

LIBERTY PLEDGE

newsletter

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Libertarianism in action: county commissioner Heather Scott uses office to question the 'unquestioned' in local politics

While registering at the 2004 convention, one delegate pointed to the stack of "Libertarian Office Holder" ribbons and said, "That's what it is all about, seeing more of those in 2008!"

Heather Scott is one example of "what it is all about." Scott, a county commissioner from Wilson County, Tennessee also happens to be a dedicated member of the Liberty Pledge program.



Heather Scott

Because the very definition of success for the LP is how many people are in office nationwide, the truth of that delegate's statement was striking — one of those simple facts that we forget in the daily grind of politics: We need more elected Libertarians.

In 2002, Scott was elected to a 4-year term. Her office is considered a nonpartisan post, but her colleagues are aware of her affiliation and how it affects her choices as a county leader.

Occasionally the other commissioners ask why she opposed legislation. She considers that "an incredible opportunity to discuss Libertarian philosophy with them," she said.

Scott sees her role as something of a gadfly, consistently questioning "legislation that would otherwise pass unquestioned," she said. For instance, Scott opposed a drug testing program for all county employees. Because the policy did not state the costs of implementation, she attempted to change minds by focusing on the fiscal irresponsibility of the plan rather than the loss of liberty it entailed. The resolution, however, did pass.

"I'm still dumbfounded that 23 of the 25 commissioners voted in favor of increasing government intrusion, and blindly spending money to do so," she noted.

She also introduces bills of her own. Two have focused on property taxes, as Scott attempted to give more power to the people in making tax decisions. Scott says both proposals failed to pass because "some of the commissioners felt the citizens were not competent enough to make a decision of this nature."

However, she has had some success with a resolution which asks federal and state governments not to impose unfunded mandates on counties. Scott is aware that a single resolution may not make a difference but she sees it as a model for other local boards to follow, which could have an impact.

Scott is considering running for a different position when her term expires in 2006. She strongly believes local experience is the key to getting elected in higher government positions. "Holding a local office is the entry level," she said.

Scott is also vice chair for the Libertarian Party of Tennessee, and is proud of the grassroots activism her state — especially with respect to taxes. The LP has formed alliances with other advocacy groups to defeat an income tax in the state. Scott says the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights will be a key issue in the LPTN's 2005 plans, along with the possibility of supporting medical marijuana legislation which may be introduced.

Another part of Scott's contribution to the growth of the party was her participation in the Ladies of Liberty calendar last year, a project led by Rachel Mills of North Carolina. Scott said Mills's enthusiasm was "infectious" and made the project a great experience. "Libertarians must rely on non-traditional and creative ways to raise campaign funds. This calendar is one such way," she said.

Scott said she is disappointed at the low level of political involvement among women overall, saying that she thinks family and career commitments keep many women from becoming involved in fixing the problems they see in government.

"When I hear them complain about how the school system is failing to meet their expectations, I always encourage them to voice their opinion at a school board meeting, or to run for school board, but most never follow through," she said.

Scott joined the party in 1996, joining the pledge program the following year under unusual circumstances. She was driving home from Texas when a highway patrolman pulled her over and began searching her vehicle, claiming that he smelled marijuana.

"I was traveling by myself and was petrified. I couldn't believe this could ever happen to me," Scott said. "When I returned to Tennessee that evening, I became a pledging member of the LP."

Scott donates to "level the financial playing field," she said, noting that with more money the LP will be better equipped to reach the American voter, hopefully leading to more Libertarians like herself, in positions where they can write resolutions, oppose legislation and show America what freedom can accomplish.

Resolve to save time this year!

2005 is going to be a great year for the Liberty Pledge Program! To help us make this a great year, we are asking for your help. Pledging via credit card is a time- and cost-saving measure, but only if we have the right information.

If your credit card has changed due to loss, theft, new expiration date, etc., please let us know. Updating our system cuts the time spent verifying pledger information!

To contact Kelly Kohut with your updated information, just call 202-333-0008 ext. 244 or you can reach her via email at kelly.kohut@hq.lp.org.

Activists convene own legislature

By Stacy Forster

A long line of political and grass-roots activists waiting to register for the event snaked through the lobby of the Alliant Energy Center. Participants said they wanted to hash out their ideas for correcting a political system that speakers and attendees called broken, corrupt and beholden to special interests.

“Government is not responding to the real needs that we have,” said Tom Thrall, 61, an environmental consultant from Madison. “We could solve so many of our problems, like health care and the environment, but the partisanship is so bad that we just can’t do it.”

Organizers came from all parts of the political spectrum. They included Ed Garvey, a Madison lawyer and editor of FightingBob.com, a progressive Web site; Ed Thompson, chairman of the **Libertarian Party** of Wisconsin; Mike McCabe, executive director of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign; and Carol McKy, a longtime member of the Republican Party. Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager also made short remarks.

When asked about the event, Assembly Speaker John Gard (R-Peshtigo) countered the idea that the Legislature is broken by pointing to results from the 2003-'04 session. He said bipartisan efforts produced 327 bills that were signed into law by Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle - three times the rate of each of the two previous sessions.

Gard also questioned the political motives of the attendees, who he said skewed Democratic. He noted that the “real” people’s Legislature met Monday in the Capitol, for the inauguration of new members.

Organizers said Tuesday’s gathering was intended to be a place where the “politically homeless” could feel comfortable. The agenda focused on measures such as campaign finance reform and the formation of a non-partisan panel to determine the state’s electoral districts.

“Rather than represent the citizens of the state of Wisconsin, this political class has chosen to promote its own interests and the interests of big money,” Thompson said.

After a round of speakers and an open-microphone session, attendees broke into smaller groups to talk about how to address ethical concerns in state government, create more open government and organize participants to continue working on issues discussed Tuesday.

Matt Dodge, a 23-year-old chemistry graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said the group’s potential impact will depend on whether attendees can figure out a way to work within the system.

“The only way to get things done is to contact your legislator,” Dodge said. “The way the government is set up is the way to play the game.”

(Left) *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin – January 4, 2005

(Below) *San Mateo Daily Journal*, San Mateo, California – January 6, 2005

Tiny party finds niche in local politics

By Bil Paul

In San Mateo County, only 1,756 voters are registered as **Libertarians**, which is nothing compared to the 180,702 Democrats, 94,418 Republicans or 78,367 who declined to state a party affiliation.

But six Libertarians hold elective office in the county, according to party chairman Jack Hickey, who is one of the six. He was elected three years ago to the board of the Sequoia Healthcare District.

Pitted against four other members of the district’s board of directors, he wants to do the unusual: eliminate his position by dissolving the district. Since Sequoia hospital has long since been paid for, and Catholic Healthcare West has taken over its operation, Hickey wants the district to stop collecting tax money and stop doling it out to charities.

This desire is completely in line with Hickey’s Libertarian philosophy of reducing government, taxes and bureaucracy. Becoming a Libertarian had been a gradual process. He’d read and resonated with Ayn Rand’s books in the 1960s. Ayn Rand is the patron saint of Libertarianism.

Jack Hickey, in embracing Rand and Libertarianism, has been able to reconcile those philosophies with Catholicism by comparing them to the Catholic doctrine of free will. He’s pro-life, or anti-abortion, but on other issues he holds standard Libertarian views.

He’s done a lot of thinking about traditional public schools. Where today 90 percent of students attend them, he’d like government schools to be the schools of last resort, and have that 90 percent attend private schools. Eventually, he says, the lower taxes resulting from most children attending private schools would eliminate the need for vouchers.

“Hickey generally aligns himself with the national and state Libertarian Party views, including opening the delivery of first class mail to competition, and reducing government spending and taxation. Libertarians also believe in moving away from Social Security and government support of, for example, the handicapped and disabled. Private giving, they believe, would step in to fill the gap.

Libertarian may have helped Rossi, experts agree

By Neil Modie

To both Dino Rossi and Christine Gregoire, an extra 63,000 votes would look awfully nice right now. That's how many ballots were marked for the third candidate, **Libertarian** Ruth Bennett, and thus how many votes didn't go to Rossi, a Republican, or Gregoire, a Democrat.

As Libertarians have been accused of doing a few times in the past, what they may have done again this year was play the spoiler, causing the defeat of a major-party candidate who might have won had a Libertarian not siphoned off votes.

But who would have won if she hadn't run?

Politicos of every stripe, including Libertarians, think Bennett's candidacy confounded conventional political wisdom by helping a Republican this time instead of a Democrat, Rossi instead of Gregoire.

Political folklore has it that Libertarian votes mostly would go otherwise to Republicans, who generally share the Libertarian philosophy of limited government, lower taxes and greater personal responsibility.

But this time, without her own candidacy, Bennett said, "I think that Christine Gregoire would have won."

State Republican Party Chairman Chris Vance suspects Bennett is correct, as do the Rossi and Gregoire campaigns.

Libertarians, Vance noted, are "anti-war, pro-gay marriage, and in favor of legalizing drugs, not just marijuana but any drugs, and Ruth Bennett is well known in liberal circles as an openly lesbian candidate."

Gregoire spokesman Morton Brilliant said Bennett "set out to run a third-party candidacy from the left, stealing votes away from our left flank. Senator Rossi went out of his way whenever possible to mention Bennett's candidacy, to mention her platform."

Bennett, a Seattle resident and semi-retired former travel agent, said defeating Gregoire, the state attorney general, wasn't her intent.

"The purpose of my campaign was just to disprove this myth that only conservatives, Republicans, will vote for a Libertarian candidate," she said. "I wanted to show that if we have the right candidates and the right issues, we will attract votes from people who consider themselves liberals."

Bennett and Richard Shepard, the state Libertarian Party's attorney, said she did best in Democrat-leaning counties in which Gregoire did best.

"She ran a decidedly left-leaning campaign, and she focused on civil rights instead of taxes," Shepard said. "Conservatives usually focus on taxes. She focused on gay marriage, and the only place she took an ad out was in the Seattle Gay News."

But lately, Republican chairman Vance added, "the leadership of the (Washington) Libertarian Party has been making a concerted effort, with the limited resources they have, to change the face of their party, to change themselves to a left-wing alternative to the Democratic Party rather than the right-wing alternative to the Republican Party."

Larey McLaren, the Washington Libertarian Party chairman, said party members have noticed that in districts in which a Libertarian runs in a three-way race, "under votes" — where a voter chooses no candidate in a particular race — go down.

"By that, we can clearly infer that Libertarians attract a significant portion of the voters who normally would not vote in that race," McLaren said.

"So we know we are not talking about Libertarians stealing entirely from one party or the other."

(Left) *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Seattle, Washington — December 14, 2004

(Below) *Anchorage Daily News*, Anchorage, Alaska — December 23, 2004

Ballot initiative is challenged

Associated Press

JUNEAU — A campaign finance reform initiative is being challenged in court by the Alaska **Libertarian Party** and an Anchorage attorney.

The plaintiffs say the ballot measure violates the state's single-subject rule, requiring proposed legislation to be confined to one topic.

Ken Jacobus, an Anchorage attorney providing free legal counsel for the Libertarian Party, said the initiative includes three different subjects: campaign contributions, lobbyist regulations and finance disclosure statements.

"They're not sufficiently related to be a single subject," Jacobus said.

According to Jacobus, Superior Court Judge John Suddock said Monday that he would have a decision on the case within 10 days.

Sarah Felix, a state assistant attorney general arguing the case, said all aspects of the initiative cover the single general subject "preventing undue influence by special interests on the work of elected state officials."

Rep. Eric Croft, D-Anchorage, one of three Democratic sponsors of the initiative, said case law in Alaska recognizes that the Legislature and initiative process can treat comprehensive problems in a comprehensive way.

[Editor's Note: On December 29, an Alaska judge threw out the LP's lawsuit, as reported by LP.org on January 5.]

Ohio recount highlights continuing vote trouble

By Jules Witcover

WASHINGTON – Fifty-six days after voting for president had ended around the country, George W. Bush finally cleared the last prominent hurdle to his re-election last Tuesday when Ohio officials confirmed his victory there.

Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell said a statewide recount had left the president with a 118,000 vote lead over Sen. John Kerry, making him the clear winner in the Buckeye State and delivering the 20 electoral votes he needed for a majority in the Electoral College.

That wait was 20 days longer than Bush had to endure in 2000 before a much more contentious partial recount in Florida gave him the presidency, with a highly controversial helping hand from the U.S. Supreme Court.

This time around, because Bush had won the national popular vote by 3.5 million ballots, compared with losing by 539,000 in 2000, the result reported on election night was generally accepted then. But two third-party presidential candidates, for the Green and **Libertarian** parties, called for the recount in Ohio, which was their right, though neither had any chance of benefiting from it.

The third-party candidates have filed a suit before a federal court in Columbus, charging that due process was violated in the recount by not assuring uniform standards in counting, and seeking preservation of all ballot and voting machines for further scrutiny. But Congress is expected to accept Ohio's chosen Bush electors when it meets to certify Bush's 34-electoral-vote margin this week.

While the long recount in Ohio did not change Bush's victory there, it did shine a spotlight once again on the troubled presidential elective process. As a result of problems uncovered in Ohio, Congress and the states must face the reality that reforms enacted in the wake of the 2000 fiasco in Florida have fallen far short of completing the job.

Even when Congress stipulated that states must give every voter the chance to cast a provisional ballot – an outcome of the Florida experience in 2000 – some states, including the Sunshine State and Ohio, threw up hurdles.

In 2000, many Florida voters, particularly in precincts in which blacks predominated voter registration, were turned away for various questionable reasons. This time around, again in Florida and in Ohio, the secretaries of state ruled that a voter had to show he lived in the precinct even to obtain a provisional ballot – one of the very rationales for having them. Subsequently a federal judge in Ohio held that a voter did have to be living in the precinct to cast a provisional ballot.

John C. Bonifaz, general counsel for the National Voting Rights Institute, says the purpose of the Ohio recount was not simply to protect Kerry's interests, but also the interests of all voters in having their votes cast and counted in a legitimate election process.

"We wouldn't ask the voters of Ukraine to certify the election of their president in a fraudulent process," he says. "Why have a different standard here at home?" Bonifaz says the recount was not conducted "in accordance with

constitutional standards" because of various irregularities at polling places.

In any event, the recount in Ohio, and reported irregularities in several other states, keeps the pot boiling on the need for further presidential election reforms, to make sure that a third straight election in 2008 is not threatened by allegations of serious voting problems.

What would serve the same purpose would be a landslide victory four years from now for one nominee or the other. But if the American electorate remains the "50-50 nation" it is considered to be, that's not likely to happen. Congress must, well before 2008, carry on the job it undertook to reform the presidential election process after 2000, but didn't finish, voting rights advocates say.

(Left) *Baltimore Sun*, Baltimore, Maryland – January 2, 2005

(Below) *Kansas City Star*, Kansas City, Missouri – December 28, 2004

County attorney switches to Libertarian Party

Associated Press

GARNETT, Kansas – Saying he was disgusted with both major political parties, Anderson County Attorney Frederick Campbell has become a member of the **Libertarian Party**.

Campbell was re-elected in November as a Republican, although he had no opposition in the county about 60 miles south of Topeka.

"No matter which one you select, things don't change," he said. "Those parties are too filled with special interests, and are too much in the pocket of organizations or groups other than citizens of the country."

In general, Libertarians support minimal government regulation, personal responsibility, a free-market economy and a foreign policy based on nonintervention.

Campbell, who is beginning a second term, said the change in parties was his way of making a statement and trying to bring about change.

"It seemed to me the Republican Party is more in favor of less government, but in the past few years, I haven't seen any evidence of that," said Campbell, adding that he didn't think it would have made any difference to the country who was elected in the last presidential election.