



Rako Studios » Media » Politics » The Honeymoon's over

The Honeymoon's over

The "Unified Membership Plan" means the California Libertarian party is subservient to the national party.



Several years ago [1995] I attended my first California Libertarian Party State Convention in Sacramento. It was at this convention that the Libertarian National Party proposed and had adopted it's "Unified Membership Plan". The primary stated rational was to eliminate the expense and effort of having redundant memberships in both a State and National Party. "The People are confused" we were told. "Why must one pay to join the State Libertarian Party and also have to join a National Libertarian Party? Wouldn't it be better, easier and more efficient to have a single unified membership? The members

will just send all their money to Washington, home of the National Party, and the National will give back a fair share to the State Party. Honest. The greater efficiencies will have both State and National wallowing in money." I was instinctively repulsed by this idea. The National party kept emphasizing "professionalism" and "efficiency". They were very cool and very persuasive. I coined the name: "The Washington Smoothies" for the National crowd. They were indeed smooth and professional. I kept thinking of that meeting in an Ayn Rand novel where "a bunch of con men was putting something over on a mentally retarded membership".

1. The Honeymoon's over
 1. Something looked crooked.
 2. Efficiency is not necessarily desirable in a political organization.
 3. The co-opting of the state organizations to serve as fundraising arms for the Harry Browne campaign.
 4. The emphasis on a doomed National race versus the many viable State and local races.
 5. The loss of 50 State and countless local strategies for one Grand National Strategy.
 6. The Honeymooner's Strategic Planning Paradigm
 7. Now What?
 8. A Proposed California Libertarian Party Strategy
 9. Conclusion
 10. Postscript

Something looked crooked.

In retrospect I can now voice the concrete reasons The Plan repulsed me. It seemed like a system that was extremely opportune for abuse. I had never met most of the State Party people and none of the National Party. It was easy to mistrust them. I gave a rousing extemporaneous speech questioning the motives and character of everyone involved. Now I see the Nationalization of the Party as a perfect analog to the abuses of Federalism. Most of the State and National Party leadership are honest decent people. So are the people in the State and Federal legislature. Look at the mess they've created. The Unified Membership plan has systemic flaws that invite abuse, both present and future.

The whole crooked nature of the thing was reinforced in LA the next years at the 98 convention. Michael Cloud was up on the dais hovering around the State Party leadership as they counted votes. Michael stood to profit if the Washington Smoothies carried the day (they did). I know it was very important to Michael what the outcome of the vote was. Having him do fundraising for California was probably a good thing. But I know Michael lives in Nevada and I doubt he is even a member of the California Party. What the hell was he doing on the dias supervising the results? Does General Dynamics supervise the voting on the defense budget? In reality Michael is probably not crooked or conspiratorial. He is just a passionate libertarian so swept up in a process that had a direct bearing on his future he could not resist going up on the stage. My biker friends would dub him "Skeeter". Always buzzing around nervously hoping to be included. I asked Michael if he was on the take back then. He laughed... "I don't think the 20 grand I get for doing this is even the slightest enticement to do something crooked" was his approximate response. Of course I'm sure the printing and fulfillment shops he sends tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars would not charge him for doing some business cards or a kids wedding announcement. I don't know if Michael would accept such a gesture. It could be labeled either a kickback or an affirmation of good will. If he ever has or will I still think it would not make him a crook to be booted out of the Party. His contributions are too vast to get upset over some chickenscratch thing like this.

Efficiency is not necessarily desirable in a political organization.

This was the danger of Ross Perot. Remember how he wanted to make the inner cities free-fire zones?

I could almost hear him thinking "That'll keep them Darkies in line".

Unfortunately government is not a business and it shouldn't be run like one. The less efficient the rounding up of the Jews and their extermination the better. It gave my dad time to get there and kick the Master Race's ass and come home with their weapons and medals so his kids could play with them as jewelry. I actually like the fact that it takes 11 years and millions of dollars to execute someone. Now that DNA evidence has exonerated so many death row inmates you should be glad too.

The co-opting of the state organizations to serve as fundraising arms for the Harry Browne campaign.

It was evident at the outset that Harry was Their Guy. Whether it was the Hypnotic Eye or Dale Carnegie's or Rasputin's techniques that convinced National that Harry was The One I don't know. It was clear that everything was going to revolve around getting Harry a lot of money and running him for office again and again. I do know that Harry is a good if not great libertarian and I was definitely proud to have him as a candidate. The attitude of National was easy to discern: "The State Parties were to be obedient little cogs in the get-Harry-elected vision of National. The running of local candidates was not to be done in order to win but only to increase the legitimacy of the National Party so Harry would be taken seriously.

The emphasis on a doomed National race versus the many viable State and local races.

Let's face it. Harry Browne will lose the Presidential race. We could run George W

Bush or Al Gore this fall and we would still lose. We will not lose forever, but I guarantee that we must elect local, state and federal legislative candidates before we can carry the Presidency. The timeline is about 50 years. Sorry. Hang in there.

The loss of 50 State and countless local strategies for one Grand National Strategy.

This is the real evil of the Unified Membership Plan and what it represents. Libertarianism is about choice. Rather than confusion, separate memberships really represent choice, just like the free market vs central planning. What a howl-- the elite Libertarians convince the populist Libertarians to adopt central planning. There is a real movement within the party to support local and state races. Let's allow free independent state parties, as opposed to the State Party being just a bush-league recruiting arm for National where you actually get paid for being a Libertarian.

The Strategy Committee

As a part of my involvement with the 97 State Convention I signed up for a Strategy committee chaired by Terry Savage, an extremely intelligent and successful consultant who specialized in helping businesses develop strategies. He shared with us the same strategy paradigm he charges corporate clients 300 dollars an hour to teach. He calls this paradigm the VSMOT paradigm. It stands for: Vision, Strategy, Mission, Operations and Tactics. I will not elaborate since this is Terry's intellectual property and he probably doesn't want it given away for free. I do not doubt the validity or necessity for large corporate clients to embrace and learn from Terry's paradigm. It seemed silly for the tiny Libertarian State Party to be engaging in such grandiose planning.

At the time I feared Terry was in the pocket of the National Party trying to sell their snake oil.

This suspicion turned out to be unfounded. In fact, in re-reading Terry's stuff I see he was much more a localist than a federalist. This has been proved out by his appointment by the Nevada Governor to a Director of Information Technologies job. No, it's not a partisan position. But it represents a massive victory for Libertarian politics.

This is the whole reason to reject "One Grand National Strategy" in favor of many independent State and local ones. As a member of the Strategy committee I responded (in my typically agitated manner) to what I feared was another encroachment of National Strategy on the California State Party. Terry would dismiss my fears, calling them "The Black Helicopter Theory" of Libertarian Politics. I tend to agree that there is no massive money-laundering conspiracy in the Party. Then again, I'm an analog sort of guy and I guarantee you things aren't as sweet and rosy as National and Harry Browne would have us believe.

If National views Harry as the "Great White Hope" for whatever reason, I'm sure they do not see it as a conflict of interest to do everything they can to help him. I have to admit that Harry is a stunning presence for Libertarian ideas and I doubt he has a mattress stuffed full of donor's money. I'm also sure he has profited from increased book sales and notoriety. But ask yourself at what cost. He's been flying all over the country doing radio interviews and third tier debates with fourth rate opposition. If Harry was only interested in self-promotion he could have achieved it far easier without the Libertarian Party.

Here is my contribution to Libertarian Strategy, written three years ago when all this brouhaha started. I said I would remind you of it in four years. Well, it turned out it only took three. I guess I'm ahead of schedule again.

The Honeymooner's Strategic Planning Paradigm

We're rushing right along with this LP California strategy aren't we? I don't even know if the entire VSMOT paradigm (Vision, Strategy, Mission, Operations, Tactics) is valid in this case. In my consulting business I have seen a more common paradigm. I call it the Honeymooner's strategic planning paradigm [TM]. This paradigm has four phases:

1. The Kramden Phase.
2. The Norton Phase.
3. The Trixie Phase.
4. The Alice Phase.

The Kramden Phase is characterized by a wild instant success "vision". Ralph might say: "Let's make our own movie and make a million bucks!!!" This would be equivalent to the Libertarian National party's saying: "Let's unify the membership, run a direct mail Ponzi scheme, raise 10 million bucks and Harry Browne will be elected President!!!"

The Norton phase is represented by Ed kinda pulling on his sleeves, bending his elbows and generally making a big fuss over things until Ralph says: "WILL YOU GET ON WITH IT!!!" This is equivalent to all these meetings and committees and fund-raising letter writing and everything else I have seen the last few months that has nothing to do with getting anybody elected to anything.

The Trixie phase is when Trixie offers some concrete proposal like: "We could have a bake

sale to raise money for film." This of course fails miserably. The LP equivalent is to put a booth up at a county fair and hand out literature.

The Alice phase is when, in the midst of "vision" and denial and impossibility, Alice saves the day by pulling her mad money out of a sock to pay off the \$400 camera rental that accrued during phases 1, 2 and 3. Of course the grand Kramdonian vision is never realized.

The LP equivalent is when Sam Severs and Jon Peterson do all the work while everyone else bickers.

Now What?

I'll be reminding you of this paradigm in four years. You see, like General Patton in North Africa "I read the book". Well actually I listened to the tapes, but it is the '90's. Yup, I listened to Michael Cloud's tapes. He says that doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result is stupid.

So why are the Washington Smoothies (coined at the '97 LP California Convention) co-opting the resources of the local and State Parties to run a hopeless Presidential candidate just like the last 5 or 6 hopeless candidates?

I suspect It has to do with Federalism, Toryism, Hamiltonism, big money (remember when they say "professional" you have to decode that as "We are gonna get paid") and more than anything else the burning desire to feel part of something "big" and "important". To blow 10 million is cool.

Even in defeat you can just come up with another Kramdonian Vision every four years. Just keep the mailings going out to the yokels and even if you don't get 10 million you'll get 2

or 3 million to piss away and feel important. That is why the Strategy of the California State party should include: "To battle and oppose the National Party at every turn." because the Washington Smoothies are the enemy of the State and local Parties.

Before we get to the strategy part of the Paradigm lets go back to the first stage, the Vision. This got slipped in and ratified pretty darn quick and I for one have a real problem with it. The only Vision I've seen is: "A society that reflects the values in our platform." This has a dangerous circular logic. What if the platform is amended to include "rounding up the Jews"? Well, OK, highly unlikely.

Still, a vision should be an absolute statement, not a reference to a document that is somewhat controversial in it's own right. I think the Vision of a political party is pretty clear: To elect party members. Therefore the Vision of national should be: To elect Libertarians to national office. The Vision of the California LP should be: To elect Libertarians to State office. The Vision of the Santa Clara LP should be: To elect Libertarians to local office. Period.

Why the distinction? Because the "society that reflects" vision gives the Smoothies and ourselves that dastardly cop-out: "Sure we got our ass kicked again, but we're doing outreach." Bull. The only outreach I see is outreach for more names to put on those precious mailing lists that net national 120 dollars per new member per year. You want outreach? Go to CATO or Reason or Liberty or FFF or FEE or Advocates or you fill in the blank.

The reticence to have a vision of electing party members (even to non-partisan offices) is because by this standard we're doing pretty badly. We're doing way worse than those

public school teachers we're so quick to vilify because they get more money every year and there's no improvement to be seen.

Now I promise to discuss my strategy in a second but I wanted to point out the thinking behind it. At the 1997 LP California convention I had the pleasure of meeting Sandy Webb. She is a city councilman of Simi Valley California. Now I have to confess an affinity to Sandy because she flipped off Diane Feinstein at a congressional hearing in Washington.

Diane is the archetype of hypocrisy, the woman who banned handguns as Mayor of San Francisco while still carrying one in her purse. The real point is that by putting a little pressure on the Chief of Police, Sandy got the policy on concealed carry permits reversed from "If your a power elite it's OK" to "If your not a felon it's OK". This is a very big deal.

In Santa Clara I have as much chance of getting a CCW as of winning the Irish Sweepstakes. A triumph of freedom. Sandy also saw to it that the type of permit issued is good all over California. The cost of her campaign? Less than 10,000 dollars. So choose. A guaranteed loss of the Presidential election or a good chance for 1000 Libertarians in office making a difference.

That's why I have vowed to support any local race as opposed to Presidential elections that will only enhance our reputation as perennial losers. Harry says we have to spend like the Demopublicans. Where will we get the quarter billion in soft money to aid the 400 million in contributions? Get real. After all, viable National strategy would be "Give the 10 million to Rep. Ron Paul and ask him to return to his Libertarian status". Bingo. Instant Libertarian in federal office.

But we're here to talk about State strategy. In less then 1000 words. Besides, I asked Ron if he would do it and he declined. OK, here goes:

A Proposed California Libertarian Party Strategy

Identify one winnable state office. If no State office is winnable, choose one local non incumbent race. Failing that, support all incumbents. Spend all resources on that one office and/or incumbents. Run "paper" candidates on all other offices. Refuse to assist the National to co-opt the State Party.

Immediately stop all membership efforts as members benefit National at the expense of State and local. Change all fundraising efforts to direct contributions as opposed to member dues. Promote a "Register Libertarian, Vote any way you want." program (practical with the new multi-primary voting laws).

Develop a database that is used to assess winnable districts and distribute press releases in addition to raise money. Develop the LIFE program per Marv Rudin's plan. Prepare to revoke the Unified Membership Plan now that we see we've been hoodwinked and local revenues are drastically less. Outline a volunteer plan to work the one targeted race and to have 50 people at each polling place in said district. Support the national party only to the extent that 50 state ballot status is kept. Revise the party structure so that locals fund the state and the state funds the national. Provide a forum/court to resolve local disputes.

Conclusion

I would like to note how the Washington Smoothies promised increased revenue for the State and local parties under the Unified Membership Plan. This was doubtful to me since cutting revenues and raising benefits is truly a Washington fantasy.

Sure enough revenues are down. The Smoothies also promised that a local bringing in a new member would get \$12 for the local. Oops, somehow that got struck from the final deal.

The Smoothies also promised that for only twenty five dollars a member would get all three newsletters. What are the two hot items from their first meeting? Raise the dues to \$35 (didn't pass) and carp about the "high cost of the newsletter".

The new California newsletter is the best thing that's happened to the State in 5 years. Now they want to gut it. As I said before, any State strategy has to address the destruction of the State and local parties by the "Big Green National Machine".

If you don't like my strategy, fine, cook up your own, but don't stick your head in the sand while local Libertarians go wanting. Remember that the real crime of the Unified Membership Plan is that it replaces 50 State and thousands of local strategies with a single National strategy.

This is pretty pathetic from the Party dedicated to dismantling the federal government.

Postscript

Well, it's three years later and not a lot has changed. The writing is on the wall though. Hornberger is creating a firestorm of controversy. I like the guy. He's a populist and an earnest voice for change.

National's Project Archimedes is a colossal failure. Harry can't get in the debates, much let win. The State Party is insolvent and furious at our local here in Santa Clara, which has 12 grand in the bank.

The reason we do is that rather than embrace "professionalism" and appearances we took the advice of the new County chairman, Marv Rudin, and closed the office we had kept for almost a decade.

The State and old-timers were apoplectic. "How could you destroy this grand tradition?-- Santa Clara is the only local with an office!--We must have this office to be professional.-- State can use the office too."

Marv is a Caltech graduate who had founded a PMI, a very successful semiconductor company. He has infuriated the State Party from the beginning. The State Party chair who is otherwise a nice guy will not even read Marv's emails or have a civil discussion with him.

But the fact is that like it or not, Marv has been very good for the local Party. Closing the office, which was one of those "feel important" type appurtenances of the old guard has taken what used to be a drain of 60 to 80% of the local budget and allowed it to be put to much better use.

The local newsletter is now in full color. It's also available online in order to save printing costs. Marv's entrepreneurial style and sometimes abrasive personality is a tremendous clash with the Robert's Rules of Order crowd that dominate the State Party.

We are lucky to have him. We are also lucky to have the Robert's Rules of Order crowd. I only wish they could get along. One of the things Marv has done to the ire of National and State is to stress Libertarian registration over Libertarian membership.

The old guard is too used to that membership needle in their arm. They know a member is good for 120 to 150 dollars a year to National and they need a lot more fixes. Marv figures there is always a ratio of registered Libertarians that become members so don't worry, big registration numbers get respect by the local news media and help candidates get elected.

To me this seems much preferable to recruiting members in order to collect large amounts of money to send to Washington so some well meaning Libertarians can be paid to tilt at windmills.

It would be great to see the Koch family and the Brainiacs over at CATO get back into Party politics if only to save us the embarrassment of these brouhahas. How 'bout it Ed?