

LPC Convention Report

California Libertarians meet in Sacramento to elect new officers, conduct other business, attend special events.

From February 13th to 17th, almost two hundred Libertarians from all over California gathered in Sacramento to attend the LPC's annual convention. Meeting at the Beverly Garland Hotel over Presidents' weekend, convention-goers enjoyed a top notch line-up of guest speakers, panels and special events. Those attending as delegates also conducted a full slate of party business, including electing new officers and representatives to the LPC's Executive Committee. (See "New Officers and Representatives Elected," page 3.)

Grassroots Seminar

The convention kicked-off Thursday, February 13th, with a very special event: the first session of a two day Grassroots Seminar - an informal meeting, free to all LPC members, that provided Libertarian activists with a forum to share their secrets of success. The seminar, conducted by Northern Vice Chair Cullene Lang, was attended by over twenty people during its first day.

Thursday's focus was on "internal" activism - forming, building and sustaining local regions. Lang discussed her success transforming Long Beach into one of the largest, most active regions in the state. She also advised activists attempting to organize inactive regions to begin by obtaining a list of registered Libertarians who voted in the previous election, as opposed to working from a list of all registered Libertarians. In addition, she stressed the importance of helping activists find their "niche." Perry Martin, editor of LPC Monthly, distributed a pamphlet he wrote, "How to Produce a Successful Newsletter," and invited other editors seeking guidance to contact him. The group also discussed regional bylaws, budgeting and work parties, and debated the pros and cons of opening and maintaining an office.

Friday, the seminar shifted its focus to "external" activism - organizing protests and fundraisers, sponsoring outreach booths and attracting media attention. Over forty activists attended the session, packing the room. Participants included Vince Carlton, who provided helpful information on how to become a Libertarian radio show host. Sacramento's Michael McHale was also there, and discussed his experiences producing his long running cable TV show, "The Libertarian Gang." In addition, Ed Teyssier of San Diego talked about his involvement organizing a successful petition drive for his city's stadium referendum.

Lang closed the seminar by requesting feedback from everyone in attendance, and announced her desire to make the seminars a regular feature of future conventions.

Keynote Address

Saturday morning, the convention's keynote address was delivered by prolific Libertarian writer George Smith, who outlined the perennial conflict between political pragmatists and ideologues. Siding with the latter, Smith explained that political strategy primarily based upon pragmatic considerations "makes a movement highly vulnerable and short lived."

"Freedom will never prosper without the strength of principles," Smith continued. "We must display moral courage in applying those principles consistently, without compromise, however unpopular this may make us in the short run. History tells us that radical changes can be effected, that political degeneration can be arrested and reversed. Those Americans who took up arms in 1775 knew they might not live to see the freedom they desired. America, with no

professional army or navy, faced the most powerful military machine on earth. A modern political scientist would've told them their rebellion was futile. But the resilience of freedom and its power to motivate cannot be quantified, measured or predicted. In the end, those Americans enjoyed spectacular success. Likewise, we should disregard the current political degeneration and not allow it to deflect us from our course. Inflexible zeal on behalf of the freedom and dignity of the individual is the only way we can achieve our goal."

Excom Reports

The first major item on the convention's business agenda was for 1996 Executive Committee members to report on their activities and accomplishments during the previous year.

Al Swain, chair of the Publications Oversight Committee, described his revised and formalized bid procedure for selecting the party's newsletter editor, adding that the new publication, LPC Monthly, has enjoyed a "favorable response" from members. He also suggested implementing a teleconferencing system for the Excom, and instituting a program to fax responses to inquiries.

Ted Brown reported that the LPC fielded 73 candidates in the 1996 election. He also said that the party needs to do more to help its candidates after they have been selected, and advised commissioning a campaign manager to provide candidates with improved training and guidance.

Regional Rep Joe Dehn discussed his activities as a representative to the National Committee. He also provided an update on his efforts to expand the LPC website, and expressed his desire to add more local information to the site. Dehn urged each region to create and maintain their own webpages and offered his assistance.

Terry Savage described his efforts to develop a strategic plan for the LPC, and urged the new Excom to devote a minimum of ninety minutes per meeting to develop "strategy and policy."

Treasurer Jon Petersen delivered his report; he also pointed out that a significant portion of the LPC's expenses - those associated with maintaining the party's database - will not be a major factor in the '97 budget after the Unified Membership Plan (see related article on page 3) goes into effect.

Due to time constraints, LPC Chair Gail Lightfoot delivered her report in writing. It detailed her efforts to improve the party's response to inquiries and its internal and external communications; she also provided the results of various fundraising projects and reported that LPC membership had grown during the year.

Additional reports were presented by José Casteñeda (Secretary) and Hugh McLean (Withease).

Other Business

This year delegates instituted several changes to our bylaws, including the addition of a clause making explicit the Excom's power to decide if the LPC will participate in the UMP. Other changes included the adoption of a directive to hold presidential straw polls at state conventions in election years and a decision that LPC delegates to national conventions must be elected by a minimum of three votes. The bylaws were also amended to clarify that Excom mail ballots may be conducted via e-mail or fax.

Delegates also passed several minor changes to the party's platform and two resolutions: the first instructed the LPC Excom to negotiate a separation agreement with the national party should the UMP prove "unworkable or inequitable;" the second called for a complete "separation of sports and state" - a response to professional sports franchises and leagues that persuade city governments to finance stadium construction or renovations at taxpayers' expense.

Dasbach Urges Focus

After a luncheon on Sunday, Steve Dasbach, Chair of the Libertarian Party's National Committee, addressed the large gathering. "I think we'll look back at the last election as a historic period for our party," he said. "We had more

membership growth in 1996 than the previous eleven years combined. It was the first year we raised more than \$2 million. This year it looks like we'll cross the \$2 million mark again. We're also enjoying record levels of media attention."

He went on to say that he thinks "we'll come to view this year as the beginning of a new phase in our history. We can now stop fantasizing about what it would be like to be a political force and start planning to make it happen. For years, as hard as we worked, we didn't really believe we could succeed. Now we see that we can. That's the good news; the bad news is that it's a lot of work. And there's no magic bullet for victory: we have to build our base of support. We know it's possible to double our membership in eighteen months because we've done it. The challenge now is to continue doing it. It's not that far to one million members if we stay focused on that goal."

Dasbach concluded by saying: "The road to victory is before us. We can see the shining city we're trying to reach. What we have to do now is take those steps toward it, all of us, one step at a time. We have the ability to make that journey - to build a freer, more prosperous country for ourselves and our children - and, if we remain focused on the task at hand, we can."

Guest Speakers

Convention attendees had the opportunity to hear a series of excellent lectures by numerous guest speakers - so many, in fact, that many people found themselves facing hard choices.

Jeffrey R. Hummel, author of *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men*, delivered an illuminating talk on the economic impact of the American Civil War. According to Hummel, the Civil War ended America's tradition of limited government. "While federal spending exploded during the New Deal," said Hummel, "the charge was set during the war between the states." Consider some of the evidence: before the Civil War, the government's only taxes were tariffs; during the war, President Lincoln levied real estate, excise, sales and license taxes, in addition to the nation's first income tax. He also instituted many "temporary" spending programs and agencies that never died. Of course, new bureaucracies meant hiring more government workers - and, by 1871, there were 40% more federal employees than before the war. Lincoln also set the precedent for the fed interfering in the monetary supply, and suspended many civil rights.

Men's Rights activist Fred Hayward discussed the many ways our society discriminates against men, including on the issues of abortion and child support. "Many people oppose forcing the responsibilities of motherhood upon unwilling women," said Hayward, "yet these same people advocate forcing the responsibilities of fatherhood upon unwilling men. Men are forced to pay for choices that women get to make. That's slavery." Hayward presented alimony in similar terms: "Marriage is a partnership. If the husband and wife are equal partners financially, then they are hurt equally in a divorce, so there's no reason a husband should have to pay alimony; and if the husband and wife are unequal financial partners, and the husband has improved the lifestyle of the wife, then she should be grateful for what he has done for her - and not expect him to sustain her after her marital responsibilities are over." Hayward argued that for every women's issue, there is a corresponding men's issue: "Ending paternity suits is the male equivalent to maintaining women's rights to have abortions."

Sandi Webb discussed what Libertarians can expect to accomplish once elected to local office. Now serving her second term on Simi Valley's City Council, Webb said she deals with issues such as land use, permits, local ordinances (like smoking bans and curfews), rent control, redevelopment, taxes and cutting wasteful spending. She considers her biggest victory to be her streamlining of the city's process for issuing permits for carrying concealed weapons. Clearly relishing her role as Simi Valley's resident freedom fighter, Webb said her presence is often enough to discourage power-hungry bureaucrats from proposing new laws. "More than one time, I've heard other council members say 'Forget it! Sandi will never go for that!'"

Other guest speakers included: Norma Jean Almodovar, author of *From Cop to Call Girl*, who discussed her activities as a prostitutes' rights activist; George O'Brien, Western Regional Representative of ISIL, who explained "Why Libertarians Are Not Conservatives;" and Dr. Michael Edelstein, author of *3-Minute Therapy*, who provided advice on "How to be Happy in a Statist World." There were also speakers on Smog Check II, the State Engineers Union's

Initiative, the Medical Marijuana Initiative and other topics.

Strategy Panel

Should the LP focus on local or national election campaigns? That question is often hotly debated by members, and a panel of well-known Libertarian activists at the convention explored some possible answers. Chaired by Michael Cloud, Projects Manager of the Browne for President Campaign, the panel consisted of Aaron Starr, Chair of the Committee to Elect Libertarians to Local Office, Jack Dean, Senior Advisor to the Browne for President Campaign, and radio talk show host Terry Savage.

A champion of local elections, Starr said: "At this stage the party needs to go where the big guys aren't. We have an advantage in local races: we can collect money from Libertarians all over the country for winnable local races, elections the Democrats and Republicans don't care about." Starr went on to say that electing Libertarians to local office "helps us accumulate political capital which, eventually, will enable us to tackle bigger things."

On the other hand, Savage emphasized the value of running good presidential campaigns, saying "that's where we get maximum media exposure." He also advocated focusing resources on a handful of "well-chosen" state senate and congressional races, then spending remaining funds on increasing voter registration.

Drawing an analogy between political growth and a physical exercise, Dean said: "We have to work out our entire body." He urged fielding candidates at all levels, saying that "hard, focused work" was the key to long term victory. He also quoted entertainer Eddie Cantor, who once famously quipped that it took him twenty years to become "an overnight success."

Cloud stressed the importance of building the party by increasing membership. "Studies show that people either vote their party line or they don't vote at all," he said, comparing the "party loyalty" of voters to the "product loyalty" of consumers. "We need to focus on recruiting new Libertarians, as opposed to, say, getting our message out. We don't need to get our message out - we need to get new members in!"

The panelists spoke for two hours before an SRO crowd.

Banquets

The '97 convention boasted two separate banquets, opportunities for everyone to unwind with food, drink and friends.

The first banquet, held Saturday evening, was hosted by Master of Ceremonies Michael Cloud. Cloud told those gathered that there is no "silver bullet" for Libertarian victory - that our party's success will not come from recruiting a celebrity candidate or millionaire investor; instead, it will come from "silver buckshot" - the persistent, concentrated and forceful efforts of thousands of Libertarian activists. Afterward, Cloud conducted a fundraiser that added over \$1500 to the LPC's warchest.

The second banquet took place Sunday evening and was highlighted by a speech from Guest of Honor Harry Browne, the 1996 Libertarian presidential candidate and best selling author of *Why Government Doesn't Work*. Browne thanked the crowd for everything that they had done for him during his campaign, and urged everyone to focus their energies on building party membership. (See sidebar on page 8.)

Samuel Adams Society Luncheon

For the sixteenth year, the LPC's annual convention climaxed with a luncheon sponsored by the Samuel Adams Society, a group dedicated to recognizing and inspiring Libertarian candidates in California. Master of Ceremonies for the event was Jack Dean, the society's founder and director.

As is customary in post-election years, Dean gave certificates of appreciation to several Libertarian candidates. Afterward, he presented the society's coveted Sons of Liberty Award to Tom Tryon, Supervisor of Calaveras County. A

beaming Tryon accepted the engraved silver cup, which is given to candidates deemed "most effective in communicating libertarian principles."

The cornerstone of the event was a talk by Jacob Hornberger, founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation. Delivering a talk entitled "Libertarianism: the hope for America," Hornberger demonstrated why he is rapidly becoming known as one of our movement's most articulate and inspiring advocates. (Highlights from his speech will be published in our next issue.)

First Meeting of New Excom

The last official event of the 1997 LPC Convention was a short meeting held by the party's newly elected Executive Committee.

During the meeting, the Excom authorized Chair Mark Hinkle to make arrangements with Michael Cloud to institute a new fundraising program for the party. It also elected Ted Brown, Joe Dehn, Eric Fine and Jon Petersen to serve with Hinkle as the Operations Committee. The Opcom was authorized to implement the Unified Membership Plan and the Executive Committee approved an agreement enabling the LPC to withdraw from the UMP should it later decide to do so. The committee adjourned after scheduling its next meeting for March 22 in Santa Clara County.

With that, the LPC's 1997 Convention drew to a close. Delegates and members left the Beverly Garland Hotel and scattered like "silver buckshot" to every corner of the state, returning to their homes and families - and their activities on behalf of the Libertarian Party of California.

