



BY WILLIAM A. NISKANEN

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Chairman's Message A Case for a *Different* Libertarian Party

All of this blog talk about which major party candidate is more likely to be receptive to libertarian policy positions, I suggest, is a waste of time unless the winning candidate of either major party is dependent on the votes of libertarians.

Increased outrage about the state of American politics and the prospect for a large number of close elections increase the potential effectiveness of a different “libertarian party”—one that sometimes endorses one or the other major party candidate but does not run a party candidate for that position.

The effectiveness of the Libertarian Party and almost all other third parties in U.S. history in promoting their policy positions has usually been counterproductive, because running a third-party candidate reduces the vote for the less undesirable of the major party candidates. A disciplined group that is prepared to endorse one or the other major party candidate in a close election, however, can have a substantial effect on the issue positions of both major party candidates. The following conditions must be met to achieve this:

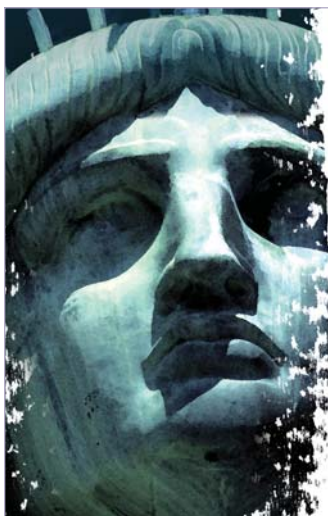
1. An effective libertarian party must not run a separate candidate.
2. The size of the party must be larger than the expected vote difference between the major party candidates.
3. After the major party candidates are selected, the party leadership must have the opportunity to bargain with each of the major party candidates on the

issue positions of highest priority for the libertarian party.

4. The party, as much as possible, must act in concert to support the major party candidate that is preferred by the members of the party in that district.

There is no reason for this libertarian party to be active in any district for which the party does not meet all four of the above conditions. Condition 2 illustrates why a different libertarian party could be far more effective than the current Libertarian Party; several polls indicate that about 20 percent of voters have general libertarian political preferences, but few Libertarian Party candidates win more than 1 percent of the popular vote. Condition 4, I suspect, is the most difficult of these conditions for libertarians to meet. In addition, the party should not emphasize the same issues in every district, because the choice of these issues should depend on those for which one or the other major party candidates is willing to bargain.

This is a strategy to increase the approval of libertarian policy positions rather than the usually counterproductive effort to increase the number of votes for Libertarian Party candidates. Maybe it would be better to term the organization that I have described as a libertarian political action committee or a liberty caucus rather than a libertarian party.



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