

Common Sense for Libertarians

**A Virtual Question and Answer Session
With James Oaksun,
Candidate for LNC Treasurer**

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To All Lovers of Liberty:

As my campaign for LNC Treasurer progresses I receive questions from various people about various subjects. I am not the kind of guy to say one thing to one group, and another to another.

So I've decided to post my responses for all to see. If the questions were received orally I will memorialize the conversation best I can.

I will not identify questioners.

I'd be happy to expand and elaborate on any of these answers if anyone would like additional information.

I'd also be curious as to how other candidates (most especially Aaron Starr) would address these matters. I'd certainly encourage any interested party to seek their perspectives, and evaluate their willingness to go public with their responses with mine.

(It should go without saying that my views presented here are solely my own and do not necessarily represent the views of any other candidate; however, I believe they are in substantial alignment with a group of other candidates with whom I am proud to be associated.)

I'm a big believer in sunlight. We've got to rebuild and we need to get as much input and as much co-operation as we can in that process.

In my business and personal dealings I always – **Always** – begin with co-operation, and then see how the other party responds. All I can do is my best. As treasurer, you should know my door/email/phone will always be open. I don't claim perfect knowledge; I can't say for certain we will always agree on everything. I'm sure I'm not radical enough for all the radicals, and I know I'm not conservative enough for some of the newer party members, let alone some of the current leadership.

We don't need purges, witch hunts or endless debate about the true meaning of which page of Robert's; we need to figure out how to move forward... and time is of the essence!

As I have said earlier, I invite any and all reading this to contact me directly with any question, concern or idea you might have. My phone number is 603.397.3387 and email James@JamesOaksun.com.

My first question is whether you agree or disagree, for the record, with each of the Five Key Values of the Grassroots Libertarians Caucus

(<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/grassrootslibertarians/>):

(I) BOTTOM-UP, NOT TOP-DOWN. We see a party that too often takes after the establishment parties and corporations rather than manifesting itself as a grassroots organization with revolutionary goals. We seek a decentralized Libertarian Party run by its members and activists rather than by a centralized clique of corporate-oriented professionals.

Generally agree. We shouldn't be "just like the Democrats and Republicans". We need to be innovative. I oppose the stifling of dissent, "purge mentality" of some, and excessive secrecy. I don't think we can be entirely self directing; there should be some balance between structure and innovation. You can be loose and tight simultaneously. Right now we need less tight and more loose. But we need both; it is a matter of balance.

(II) POLITICALLY BALANCED. We see a party which has become too conservative in both style and substance. We seek to restore a balanced approach to Libertarian Party policy-making and outreach that strives to appeal to the political left as much as to the political right and emphasizes personal liberty no less than economic liberty.

Agree 100%.

(III) FUN, BOLD, AND FREE-SPIRITED. We see a party that has become too staid, timid, boring, and unimaginative. We seek a culture within the Libertarian Party that is bolder, more irreverent, more free-spirited, more creative, and more fun-loving.

Agree 100% with this too.

(IV) RADICAL AND PROUD. We see a party that has become too ashamed of its own ideals, a place where "idealist" is too often treated as a dirty word. We seek a party in which Libertarians proudly share a sense of solidarity as radical freedom fighters in a larger movement committed to the vision of worldwide

individual liberty expressed in the Preamble and Statement of Principles of the Libertarian Party's national platform.

I prefer the definition of "radical" as meaning "of or going to the origin; fundamental". We need to get back closer to our founding principles.

(V) YOUTH-FOCUSED. We see a party that is largely failing to connect with young people. We seek a Libertarian Party whose style, structure, culture, and materials speak first and foremost to the younger generations who hold the future in their hands.

Well I'm not totally sure of this one. I'm 48 and I think compared to most Americans (maybe even most of the current LNC leadership!) I'm pretty radical. That said, the achievement of our vision is possible, but it is a long term process. We do need to connect more effectively with the younger cohort, while recognizing that radical ("of the origin/fundamental") ideas are not solely the province of the young.

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Who did you support for the LP's presidential/vice presidential nominations in 2008?

As you probably know I am a member of Outright Libertarians. Initially I supported George Phillies in 2008 as he received Outright's endorsement. I seem to recall some sort of "token" that candidates collected to get into the debate; George got mine.

I stayed with George until he was off the ballot. Then I switched to Mary Ruwart, and I was with Mary to the (bitter) end.

For VP I was with Steve Kubby all the way. I was also standing about 2 feet away from David Nolan when David and Steve addressed the quasi-informal gathering outside the convention hall after the vote.

You should know I have Mary's and Steve's convention signs hanging on my dining room wall (for what it's worth).

What made you decide to run yourself rather than supporting another candidate?

Here's what happened. Two people for whom I have a great deal of respect, approached me separately and asked me to run. I accepted.

As far as I know, my only opponent is Aaron Starr and no one else to date has declared. I can't control who declares and who doesn't. All I can do, now that my hat is in, is give it 1000 percent, tell people honestly how I operate and what my assessment is of the situation... and what my ideas are to fix it, and then the chips fall where they may.

I will run an aggressive, upbeat and spirited campaign. I plan to ask for every vote ultimately (well I assume Aaron won't vote for me; perhaps I should mark him down as "undecided"). What I'm looking for right now, is an open conversation. I will be very honest about my diagnosis and prescription. Share your thoughts with me openly and honestly and, together, we will know the right path to take, consistent with our founding principles.

I think I am extremely well qualified to be a leader in this effort and would be grateful for support from all as we work, Together, to bring about a new beginning for the LP.

What candidates are you supporting for other LNC positions, if any? Are you willing to support _____? If not, what are your reasons? If I run for _____, will you support me?

I support George for chair. I think George is the best choice for 2010. He has obviously been involved for a long time, given our current plight a lot of thought, has some great ideas to move us ahead – together, and has won endorsements from several people who I respect greatly, including Rob Power, Angela Keaton and others.

I think Angela Keaton said it well when she wrote recently: "George is libertarian enough for this radical and certainly better than the pretenders who came sniffing around during the last presidential election cycle. He can count, too. Ideological coherence and administrative competence? That's what I want. That's what he offers."

How do things play out? I don't have a crystal ball. Also... I have been around long enough to know there's usually a backstory in all this. (It seems there is usually a backstory to the backstory, now that I think about it.) Maybe I don't know the history, don't know the

dynamics, who said what unkind thing to whom in 19xx. That could be an advantage for me, not a disadvantage.

I know there are people who have very strong opinions about George – pro and con. And the same with others. If a person has fans, then they will also have critics. That’s good – it shows there are some people paying attention! All I can do, is say what my diagnosis of the situation is, and how I plan to work to fix it. People will say “yea” or “nay” to me based on a variety of factors, including who I support for various roles... and the same for the other candidates too.

As far as supporting anyone else, I do have to “dance with those that brung me.” I do not know who exactly is running for what positions entirely. I know what I’m running for (of course). I know that George is running for chair; Carolyn Marbry for vice chair; and Rob Power for secretary. **I support all three whole heartedly.**

The list of “those that brung me” includes (at present and in addition to George, Carolyn and Rob): Rachel Hawkridge, Joe Kennedy, Jake Porter, James Remmert, Mary Ruwart, Charles Wilhoit, Scott Williamson, and Lee Wrights.

Of course I want what’s best for the party, but I also want to do what’s in my best interests too (who wouldn’t). Out of deference to those I’m quasi-allied with, and until the dust settles a bit, I have to hold off on saying much further for the time being. Stay tuned, however... and let’s keep the dialogue going!

Would you support moving LP conventions out of hotels and instead holding them in places with less overhead and restrictions, and making them longer, more diverse, and more aimed at connecting with the non- Libertarian public?

Let’s talk further about how that could happen. What did you have in mind? I think there is some value in having face to face meetings from time to time. I am open to different venues, especially if we can increase participation.

How do you feel about the party leadership's penchant for secrecy and control of information (e.g. not making videotapes of LNC meetings available to members, not letting LP members comment on LP.org blogs, etc.)?

You mean the LNC proceedings aren't analogous to a National Security Council meeting, or a meeting of the Federal Reserve governors? Give me a break ;)

At this point we should be begging for input and involvement!

The caveat would be that in matters affecting individual employee performance, compensation, or current/pending litigation, there is some need for discretion and privacy, out of respect for individuals and process. But it sure seems we've gone to real extremes with this.

How do you feel about the LP adopting electronic voting?

I need more information on this. In general I'd be in favor of trying a test case or 2, perhaps an offyear convention or meeting. Try it out and see how it goes.

Do you think the party's sole or main focus should be on electing candidates, or is it better for the party to have a more flexible approach towards how it goes about advancing the cause of freedom based on changing circumstances, and to include a strong educational role?

We need to be opportunistic. Certainly where we can, we should seek to get LP members into political office. One of the things I believe we could do, assuming we don't have the funds to provide direct support, is serve as a clearinghouse for candidates, providing them with libertarian/free market talking points and campaign material. Sort of an electronic database is what I have in mind, like a libertarian candidate Wiki.

Probably right now the most effective thing we can do is work on education and outreach, allying ourselves with other interest groups opportunistically on certain issues. I think we have a great opportunity with the LGBT community, with medical marijuana advocates, with 2nd amendment groups, and with antiwar groups, among others.

The achievement of our vision is a process. We can get there, but it will take time.

What is your position on freedom of movement across national borders?

If there hadn't been reasonable freedom of movement across national borders at one time, I wouldn't be in this country in all likelihood. My great-grandparents on my mother's side emigrated from southeastern Poland, near the border with what is now the Slovak Republic. On my father's side my great-grandparents came from far northeastern Poland, near what is now Lithuania. In those days all you needed was a US resident to vouch for you, and to pass a basic health exam.

Undoubtedly we've gone way way too far in the other direction, assuming everyone is a terrorist or something, being afraid of "the other". I am not. Why not assume the best of people until they prove otherwise. Certainly I don't support militarizing our borders, or other similar measures.

All else being equal, do you favor the LP paying more or less for staff salaries?

It may be that the most cost effective way to do certain things is through paid staff. I can't prejudge that without laying it all out and seeing how the pieces fit together.

Part of the problem, as I see it, is that nobody has taken a whole-system look at what we're doing. Nobody has said, what are the absolutely most important, mission critical, things we have to do. So things sort of bounce along by inertia.

At present we have more will than wallet. When I'm elected I'm headed to the headquarters office and will set up shop. I want to see it all – who does what, what contracts/leases are we bound to, what are we doing. And then ask one question: **Why?** Why are we doing this? Do we need it? Is there a better way? And then I will report to the LNC and interested parties.

Here's another way to look at it. Say we've got \$1 million to spend this year. What's the most effective, biggest bang for the buck way to spend it? Has anybody ever asked that question? I don't know. Well, *I'm* asking it, and am committed to getting people on board with the answer.

Do you favor a hands-on LNC that plays an active role directing staff and making sure they are ideologically on track, or would you mostly leave them to their own devices?

Generally, in organizations I have some experience with, the board (in this case the LNC) hires executive officers (in our case an executive director) and charges that person with execution of a vision and a strategy which the board has articulated and agreed upon.

My concern is that the LNC does not do and has not done this, leaving the staff to their own devices. **This must change.** The change has to be led by the LNC, not the staff.

That's why I favor development and articulation of a vision for the party. Then, you do a plan and a budget. You figure out what is achievable, what it'll cost, where you get the money. Then your executive director has their marching orders. You evaluate that person by their ability to execute.

If the LNC faced a choice between meeting in a back room at Denny's for free, or spending \$100 to meet in a nice meeting room at a hotel, which would you favor?

Here's what I think about that. The idea of "we're just like the Democrats and the Republicans, but less so" is a trap for an organization of our size and budget. We ought to be innovators, looking for ways to do things differently. For methods that will make people say "oh wow" instead of "eh so what".

There is a value to getting activists together for face to face time... from time to time. I think it should be done in the most economical way we can.

Maybe we could try something like an off year/annual meeting conducted virtually.

If elected LP Treasurer and you faced a situation where the interests of the party and the interests or principles of the larger libertarian movement or libertarianism conflicted, what would you do?

If the LNC is doing its job properly, the situation you describe cannot occur. As an elected officer of the LNC I do bear a fiduciary responsibility, however. If a situation ever arose where I believed that there was a conflict, I would have to resign. However, I cannot foresee that happening, provided that people with sound judgment and belief in the Statement of Principles are elected to the committee.

***Are you a Party member? How long? Are your dues current?
Are you a contributor?***

I am a Party member and my dues are current. I know I've been a Party member continuously for several years now, I don't really know how long. I've been voting Libertarian at the presidential level since 1988, when I voted for Ron Paul. Unfortunately I live in a state where the LP has not been real active for a long time. Last year I founded Liberty For Maine as a way to revitalize our forces here.

I am a "sustaining member" as defined in the Bylaws. I will defer consideration of a leadership-level financial contribution pending outcome of the elections in May.

Are you a Utopian, an Anarchist, or a Realist?

I consider myself a long term radical and a short term pragmatist. I am currently writing a book titled Practical Libertarianism. My inspiration comes from the late Harry Browne and his (oft neglected) book, How I Found Freedom In An Unfree World.

I believe the state can wither over time, and ultimately be dramatically smaller than it is today. But this will take time and effort and education... and we're not there yet. I say, best to start articulating the vision, what it'll look like, and how we will achieve it.

Maybe it is done person by person. Sharing with a neighbor, a community: "I found freedom. Here's how I did it." It can happen. Let's commit to beginning the process, not just talking about what cannot be today, but on what can be in the future and what specific steps people can take today to begin the journey.

Here's how I see it. In any situation there is a zone of possible outcomes. Say on a 0-100 scale, the possible outcomes in a pluralistic society are 30-70. If all we do is say 99/99/99/99.... we will get nowhere and people will eventually ignore us, if not get angry with us. I say, talking 99 as your goal or end state is fine; in the short run tactically accept 60-70. Then the next time, the zone of possible outcomes will shift to a degree. And the process continues. It takes time, but short of revolution that is how things happen in this country. I am interested in seeing things happen, not talking endlessly to no end. What the radicals in the party want, can happen to a large degree, but it does not happen with a wave of the magic wand and a "Presto!"

Don't misunderstand -- what I'd like to see happen -- ultimately -- is **very** radical. But I have a process in mind whereby that can happen, or at least how things can become a lot more free for a lot more people. That's why I am a libertarian.

What do you have against Aaron Starr? He is only one of 17 people on that committee.

I am running for Treasurer.

I have no particular issue with Aaron Starr per se. This is not personal. I am concerned with the direction of the Party, and am well aware that Mr Starr is not only an executive officer, he is a leader of the governing majority on the committee. Several people who I respect, and longtime party activists, approached me separately and asked me to run. I accepted. There are many people concerned with the state and future direction of the party. Some are on the LNC today; some are potential new members. I am honored to be running with them.

What is your opinion of Wayne Root?

Wayne Root is an energetic and photogenic man who has had some success in life. I was a delegate to the 2008 Libertarian National Convention and observed him closely first hand, and have followed his activities with some interest. I am a businessman too, and think someone with Wayne's general credentials could make a good advocate for the LP and libertarian causes generally.

But what he seems to be arguing is not libertarianism, but rather some sort of fusionism between libertarianism and various strands of the Republican Party that are decidedly un-libertarian. That just doesn't feel right to me. Wayne is of course entitled to his opinion. Further, as a likely candidate for president again in 2012 we will be hearing much more from him in the near future.

I would recommend that people read some books on libertarian philosophy before deciding whether Wayne's approach is the right way to go. I think most people know how I would respond.

When is a declaration of war required for an open ended military operation on the other side of the planet, and when is it not constitutionally required, and why?

About the only circumstance where I could understand a declaration of war being unnecessary, would be if the nation faced an immediate and existential threat (i.e., minutes or at most hours away). Open ended commitments in far away lands require a Congressional declaration. Period.

One of the challenges one faces as state chair is working with limited resources. Sometimes I think, it would be nice if the national party would take care of X, Y and Z. What do you think the relationship of the national party to the state parties should be?

I would like to get to the place where we can provide financial and fundraising resources. That's going to take some time, and is contingent on growing the party rapidly (more on that later).

Certainly, we can provide an online candidate and activist resource, something like a Libertarian Wiki, with libertarian and free market talking points on a variety of issues.

If we have a concerted and focused national media campaign, that will raise awareness of the LP and will have downstream benefits to the states. This can be done and it doesn't take much money. It does take thought and ambition and the willingness to execute. Why we have not been doing this, I don't know. That is a better question for the current executive officers.

I'd also like to see us commit to being on all 50 states presidential ballots in 2012. Or at least 49. We need to know, who is point, what will it take, what will it cost. And then execute. It's not exciting; it's three yards and a cloud of dust. But it can be done.

You've looked at the LNC budget. What's something you would take out of it, and what's something you'd add in?

The biggest single item in our budget? Would you believe, it's **overhead!** Who wants to get involved, give of their time and resources to pay overhead? Nobody I know!

When I become treasurer I am going to prepare a zero based budget. Everything we do has to be justified from the ground up. Everything.

We spend several hundred thousand dollars a year basically talking to ourselves. That has got to stop. We need to be talking to voters, growing the party, influencing policy. We're not doing that now. And everybody should ask every person now serving on the committee – in particular the executive officers – just why that is the case.

Moving around the items in the current budget is one issue. But we need to decide, quickly, where we want to go and what it's going to take to get there. That's why I am advocating a 2016 Vision for us.

We need to articulate and agree on a long term set of goals, and determine what it's going to take to achieve them. Will it take time? Money? How much money? Millions? Less? Who's going to take charge of the various aspects?

And why hasn't the current leadership been doing this? They seem to spend much more time plotting purges and witch hunts, and debating the meaning of Robert's Rules of Order. That's just ridiculous. It needs to stop. We need change.

What would be your plans for growing the party?

I would like to see us commit to reaching One Million Members by 2016. The most effective ways of doing that are person to person/word of mouth; the media; and the Internet.

A major asset for this is our existing database of members. What do we know about them? In my corporate work my specialty was extracting information from large datasets. We need to know more about who we've got and who would be most receptive to our message. Then we need to target them like a laser beam.

We might need to devote at least \$100,000 per year to this, or more. If done right, it'll be worth it and will pay tremendous dividends to us.

For my part, I will do the data mining, pro bono. I have the ability and the desire. It is time to capitalize on what we've got. We're not doing that now. I don't know why, exactly.

We need change.