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IT'S A GRAY AREA: The Libertarian philosophy

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I was a lifelong Republican until I realized my party couldn't be counted on. Not to protect my freedom or my liberty, and not to be "fiscally conservative."

So I realized I could not be a part of an organization that did not reflect my values, or the values I believe this country is based upon.

Therefore, I decided to change parties. Where to go? Once I started to check out my options, it took me about two minutes to decide that I was a natural Libertarian.

Since that time many people have asked me what are the differences between Republicans, Democrats and Libertarians. Well, using a little poetic license just to make a point, I will tell you.

Republicans basically act like your father. They will let you spend your own money, but they tell you what to do in your personal life. And if you don't follow their directions, they will punish you.

Democrats, on the other hand, want to act as your mother. They want to keep most all of your money, but promise to take care of you and spend your money on things they think are good for you. And, of course, they will not trust you to make your own decisions. Why? Because "Mommy knows best."

Libertarians are completely different. Libertarians treat adults as adults. Make your own decisions, but you are bound by the decisions you make. In other words, Libertarians think you are smarter than any politicians about how to run your financial and personal life.

When people first hear about Libertarian philosophy it seems unsettling. But when it comes down to it, the Libertarian philosophy works. Think about it. Had Libertarians been in control of our federal and/or state government for the last 10 years, we would not be in financial trouble today. Instead we would actually be prospering both economically and sociologically.

But putting attempts at humor aside, what is the Libertarian philosophy? It has its roots in the philosophies of Thomas Jefferson, John Locke and Adam Smith. Of course, it is hard to generalize about any group of people. But simply stated, Libertarians believe in freedom, the Rule of Law, limited government, self-defense and free markets. They also have a basic confidence in the ability of ordinary people to make wise decisions about their own lives.

As an example, Libertarians believe that parents are in a far better position than the government to decide where and how their children should be educated.

Think of it this way. Most of the important institutions in society developed without governmental involvement. Examples are the development of language, money and markets. That does not at all

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mean Libertarians believe "anything goes."

To the contrary, Libertarians believe adults should make their own decisions and be free to act as they deem appropriate, but only as long as those acts do not interfere with the rights of others. As a result, Libertarians are actually quite law-and-order minded.

Regarding self-defense, Libertarians agree with Jefferson when he said that whoever beats his swords into plowshares will soon be plowing for somebody else.

But Libertarians rebel at attempts by government to legislate all risks out of existence. They also believe in the "forgotten" 9th and 10th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which say that all rights not expressly given to the government by the Constitution are retained by the people.

This might sound like "egghead" talk, but it is important.

For example, nowhere in the Constitution by any stretch of the imagination does it say that government can control things like our healthcare system.

When I was growing up, we probably had the best healthcare system in the world.

Back then no one even raised the issue of not having access to good quality doctors, hospitals and medicines. Emergency Rooms were fully available as needed, and healthcare was reasonably priced. But then government began to take control, and look where it has taken us.

Libertarians understand the answer is not to have more government involvement, it is instead to limit government as much as possible.

In fact, Libertarians will tell you that if you think healthcare is expensive now, wait until it's "free."

To bring that point home even further, today there are two areas of medicine where we can still obtain top quality healthcare at reasonable and competitive prices. What are they? Cosmetic surgery and Lasik eye surgery. Everywhere you look you can see ads for these treatments at low prices, easy payments and many other nice benefits. Why? Because they are not controlled by government or insurance. These are places where the free market and individual choice are still in control.

Libertarians know we can reclaim what was once the best healthcare system in the world by bringing back that same free market choice.

Another program that has completely failed, especially for the poor, is our government's welfare system. Government has trapped the poor on both sides with its bad policies.

On the one hand, minimum wage laws and licensing requirements make it harder for the poor to find that all-important first job.

On the other, it makes not working much more attractive by paying people not to work! (Then government looks at the problems it has created and naturally decides to do more and more of what has been shown not to work.)

In summary, Libertarians understand that a system of market incentives works better. Libertarians do not want to abandon people who are poor, downtrodden and disabled. But they want government "solutions" to be a last resort, instead of the first.

So I hope this has piqued your interest in America's largest third party. If you would like to give it more thought, I recommend you read a book by David Boaz entitled "Libertarianism: A Primer" (The Free Press, 1997).

And about my new political party?

I believe the more you think about it, the more you will be favorably impressed.

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