

The Power of Double Negative Thinking

Carl Milsted, Jr.

In previous essays I advanced the thesis that to grow, the LP must produce value for libertarians *now*, using existing resources. Then, I listed several ways to do this: focus on winnable *meaningful* races, do lobbying, educate the public on issues, and simply be a fun social club for freedom lovers. By doing these things, the Libertarian Party becomes a useful tool for libertarians in general, even though it is still too small to win at the U.S. Congress level and above.

But are these things enough to attract that many more people who are now sitting on the fence? They have other options, other libertarian organizations to join and support.

If we could find those who are now on the edge of supporting the LP and recruited them as soon as the LP begins producing additional value, we could then add their efforts to increase our value yet more and pyramid accordingly. This is a nice vision, but difficult to carry out efficiently since it is hard to find those currently sitting on the fence. We know some of them; they are in the list of expired members, but even among those many are sitting far from the edge. Many former members have been burned out by excess activism or have been burned by myriad recruitment and fundraising letters that promised too much.

It would be nice to be able to produce a *major* boost in the value that the LP produces before trying to cash in on the widening of the credibility bottleneck. This would increase the bang per buck of the recruitment costs. But can we increase the value of the LP that much without burning out existing activists?

The answer is yes. There is a way to *dramatically* increase our value to freedom-lovers without *any* additional effort! The approach is similar to our philosophy of government. It also solves the “lesser of two evils” dilemma. Unfortunately, many current big-L Libertarians will hate it.

If you want to widen the credibility bottleneck dramatically, and end the “lesser of two evils” dilemma, read on. But prepare to be offended.

Hippocratic Politics

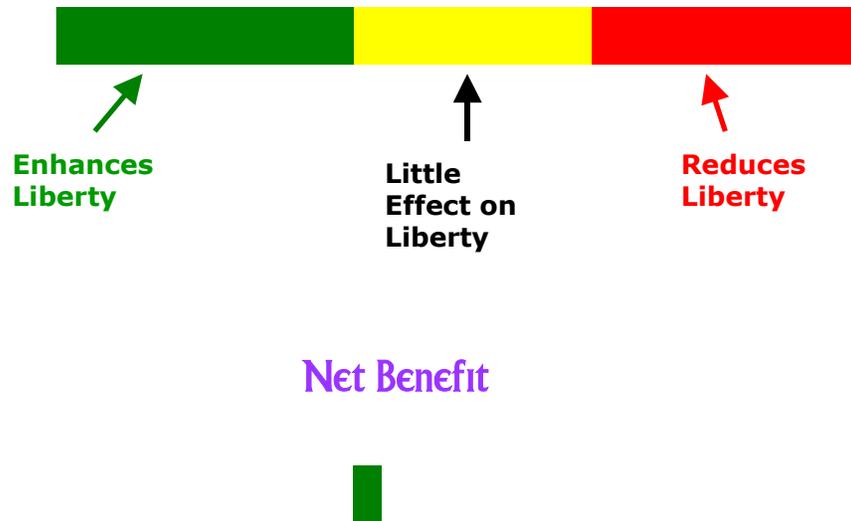
The activities of the Libertarian Party can be divided into three classes:

1. Those that increase liberty (winning elections, lobbying, changing public opinion on issues, etc.)
2. Those that do not affect liberty (gaining ballot access, recruiting members, holding conventions, etc.)
3. Those that *decrease* liberty (to be listed later).

That’s right, the Libertarian Party does perform actions that are detrimental to the cause of liberty! And these efforts are not trivial.

The net result of our efforts can be seen in Figure 1.

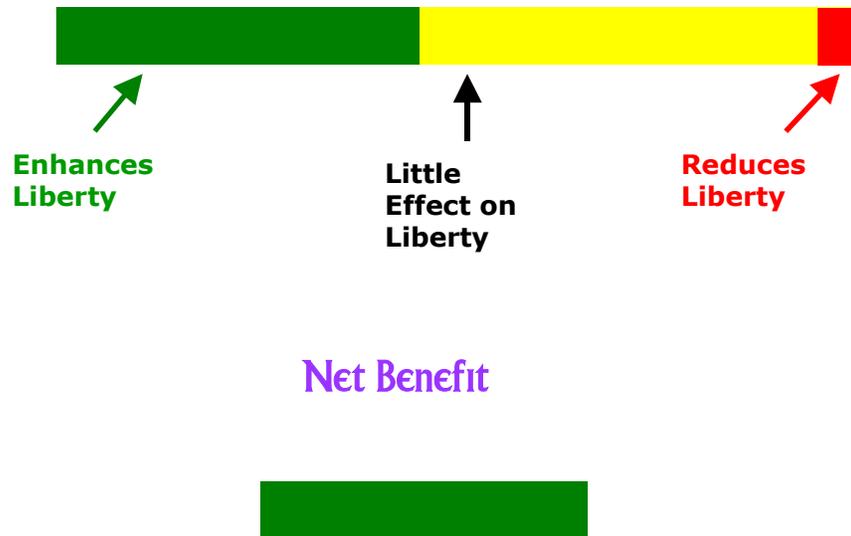
Figure 1: Current Effort Distribution



Ugh! The net result of our efforts is only a small fraction of the gross results of our efforts. We are like the doctor who makes a huge salary, but fritters it away on fancy sports cars and other luxuries to wind up with less net worth than the guy who owns the car wash. With the small green rectangle representing the net results of our efforts I am being generous. Many freedom lovers would argue that the net results of the Libertarian Party's efforts are negative (red)! And for this reason, they opt not to join the LP.

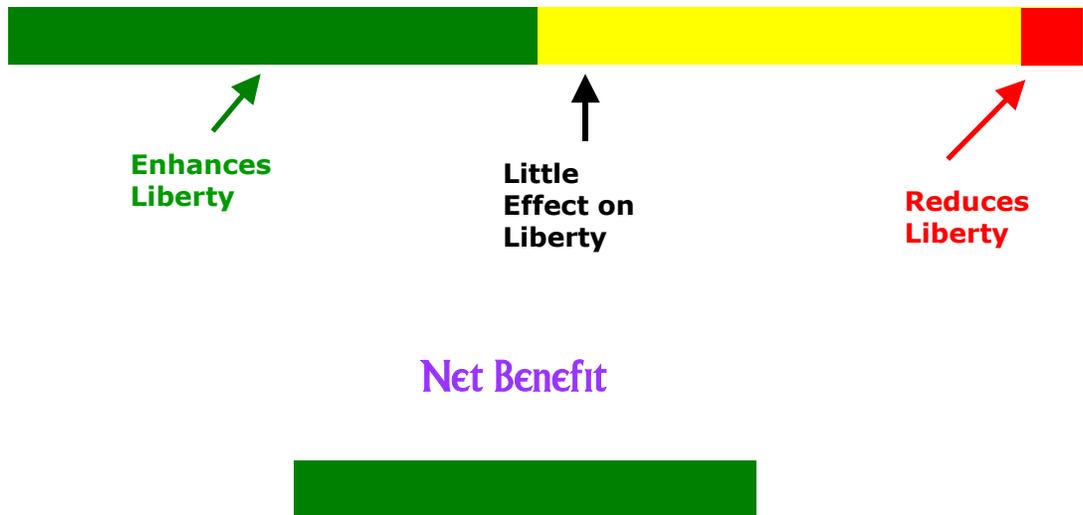
Suppose we had a major rethinking in order to redirect our efforts in order to maximize the fraction that increases liberty while minimizing those efforts that reduce liberty. Our effort distribution could look like:

Figure 2: Refocused Effort



We could thus increase the net benefit to liberty that the Libertarian Party produces several-fold without any increase of overall effort! And it would be apparent to all who follow the LP that the LP is a force for more liberty. Thus, if we so redirect our efforts, we can expect a quick boost in membership from those sitting on the sidelines who already know about us. The result is:

Figure 3: LP Aware Fence-Sitters Jump on Board



At this point, we could then redirect some of our efforts (green to yellow) to an aggressive recruitment effort to grow to the next level.

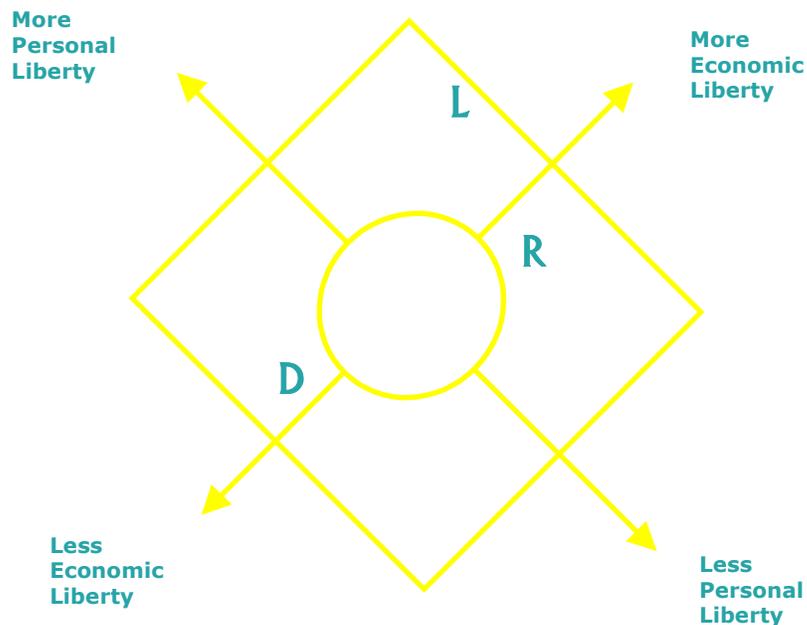
A Force for Tyranny

Just what are these LP efforts that decrease liberty?

Consider that the main activity of the LP (after ballot access and other overhead) is that of running candidates who have no hope of winning. These candidates run on a pro-freedom message. So, we can expect that these candidates will draw most of their votes from freedom lovers.

Now consider a situation where the Republican candidate is more freedom-loving than the Democrat (say, Phil Gramm vs. Hillary Clinton).

Figure 4: Typical 3-Way Race



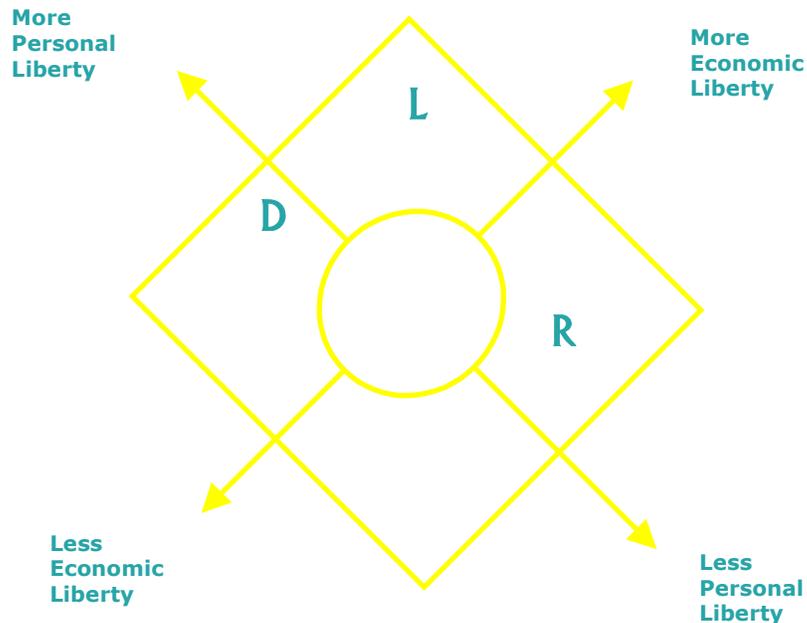
We see that the Libertarian candidate in this fairly typical situation is positioned much more closely to the Republican than to the Democrat. (Note that in the diagram I have placed the Libertarian to the right of the center since many Libertarian candidates downplay the social positions in order to avoid offending certain people.) We thus expect that the Libertarian will draw more votes from the Republican than the Democrat. The stronger the Libertarian candidate is, the more likely the Libertarian candidate will make the Democrat win. In this situation, additional support for the LP results in *more* tyranny!

This is a painful fact for many of those in the LP. At a social gathering of Libertarians in Northern Virginia I posed this question: “If, as a result of growth in the LP, our candidates in Senate races go from 2% to 8% on average, and that some do on the high end of this. As a result of this growth, we elect one Libertarian to the U.S. Senate and replace 30 Phil Gramms with 30 Hillary Clintons. Would this be beneficial to the cause of liberty?” The answer I got was an overwhelming “Yes!” Ask a freedom lover who is outside the LP and you will get an emphatic “NO!”

Either there are more libertarians outside the party than inside, or we should give up on politics and focus on educational actions.

Lest ye think I am biased toward Republicans, the same dynamic applies if the Democrat is more libertarian than the Republican (think Jimmy Carter vs. Bill Bennet).

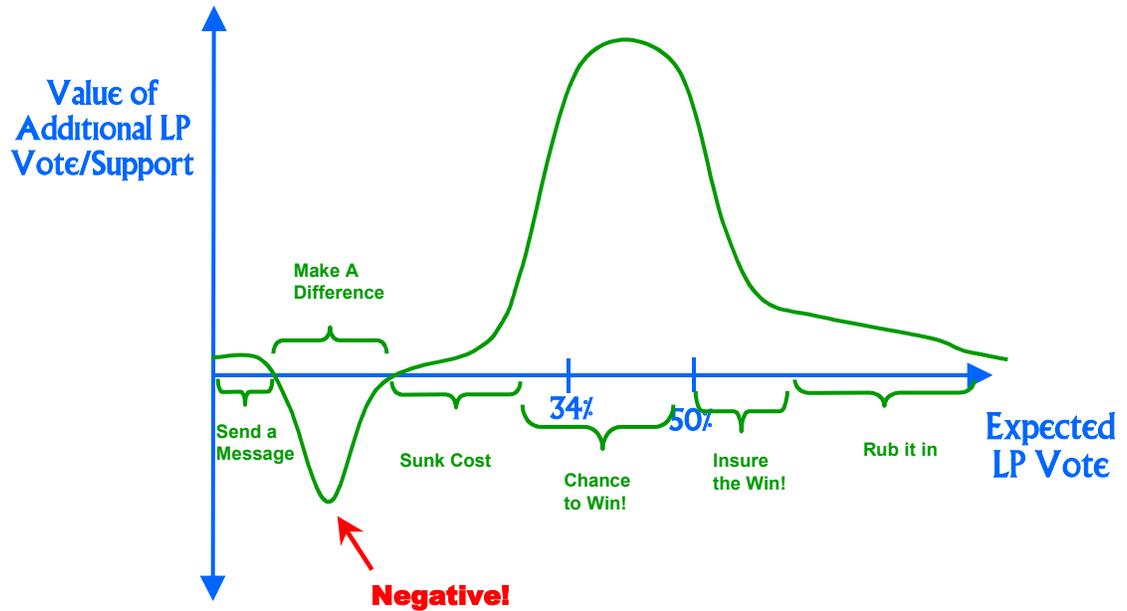
Figure 5: Typical 3-Way Race with Good Democrat



Recall the scenario in “A Realistic Vision of Victory”. Libertarians need not outnumber either the liberals or the conservatives in a legislative body to be effective; they need merely outnumber authoritarians by an amount equal to the difference between liberal and conservatives in the legislature in question. Replacing a liberal or a conservative with a libertarian is worth 0.5 votes on average. Replacing an authoritarian with a libertarian is worth 1.0 votes on average. Replacing either a conservative or a liberal with an authoritarian because a Libertarian split the pro freedom vote is worth -0.5 votes on average! Replacing a Hillary Clinton with a Phil Gramm has the same positive value as replacing a Phil Gramm with a Ron Paul! I know this runs against the Libertarian party line, but it is high time we grew up and dealt with this fact.

The negative return on investment in a Libertarian candidate in a typical three-way race is represented below:

Figure 6: Marginal Value of a Libertarian Vote, Typical 3-way Races



A paper candidate does little to no harm and a little bit of good (promoting the ideas of liberty). But when the candidate hits the margin of victory, the negative electoral result outweighs the propaganda benefits. It is only when the candidate gets well past this barrier that the marginal value of support for the LP candidate becomes positive. This rarely happens unless the candidate is wealthy. It would be possible to get through this barrier through focusing efforts to such a candidate, but of course we can do this for only a limited number of candidates.

I can hear the voices screaming in anger: “You want the LP to stop running candidates!” At least this is what I heard when I was on the Strategic Planning Team. Fortunately, this is not the case. The LP can continue running paper and cardboard candidates, but to avoid causing harm, we need to apply some new strategies.

And as a bonus, we will increase the LP vote dramatically.

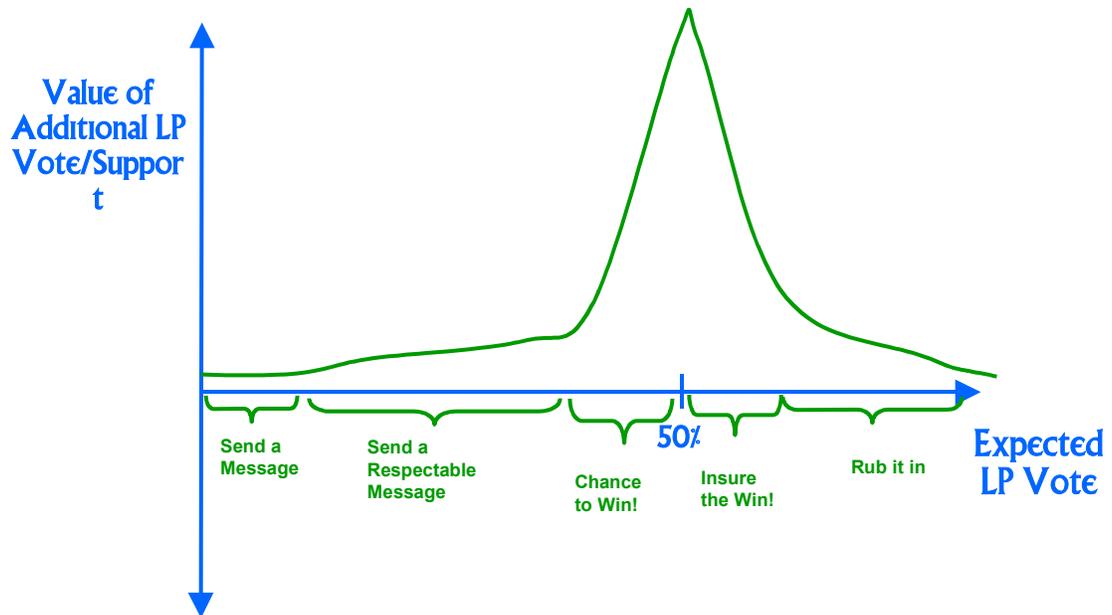
Strategy 1: Two-way Races

This is an easy one. Many of the lower-level races go uncontested between the major parties. At the state house level this is 50% in many states! The reason for this is Gerrymandering. Some districts are so conservative that a Democrat has no chance. Some districts are so liberal that a Republican has no chance.

But Libertarians embrace parts of both the liberal and conservative agendas. Platform-wise a Libertarian has more chance in a conservative district than a Democrat and more chance in a liberal district than a Republican. And even if the

Libertarian is hopeless underfunded, the marginal value of giving support to such a candidate is always positive.

Figure 7: Marginal Value of a Libertarian Vote, 2-way Races



I did a study of a dozen states on the 1999 and 2000 elections for lower state house, which was published in the May 2001 issue of *Liberty*. On average, Libertarian candidates did *four* times better in races where either the Democrats or Republicans failed to field a candidate than they did when both major parties fielded a candidate. Can you think of any other strategy that yields a factor of four in votes so easily?

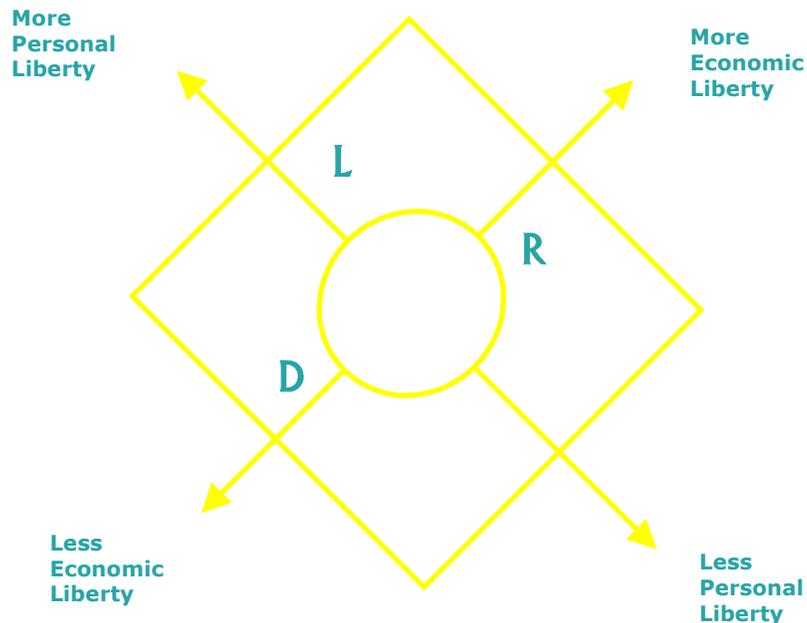
Some would object that this is an unfair comparison since fewer votes are needed in three-way races: ~35-40% vs. 50%+1. I would note that this difference is much less than a factor of four. The main reason that many Libertarians think that three-way races are easier than two-way is that they are focusing on only one of the three bottlenecks to victory: belief in the LP program. I think credibility is the tighter bottleneck and running in a two-way race fixes that to a very large degree. What remains is to do enough advertising to build awareness, get the candidate in a suit and avoid saying anything too outrageous.

Strategy 2: Triangulating

Suppose the Democrat is a borderline authoritarian and the Republican is at least a conservative. In this case, the Republican is the lesser of two evils. To avoid being a force for tyranny, the Libertarian should avoid taking votes away from the

Republican and if possible take some vote from the Democrat. One way to do this is to emphasize the social agenda of the libertarian program.

Figure 8: Better 3-Way Race



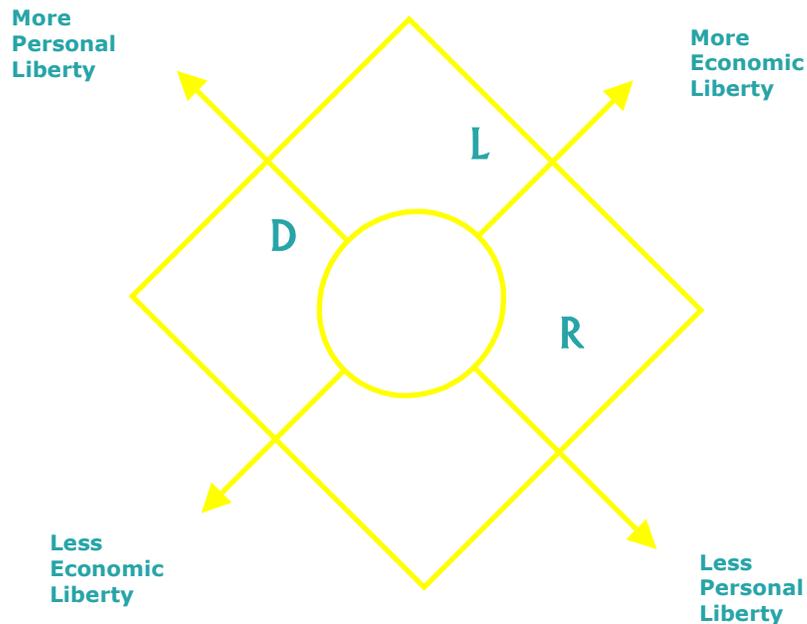
This is the time for emphasizing legalizing drugs and prostitution. It is also a good time to talk about corporate welfare, immigration policy and foreign policy. While right-leaning libertarians may be uncomfortable with this emphasis, it doesn't matter, since they will likely vote for the Republican anyway under this scenario. Indeed, I have made such people happy with this kind of stance by pointing out that the reason was to avoid making the Democrat win.

Once again, this strategy not only avoids increasing tyranny, it also gains votes. In the figure above, the Libertarian is positioned equidistant between the Democrat and Republican. People at this position on the Nolan Chart have no preference between the D or R. They, not the pure libertarians, are the true politically homeless. Thus, these people are not throwing away their vote by voting Libertarian. All that is needed is to reach these people and make them aware of the candidate and her stances.

Experimental note: positions on sex and drugs provide only partial motivation for those in the left-libertarian octant of the Nolan Chart. I have determined this in the field; while I was able to get Nader voters to work for a Libertarian congressional candidate by putting up Legalize Hemp signs, the number of votes gained was disappointingly small. However, I have been trying out some new approaches on the hippies of Asheville with considerable success. Stay tuned.

(If the Democrat is more libertarian than the Republican, then rotate the diagram: the Libertarian should then run to the Right, emphasizing such things as taxation and guns.)

Figure 9: Better 3-Way Race with Good Democrat



Strategy 3: “Non-voters”

Conventional political strategy is to target those who have a history of voting. But if one wants to avoid dividing the pro-freedom vote, one should consider going after those who weren't going to vote for either of the major-party candidates anyway. That is, when doing door-knocking, go ahead and knock on every door vs. those who voted in the primaries. Carry voter registration forms and sign people up. When doing direct mail, go ahead and send mailings to those who rarely vote. Consider advertising on music radio stations and during mindless entertainment television shows.

Once again, this can be a vote-getting strategy; it produced a victory for Jesse Ventura, after all. People who generally don't vote are expressing that they have very little preference between what either the Democrats or Republicans have to offer.

One group that is notorious for not voting is the young. When I have taken Quiz2D to college or high school venues, I have found that the scores cluster quite tightly in the upper left area of the Nolan Chart, mostly libertarian-leaning liberals. In other words, this strategy *is* the same as the triangulation strategy. To triangulate successfully, one must target the demographic groups that have a

history of not voting – because they see little gain in whether the RP or the DP wins elections.

Post Election Announcements:

So you have applied Strategy 2 and/or 3 to a three-way race and got 10%. Do not send out a press release claiming that you “made a difference.” If you do, many small-l libertarians will think you have hurt the better of the two evils and hate the LP accordingly. Instead, emphasize the new voters brought to the polls. Talk about the politically homeless who finally have someone to vote for.

Do this enough, and libertarian-leaning D’s and/or R’s may start deciding that the Libertarian candidate is the “lesser of two evils.”

And Now, Some Shameless Capitalism:

Tools for World Liberation has some T-shirts coming out that will make heads turn. You want the attention and I want the money. Come to the site and buy. It’s a win-win situation.