did not require ballot access, they were easy to find candidates for, they typically had no filing requirements and they served as a stepping stone to gain experience.

California’s approach was as follows. They

1. determined what seats were up for election
2. determined who lived in what district. They contracted with a firm and got “slate mailers” by address
3. determined who were the registered Libertarians eligible for the offices
4. determined who out of these were regular voters (the contract firm did #2, 3, 4).
5. raised \$30k for this, and sent out 10k letters. The letters came from a mail merge that included the offices for an individual. And told them they’d follow up with a phone call.
6. used a telemarketing firm to filter the responses. If an individuals was not willing to run, the telemarketing firm then asked them for money.

California’s response was “overwhelming”, and cost \$140 per candidate recruited. They also got the names of 240 people who said they would run in the future.

The downsides Juan reported include:

1. they got too many inquiries to handle – what a problem to have
2. they got bad information from Counties on what offices were up
3. they did not get enough feedback from those who got their original letter and filed. Thus they had multiple candidates for several offices.
4. they did no candidate screening, and risked getting candidates who may have opposed the minimum wage, but wanted to impose a maximum wage.

Upside:

They discovered six LP office holders they did not know about, and got eight more elected.

Geoff Neale from TX reported on his state’s experience.

Texas made it easy for their people to say yes to running for office. They sent letters to prospects and explained the qualifications for each office. They let the prospects know

the “dirty little secrets” -- the forms to fill out and other obligations. They explained what each office did. They prepared a legislative agenda for the position.

Texas was able to identify multiple individuals filing for the same office. If one candidate was a paper candidate and the other an active one, they persuaded the paper candidate to run for another office.

Texas wanted to get 100 candidates, and they got 117. They could have gotten 200 if they had started earlier.

Texas Libertarians got elected to some bogus positions (inspector of horse collars, or weights and measures or something) and they eliminated the positions!

Texas benefited by having no filing fees and no signatures required.

Jeff Zweber of Ohio did not recruit. They recruited the recruiters. The recruiters told the prospects what they would have to do (complete which forms, enumerated the office responsibilities). The recruiters did a good job of matching candidates with offices.

Brad Klopfenstein from Indiana said they placed ads in the paper for candidates. Brad recommended LP organizations get photos of all candidates early. Indiana provided “LP Answers” as background material.

Indiana’s advice:

- Meet your deadlines (it’s simple!)
- Tak a long range view. Paper candidates today can become active candidates next time. It’s addictive.
- Join other organizations to show you care about the community.
- As mentioned, get photographs of candidates early.

Media Relations

Tim O’Brien of MI noted there is no media conspiracy against the LP. The media are interested in elections as a horse race.

He added one useful bromide: “Don’t piss off the people who by their ink by the barrel”. In fact, it is possible to play to their biases. He gave the example of a new tax to pay for an art museum. He labeled it a “tax to benefit the snooty and the rich at the expense of the working people”. It played well to the media.

BettyRose Smith of CO added that each story must be salable and advised to not invite media to non-stories, eg picnics. Do have regular contact via press releases, and set up a special “Press 3 if you’re from the press” on your AVR system.

Also, an effective technique is to just show up at events where you know TV or radio will be there and say “I’m here to be interviewed”.

Always say thank you. When a reporter covered something that the others eschewed, he got roses.

Juan Ros of CA noted you have to make news, not just give opinions. News consists of

1. Things that happen
2. Strategy announcements (so and so files for office) or
3. Gives the LP perspective

Of the three, #3 is the hardest to get published.

When issuing a press release, make it short and use inverted pyramid style which includes who, what, when, where and why at the top. Give more detail later, so that an editor with 5 column inches to spare can delete the last two inches of your text and not lose anything except more detail.

CA uses a distribution service for press releases that costs \$105 / mo. They also have a fax list (a little redundancy goes a long way). CA has head shots of their writers IN A SUIT. CA prefers faxes to e-mail because 1) the wrong person might get the e-mail and 2) the physical nature of a fax makes it more persistent.

CA also uses a press clippings service. Their fees range from \$80/month to \$200, depending upon how close it is to election time.

Alternatively, an organization can do an Internet search on “Libertarian”.

In addition, use a variety of sources including radio ads and letters to the editors. This is the third most read section of the paper after main news and comics. Write letters to the editor *directly* to college newspapers. They will be honored and likely publish your letter. Tap into newspaper weeklies. Unlike dailies, these lay on the kitchen table for a few days until someone clips the coupons and goes grocery shopping.

But don't stop there, either.

Make alliances with groups such as anti-tax organizations that share common goals on particular issues.

Do your own radio show!

Do your own show on cable access!

Finally, put e-mail addresses onto your web site!

Newsletter Creation

The purpose of a newsletter is three-fold:

- for outreach,
- for events notification,
- for general education

With the availability of newsletters available on the Internet (in particular Michigan's), it is easily possible to obtain stories from the sites of other states.

A good newsletter should contain a calendar of events in the form of an actual calendar with county meetings, discussion clubs, and other events. In Michigan, each county can update the calendar to post their events.

Do pay close attention to graphic design – the newsletter should be visually appealing. Take classes if need be in graphic design.

Consider creating a special “outreach issue” every six months with extended distribution.

Finally, a good newsletter should have a State Chair's column and articles from other contributors.

Outreach and Prospecting

Mark Mosley of GA noted that their success was attributable in very large part to Niel Boortz, www.boortz.com. Belenda Skelton is the contact to get Niel Boortz syndication available on a radio station near you.

Also, the LPGA was the force behind www.voterchoice.org, ostensibly the product of collaboration among 3rd parties in Georgia.

Sean Haugh of NC noted that candidates recruit members. Once members become activists, NC employs a ‘do-aucracy’. Simply stated, if you do it (run an outreach event), you call the shots, not get second-guessed.

Sean recommends you thank ‘em, thank ‘em and thank ‘em.

Mark Cencil of ME discussed radio prospecting. They could get commercials over night on the Art Bell show, which airs from 1am to 5am. Mark reports they had hundreds of inquiries.

Talk radio stations are particularly effective, as are classical music stations. People listen to those, while other stations just background wallpaper.

Mark would not recommend radio prospecting unless you can get a great rate as they did.

Jeff Weinstein in Yarmouth, ME is in the business and can research rates for you, finding radio stations in your part of the country and supplying rates. Media Guys, Inc., MediaJeff@MediaGuys.Net, www.MediaGuys.net, 2007-846-0700.

Jeff can produce excellent radio spots and can mix in music. Jeff Weinstein recommends you buy a block of radio ads when you're about to make news. One commercial per hour is the recommended frequency.

Tim O'Brien from MI also discussed radio prospecting. He noted it energizes the membership and helps with fundraising.

A new approach he is using is instead of saying "we're the LP, join us", he's turning it around. "If you agree with us on this controversial issue, contact us to help". He's not saying "join us, then we'll do this" anymore.

Michigan focused on the free Internet with issue ads and they played their samples. Since Tim is in radio, one he produced for \$150 using himself and a friend. Another with music produced professionally would have cost \$1200. However, this one cost \$500.

During the campaign, MI spent \$28k on Browne ads, \$10k on Conliss (presumably the LP senate candidate) and \$15k on "Tweedledum and Tweedledumber".

Ads on WXYT in Detroit cost \$150 per minute, but it has 5x the listenership. Elsewhere in Michigan ads may cost \$30. You accurately get what you pay for in terms of listener impacts.

Michigan's advice is to advertise in populous areas first. Then offer to match donations for outlying areas. That way the people in St. Joe can send in \$15, have it matched and get a \$30 ad on the western part of the state.

Radio prospecting provides Missouri an opportunity to advance our efforts much farther than we would be able to otherwise accomplish using our standard practice of staging labor-intensive outreach booths at fairs.

Building Local Organizations

Stacy Van Oast of MI noted they have a start-up kit for their new organizations. It contains sample meeting agendas, suggested jobs and positions, suggested committees, sample bylaws and suggested activities. See www.mi.lp.org

Michigan also has training meetings covering how to use their db, how to update the calendar, how to recruit candidates and so on.

They also have a county chairs meeting to solidify and enhance county organizations.

Michigan has established a goal of having one Libertarian at every local government meeting. If they can pull it off, they have a solid link into the pulse of local governments. County orgs themselves update their web site events calendar as a means of distributing the work and not having to rely on a single person.

Finally, Michigan has an online membership database that can be updated from the web by authorized individuals.

See <http://www.newsnetpipeline.com/members/membdbslides.doc>. A demo is available at <http://www.newsnetpipeline.com/nidus>. Use the userid gregd and password mrothbard. Greg Dirasian is the guru, greg@newsnetpipeline.com, 877-Newsnet.

Kurt St. Angelo of IN has a lot of “coordinators” for Marion County (Indy). They do not have offices per se. They are functionally organized and don’t need offices.

Coordinators include one for volunteers, another for election day, fundraising, outreach, phone tree, news releases, inquiries, annual events, database, e-mail, website, fax services and publications.

In addition, they need a candidates coordinator, a membership coordinator, a monthly events coordinator (for car washes, “stands” on a street corner with lady liberty).

They have a job board and a task board. The jobs have ongoing responsibilities (eg communication) and the tasks are work which is over and done with (eg, stuffing envelopes for this mailing).

Indiana has established a Liberty Club which costs \$360/year.

Indiana sends out bi-weekly newsletters e-mail which reduces costs. Standard newsletters go out to the larger group quarterly.

In order to establish an LP organization at a college, it takes a faculty member to provide the stability and persistence.

Finally, buy a button machine! www.Badgeaminit.com sells them cheap.

Membership retention

Want to keep members? Don’t trash their ideas (“yeah we tried that before and it did not work”). Instead “here’s what we did, here’s what happened, perhaps if we rethink this, we’ll have success this time”.

Thank them, thank them, thank them. Lavish praise, especially in the “Chairs Column” of the newsletter.

There are two main reasons for burnout:

1. People are asked to do jobs they hate
2. Infighting. Avoid that.

Contact members regularly, but realize that calling people by individuals usually does not work. Instead, get together at a realtors or insurance company and set up a phone bank in an evening. Get several people to show up, buy refreshments and knock it out. Collaboration and teamwork go a long way.

With changes in the telephone industry, investigate “roving phone banks” with cell phones.

Michigan has “defender of liberty awards”, and they get statues of Liberty from www.Colbarart.com (?) for \$10 each. Our silver dollars and frames cost about that or a little more.

Other

- **Consider attending or holding a Don Gorman’s Candidate School in MO. It is two days of hard, intimidating work, but you emerge confident.**
- Read “Eli’s summary of lessons learned”, describing MA’s experiences. They have organized into communications, executive, and political action groups.
- A state chairs e-mail distribution list: Statechairs@topics.com

Eliminating the Pledge

At the “blue sky” session on Saturday afternoon in which the joint group comprised of LNC members and state chairs came up with 400-500 strategic possibilities, somebody beat me in advocating we “eliminate the pledge”. However, several people later recommended we change certain words in the pledge one way or another.

I want to eliminate the pledge not because I agree with it one way or another, but because it is a source of apparent (to me) squandered energy, divisiveness and organizational discord.

I spoke with Steve Dasbach Sunday and asked him what the possibility was of us eliminating the pledge. He said there was a snowball’s chance of that because there were many people on the other side of the issue who would just as fervently argue to keep it.

However, Dasbach noted something very interesting. There is some large percentage of people who DO NOT SIGN the pledge when they fill out the paper form to join the LP. But when people tender their membership over the Internet, they are invited to click a

button – sort of like a survey – to indicate whether they support the associated initiation of force statement, *for which compliance is about 100%*.

Steve Dasbach, who was unsuccessful in having led an effort several years ago to eliminate the pledge, noted the LP by-laws say that states must “certify” that individuals do not believe in the initiation of force. The by-laws do not say states must obtain signatures as evidence of certification.

Accordingly, Steve Dasbach says if states were to have a *checkbox* on their paper membership forms patterning language that can be found on the LP website and asking “Do you agree with this? Check ___”, the national LP would accept such forms. One of the two gentlemen from MI and IN who were talking to Steve Dasbach with me said “I just now know what our new membership form looks like”.

My point in writing about this is to discreetly tender a suggestion. How would such a checkbox play in MO? If this is utterly unacceptable, then I pull a Bart Simpson – I never said it, you never heard me say it, and you can’t prove anything. I don’t want to create an opening for re-releasing the venom on this.

Dasbach went on to say the pledge “is kind of like ‘Thou shalt not kill’. People generally would agree with that. But what if somebody is trying to kill you? Do you protect yourself even if it means killing the perpetrator?”.

Possible Approach for the Mo State Strategy Meeting

- Spend time coming up with ideas and possibilities (blue sky). Do not criticize or evaluate.
- Categorize the ideas
- Prioritize the ideas
- Establish minimum requirements (needs)
- Establish wants
- Then ask, how could we leapfrog?
- Apply resource constraints and ask “what do we need more of”?
- Determine tasks needed to supply more of the missing elements in order to remove the constraints
- Work the plan.

Organize and list jobs and tasks

Obtain a list of all the offices Libertarians could run for.

For what it’s worth, note the LP membership and contributor classifications:

- Elected LP officials
- Active Candidates

- Paper Candidates
- Activists – donors of time and effort
- Activists – donors of money (congealed time and effort)
- Members
- Supporters
- Voters