

LIBERTY PLEDGE

newsletter

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NEW CONVENTION SPEAKER ...

Neale: Sierra Club director offers outreach opportunity

National Chair Geoffrey Neale says his decision to invite the head of the Sierra Club to address convention delegates in Atlanta could be an important first step toward reaching out to Americans on the Left.

"Libertarians may be shocked to learn how much they have in common with this supposedly radical environmental group," Neale said. "Our challenge will be explaining to them how free markets and smaller government can get them what they want: a cleaner environment."

Carl Pope, who has been executive director of the 700,000-strong Sierra Club since 1992, is a scheduled luncheon speaker at the upcoming national convention, which will be held in Atlanta from May 27 to 31.

"I expect our audience and Pope to find a lot of common ground," Neale said. "For one thing, he is vociferously opposed to subsidies. I heard him say that one of the best things we could do for the environment would be to cut all government subsidies to water projects, which would effectively cut subsidies to the cattle and grain industries."

Neale described Sierra Club supporters as a "politically sophisticated group" that is well aware that the government is often an environmental wolf in sheep's clothing. For example, he noted, it sells national forest land to logging companies at below-market prices and grants corporations a "right to pollute" under the guise of clean-air laws.

Another one of Pope's favorite Libertarian themes: individual responsibility.

"In one recent speech Pope asked his audience, 'How many of you want less air pollution?' and, of course, everyone raised their hand." Neale said. "Then he asked, 'Now, how many of you drive SUVs that get less than 20 miles per gallon?' and several dozen hands remained up.

"Carl proceeded to lecture them about the fact that they need to take personal responsibility for their own behavior before they ask others to alter their lives. Coming from him, the lesson sunk in."

Noting that polls show that 75 percent of Americans consider themselves environmentalists, reaching out to the Sierra Club and others on the Left could be a growth opportunity for the LP, Neale said.

"Imagine if just 10 percent of the Sierra Club's 700,000 supporters turned out to be latent Libertarians," he said.

LOCAL ACTIVISM PAYS OFF...

LP pressures city council to repudiate Patriot Act

Libertarians in Carbondale, Illinois have pressured their city council to pass a resolution condemning the Patriot Act.

"Let no one say that one person or a small group cannot make a difference, because we've proved today that they can," said Jim Syler, chair of the Southern Illinois Libertarians. "The voice of the people of Carbondale has been added to the millions decrying the assaults on our civil liberties since the attacks of September 11, 2001."

On February 3, the Carbondale city council approved a resolution urging President George Bush and Congress to "review, revise and rescind executive orders and policies that limit or compromise the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights."

The council's action followed on the heels of a January 20 council meeting at which the LP and three other organizations -- the Shawnee Green Party, the Southern Illinois chapter of the ACLU and the Peace Coalition of Southern Illinois -- testified in favor of the resolution and drew applause from the standing-room-only crowd. The group also presented petitions with more than 300 signatures opposing the federal law.

"We're thrilled with the outcome," said Syler. "Four people representing four organizations came together and started this process."

LP official seeks taxpayer vote

An elected Libertarian county commissioner wants her constituents -- rather than the county commission -- to be able to vote on property tax hikes.

"I'd like for state law to allow county commissions the option of letting taxpayers vote on property tax increases," says Heather Scott, who serves on the Wilson County (TN) Commission.

Under Tennessee law, only county commissioners can set property tax rates. But Scott and other officials are calling for a statewide Taxpayer Bill of Rights, which would put all tax hikes to a referendum.

The county commission is expected to vote on Scott's resolution in February.

Coming soon: 'Ed Thompson — the movie'

By Susan Lampert Smit

The New York Times loved Ed Thompson; the *Economist* dubbed him the next Jesse Ventura.

Wisconsin voters liked him, but not enough to make him the state's first **Libertarian Party** governor.

So what will film festival judges think?

The colorful Tomah supper club owner and former gubernatorial candidate (and Tough Man boxer) is the subject of a video documentary being shot by a Milwaukee film maker.

David Hendrickson said he initially planned to do a documentary about the Wisconsin Libertarian Party. But when he met Thompson manning the party's booth at the Wisconsin State Fair, he quickly switched focus.

"It's not too often you're handed a subject like this," said Hendrickson, who said he makes his real money doing drawings for patent applications. Hendrickson has made but not sold a feature length video, a 30-minute short, and a "short-short" that was screened at the Wisconsin Film Festival last year. He recently switched to documentaries.

"You walk into a bar (when you're shooting features) and they think you're going to do porn," Hendrickson said. "You walk into a bar doing a documentary and they think you've got a Ph.D."

He's already taped 16 hours on the life of the younger brother of former Gov. Tommy Thompson, including the free Thanksgiving Day meal Thompson puts on at Mr. Ed's Tee-Pee Supper Club. You can see clips at www.freevox.org.

He's looked into Thompson's avocations as an amateur actor and boxer, and is clearly smitten with this subject.

"He boxed his last match at age 42 and I think he beat a 24-year-old," Hendrickson said.

He's also gathering material on the event that catapulted the younger Thompson to statewide attention: The 1997 raid on gambling machines across Monroe County that seized four machines from the Tee-Pee. While the raid resulted in embarrassing headlines for the governor, the local district attorney couldn't find enough unbiased jurors to try the case and state law changed to allow taverns to have a limited number of machines.

Hendrickson said he interviewed the former district attorney John Matousek, who lost the primary after the raid, and Matousek claimed he voted for Ed Thompson for governor in 2002.

He's also run down the facts on another infamous incident from the Thompson files: A squabble between Thompson and a butcher friend named Daisy that wound up with Thompson getting stabbed, and then arrested. After filming Daisy the Butcher's version, Hendrickson said that Thompson told him "That ain't how it happened," and claimed he had the butcher and the butcher's assistant in headlocks and was trying to bang their heads together.

Hendrickson said he doesn't think he'll include that incident in the video.

"That's one of the image problems that Ed has, he's so real that people don't know what to make of him," Hendrickson said. "They're used to smarmy politicians."

For his part, Thompson said he's been busy with Libertarian politics and is typically modest. "It's probably going to be a horror show," he said.

(Left) *Juneau County Star-Times*, Juneau, Alaska -- February 4, 2004

(Below) *Reuters*, Seattle, Washington -- January 26, 2004

Amazon.com's latest product category: political candidates

By Reed Stevenson

SEATTLE — Shoppers at online retailer Amazon.com can now spend money on something new — U.S. presidential candidates.

A new feature that debuted Friday collects campaign contributions of up to \$200 for U.S. presidential candidates.

The Seattle, Washington-based retailer, which claims 37 million active accounts, said on its Web site that it is "trying to take the friction out of grassroots contributions to presidential candidates."

For that reason, Amazon said it is not endorsing any candidates and is charging each campaign its usual processing fees for the payments, which it will donate to a non-profit, non-partisan civil group.

"For us, we think this is an interesting but natural extension of what we do every day," said Amazon spokesman Chris Bruzzo. "Our goal here was to make it as easy for people to make contributions to presidential campaigns as it is to buy the latest Harry Potter book."

Among others, by early Saturday Democratic poll leader John Kerry had garnered 62 contributions totaling \$1,699 at Amazon.com, former Vermont Governor Howard Dean had 72 for a total of \$1,095.01 and **Libertarian Party** candidate Michael Badnarik had 26 contributions totaling \$252 at the site.

The 2004 presidential campaign has been noted for the extent to which candidates, particularly Dean, have drummed up support and collected contributions over the Web.

Some campaigns, including those of Bush, Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman and a few others, were not yet accepting contributions on the site. Amazon said it was seeking permission to accept contributions for those candidates.

Libertarians unite at Florida convention

By Jon Custer

While most of the nation is focused on the hubbub of the Democratic nominations, they are not the only ones scrambling to take on President Bush.

This weekend, the Florida Libertarian Party met in Gainesville to mull over its nominee for the presidential election. Members hope their candidate will garner the same national attention as past third-party alternatives like Ralph Nader and Pat Buchanan.

But when a candidate begins a stump speech by saying, "The first thing I want you to know is I'm not insane," as Michael Badnarik reassured a crowd Saturday, it seems that will be no easy task.

Libertarians, who promote a laissez-faire policy in economic and social matters, are used to being a sideshow even among third parties. But with the implosion of the Green Party in 2000, and no celebrity candidates like Ross Perot stepping up to the plate, they hope 2004 will finally be their year.

"I think this is going to be the best year we've ever had," said presidential hopeful Gary Nolan, a talk radio host from Cleveland, after addressing a crowd of about 70 party faithful at a convention breakfast Saturday. His strategy: woo fiscal conservatives from the Republican Party who are upset with Bush's spending increases and record deficits.

But Aaron Russo, a bombastic Hollywood producer also vying for the Libertarian nomination, focuses on the party's opposition to the war in Iraq, in hopes of picking up anti-war voters who are disappointed by Kerry's early support of the Iraq invasion.

"We're the only anti-war party left," said Russo, who promised to call in favors from his celebrity friends to stage high-profile campaign events.

The fact that Russo and Nolan are in the same party -- and spent most of their debate agreeing with each other -- underscores the unique philosophy that makes the Libertarian Party platform a hard sell for most voters.

Their rigid anti-government views mean they oppose the income tax, welfare and business regulation, but also want to legalize drugs, gay marriage and abortion, slash defense spending and pull out of Iraq -- policies that alienate conservatives and liberals alike.

However, Russo sees the Libertarian platform as a way to transcend traditional divides.

"Left and right is what's killed this country," he said. "You've got to think for yourself."

Like all third parties, the Libertarians are not running just to win, but to raise their public profile. Candidates often speak in religious metaphors about "converting" voters to Libertarianism.

"Our job is to make them see the light," Russo said.

They face an uphill battle, in an election system where just getting the candidate's name on the ballot can consume most of their campaign war chest. As with any small party,

fund raising is a perennial problem.

Nolan points out that he has raised more money through Amazon.com donations -- about \$12,000 -- than any candidate besides John Kerry, the current head of the Democratic pack. That may not mean much, however: Former Democratic front-runner Howard Dean, who took in only \$11,000 through Amazon, has raised more than \$41 million, much of it through his own Web site.

For Florida Libertarian Party Chairman Doug Klippel, that's just part of his party's grassroots charm, and the nature of an anti-government political party.

"We actually pride ourselves, here in Florida, on running low-budget campaigns," Klippel said. "Libertarians are reluctant warriors."

In 2002, as part of a profile-raising initiative to run candidates for statewide races, Libertarians actually ran more candidates in Florida than Democrats.

(Left) *Gainesville Sun*, Gainesville, Florida -- February 8, 2004

(Below) *Statesman Journal*, Salem, Oregon -- January 25, 2004

Oregon nominates candidates

By Shawn Day

Eleven **Libertarian** candidates were nominated for state offices Saturday at the party's first convention of the election year.

The nominated candidates included Mitch Shults for state treasurer; Christi Feldewerth for state House of Representatives, District 26; and Marc Delphine for state Senate, District 19.

"There will almost undoubtedly be more libertarians on the ballot than this," said Tom Cox, the state's Libertarian Party chairman and a nominee from House District 29. "These are just our early birds."

Saturday's convention in Beaverton was an opportunity for candidates to jump-start their campaigns, Cox said, adding that another nomination convention likely will be held by the end of summer.

The mayor of Beaverton, Democrat Rob Drake, delivered a welcome speech and also did "some politicking," Cox said. No Libertarian candidate has filed to run against Drake, Cox said.

Two Republicans, Goli Ameri and Tami Mars, both running for seats in Congress, also campaigned for Libertarian votes.

Cox said both were "reasonably persuasive," so no Libertarian candidates filed to run against them.

California Senate hopeful eyes drug reform

By Josh Richman

Jim Gray isn't easily pigeonholed.

He's a veteran of both the U.S. Navy in Vietnam and the Peace Corps in Costa Rica.

He's a lifelong Republican now running for the U.S. Senate as a Libertarian while reaching out to Bay Area liberals.

He's a Republican-appointed Orange County Superior Court judge whose main platform plank is drug legalization.

He says he might be the only person ever to get standing ovations for giving the same speech to the American Civil Liberties Union and the Young Republicans.

"This is everybody's issue," he said of his war on the government's war on drugs.

Gray, 58, of Newport Beach, said the Bay Area should be especially receptive to his core issue -- getting the federal government to butt out of California's medical marijuana affairs, and then getting California to completely decriminalize adult marijuana use.

Doing so, he said, would save the state \$1 billion a year in failed eradication, prosecution and incarceration costs, while raising almost \$2 billion a year in new taxes on the drug, not counting a resurgent industrial hemp industry's boost to the economy. Regulating marijuana would make it less available to children and prevent its adulteration with more harmful substances, he said, while patients and doctors finally would be free of fear.

Adult use might increase but only temporarily, he said, citing data from nations that have legalized the drug. He has no suggestion on what to do should California start drawing "tourists" from other states that haven't legalized marijuana, but said this too could boost the state's economy and other states probably would follow suit.

"The Green Party does not have a candidate in this race and I'm wholeheartedly asking for their support ... we walk hand-in-hand on this issue," he said, adding that for all those who voted for California's medical marijuana in 1996, "I'm their candidate, I speak for them."

The Rev. Lynnette Shaw, founder and proprietor of the Marin Alliance for Medical Marijuana in Fairfax, agrees.

Gray visited the alliance's office Monday, toward the end of a weeks-long campaign sweep across Northern California.

"People around the state are very concerned that our votes are being ignored or overridden by the police," Shaw said. "I believe Judge Gray is a candidate for ... people who want change and know it's time to end the drug war. And he is looking at a very large pool of people who are interested in medical marijuana.

"I think he has a chance of making a dent."

Former Rep. Tom Campbell, R-San Jose, was an outspoken critic of federal drug policies as he ran unsuccessfully against U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein in 2000. Now dean of the University of California, Berkeley's Haas School of Business, Campbell has personally endorsed

Republican Bill Jones for the Senate seat, but praised Gray nonetheless.

"Judge Jim Gray was a great help to me, within the bounds of the canons of judicial behavior, when I was running for United States Senate," Campbell said. "We may not agree on every proposal ... but I have the highest admiration for his integrity and his thoughtfulness in approaching this most difficult problem, and in his recognition that the present approach to America's drug problem is a tremendously costly failure."

Ethan Nadelmann, executive director of the New York-based Drug Policy Alliance, called Gray "a hero of the drug policy reform movement.

"He's putting the issue into the public eye and they're hearing these arguments come out of the mouth not of some liberal Bay Area politician but from a conservative, formerly Republican state judge," he said. "I think in that respect, it's all good."

Tri-Valley Herald, Hayward, California --
January 25, 2004

Gray said he doesn't expect to win, but hopes a strong showing will demonstrate a groundswell of opposition to the drug war.

Some voters concerned with drug reform might balk at Gray if U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer seems vulnerable to a Republican challenger; they might think it more important to work toward a Democratic Senate majority than to elect a lone Libertarian. But Gray says neither Democrats nor Republicans can be counted upon to reform drug policy: "They have to be pushed from the outside, so I'm on the outside pushing."

These policies not only drain billions in tax dollars but also hurt homeland security, he claimed, calling drug prohibition "the golden goose of terrorism -- it sponsors terrorists from Osama bin Laden on down." Yet the human impact may be worst of all, he said. "It's awful -- we are ruining people's lives, we are breaking up families."

He lambastes Boxer for failing to act on this, as well as for voting for the USA Patriot Act -- only Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wisc., opposed it -- probably without fully reading it. He calls that "an abrogation of responsibility" that has led to serious infringements upon civil rights.

Gray was named to the bench in 1983 by Gov. George Deukmejian. A lifelong Republican, he became a Libertarian about 18 months ago. America is stuck between "tax-and-spend Democrats and don't-tax-but-spend-anyway Republicans," he said, adding Libertarians "represent Republican values far more than the Republicans do."

He's taken an unpaid leave of absence from the court to run for the Senate. He said he jokingly told his wife he's doing his share to reduce their income tax burden, but she didn't think that was funny.