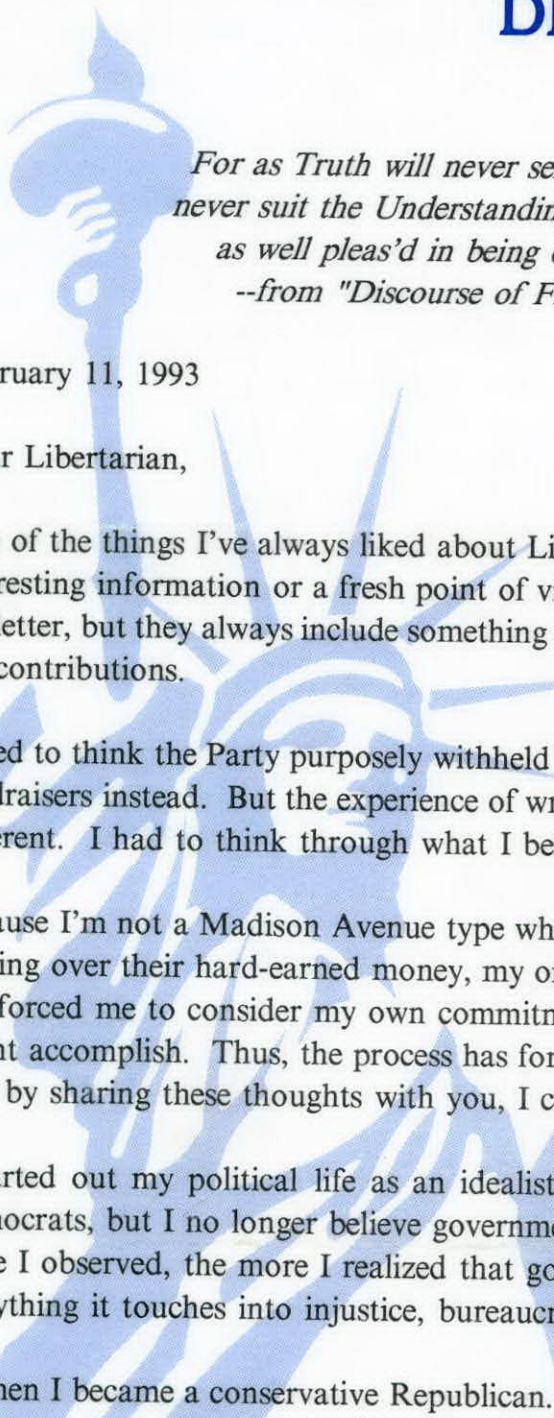


The Libertarian Party

DEFENDERS OF LIBERTY

Stuart Reges • National Director



*For as Truth will never serve the Purposes of Knaves, so it will
never suit the Understandings of Fools; and the latter will ever be
as well pleas'd in being deceiv'd, as the former in deceiving.
--from "Discourse of Free-Thinking" by Anthony Collins*

February 11, 1993

Dear Libertarian,

One of the things I've always liked about Libertarian Party fundraising letters is that they provide interesting information or a fresh point of view. Yes, they end up asking for money by the end of the letter, but they always include something else that makes them more valuable than just an appeal for contributions.

I used to think the Party purposely withheld some of the better articles from the LP News to use as fundraisers instead. But the experience of writing this letter has taught me that it's something quite different. I had to think through what I believed would be a good appeal to our membership.

Because I'm not a Madison Avenue type who knows all the clever ways to manipulate people into forking over their hard-earned money, my only tools are honesty and sincerity. Writing this letter has forced me to consider my own commitment to libertarianism and my vision of the things we might accomplish. Thus, the process has forced me to reaffirm my faith in the movement. I hope that by sharing these thoughts with you, I can help bolster your faith as well.

I started out my political life as an idealistic liberal Democrat. I still respect the ideals of the Democrats, but I no longer believe government is the right vehicle to accomplish their goals. The more I observed, the more I realized that government has a kind of inverse Midas effect, turning everything it touches into injustice, bureaucracy and waste.

So then I became a conservative Republican. That was quite a change, but I'd read enough books by then to appreciate the intellectual underpinnings of the conservative movement.

But the conservatives I met all wanted to use government to impose their morality on others. In fact, they were adamant that the future of the country depended upon successfully doing so. I tried to argue with them that a true conservative would try to keep government out of people's personal lives, but they had a different mind-set than I did.

At that time I only knew about the two major parties, and it was clear that I couldn't stomach either. I was convinced that politics was a hopeless quagmire of idealistic but foolish party members who were constantly being manipulated and deceived by knavish politicians. I wanted the Democrats to stop using government as an instrument to achieve their vision of social justice and I wanted the Republicans to stop using government as an instrument to achieve their vision of a moral society.

The problem, it seemed to me, was not their goals, but their choice of instrument. I didn't think they should be using the coercive power of government to achieve their own particular social engineering objectives. Both the Democrats and the Republicans seemed to believe that their ends were so important that they justified any means. As I read more books, particularly about American history, I finally figured out that what I believed in was something called libertarianism.

As a libertarian, I'm most famous for a battle that I sometimes comically refer to as, "The Drug Czar and Me." I had the most fascinating experience of my life for three weeks in the spring of 1991 when I found myself suddenly a national villain or national hero, depending upon who you talked to. Congressman Charles Rangel issued a press release denouncing me. Bob Novak pointed his finger at me on national TV and said, "You, sir, are a menace."

But on the positive side, Arnold Trebach of the Drug Policy Foundation fully supported me and even made my case required reading for one of his political science courses. According to Arnold, I'm the only teacher in the history of the United States to be fired by command of the federal government.

Let me give some background for those who haven't heard my story before, and I'll throw in some never-before-revealed tidbits for those who have already heard it.

When I was twenty and still a liberal Democrat who didn't feel any guilt about being on the dole, I went to study computer science at Stanford University on a National Science Foundation Fellowship. They thought I was a "promising young scientist," and so did I. But I soon learned that I wasn't cut out to do research (not patient and diligent enough). However, I did discover that I liked teaching and seemed to have an aptitude for it.

Stanford hired me after I graduated to teach and administer introductory courses. I taught courses there for ten years and came to be one of the most popular lecturers on campus (the Associated Students of Stanford University voted me among the twelve best teachers of large classes). I was a valued employee at Stanford. I valued my job there. But then the US Congress passed the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act.

Prior to 1991, Stanford had what I think was a wise policy on alcohol and drug use. They believed that taking an enforcement role was incompatible with their educational mission, so they tried not to interfere in the personal lives of students and staff. They had a very libertarian approach to the issue, allowing people to make whatever personal choices they wanted to as long as they behaved responsibly.

But the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act said that any school receiving federal funds had to take an active role in trying to achieve a campus free of illegal drugs and underage drinking. Stanford caved in to the pressure and changed their policy. Even though the top university officials all stated publicly that they thought this was the wrong policy to implement, they did it anyway because they knew that Stanford had grown too dependent on federal funds to survive without them.

At that point I had the classic "enough is enough" reaction. There is so much misinformation floating around about drugs that it's almost impossible to talk about it productively, so I had kept my opinions to myself when it was just the government destroying other communities. But when they reached into MY community and imposed a bad policy, I felt I had to take action.

In an article I wrote for the Stanford Daily I described my opposition to the war on drugs in general and to Stanford's new policy in particular. I also mentioned that as a protest of the policy I would carry illegal drugs on campus in my backpack.

Stanford ignored me, as I expected, because they didn't like the policy any more than I did. But I raised the ante by writing to various government officials about my protest, and that eventually got me into trouble. Five months after my article appeared, President Bush chose Bob Martinez to be the next Drug Czar.

I wrote a taunting letter to Martinez the day he was sworn in telling him my story. He responded by writing a letter to Stanford's president reminding him that Stanford's federal funds could be yanked for noncompliance with the policy and demanding that he take action against me. Stanford suspended me for three weeks while they made up their minds, and they eventually fired me.

In the interim, I had independent articles written about me by the Washington Post, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Boston Globe, USA Today, Associated Press, and many others. CNN did two news stories on me and CBS Evening News did a piece on me. I was invited to appear on Crossfire where I debated Congressman Rangel, Crier & Company where I first met Nancy Lord, Larry King Live, CBS NightWatch, and several other interview shows. I was also interviewed by National Public Radio and appeared on dozens of radio talk shows.

Not many people know that although I protested Stanford's policy and although I still maintain that my drug experiences have been positive ones, I am not an active user of illegal drugs. I haven't used illegal drugs in over three and a half years, and I haven't used them with any regularity for almost a decade. In fact, since leaving Stanford, the only mind-altering substances I've consumed have been two complimentary drinks at the LP's election night party.

I had a bit of a problem making good on my threat to carry drugs on campus, because I had no dealer at the time. But after rummaging through my old drawers, I managed to find a half a hit of LSD that I could use to carry out my threat. An interesting point about this is that I was carrying a minuscule amount of two-year-old LSD that had been stored at room temperature, so it's quite possible that even if I had been "caught" by the police, they would have concluded that I had nothing but paper in my backpack.

Another thing that not many people know is that the Dean of Engineering was willing to hire me back if I made an appropriate "statement." If I had been willing to say, "I do not intend to violate the university's alcohol and drug policy," I would be teaching at Stanford today.

The funny thing is that it was a true statement. I knew it would make Martinez angry if I had my job but could still taunt him by violating drug laws off-campus (which is not covered by the policy), so it was true that I didn't intend to violate the policy.

But I decided that it was inappropriate of Stanford to require such a statement of me. To think this through, I mentally translated this into, "I do not intend to wear green underwear on campus." Even if it were true that I didn't intend to wear green underwear on campus, I didn't want to work for an institution that required me to make such a statement.

As a going away present, my co-workers wanted to give me something with the Stanford name on it, so they gave me a red Stanford backpack, which I carry to this day. The other, more famous, backpack is buried in a time capsule underneath the Stanford Quad, to be opened by the Stanford students of 2091. I was allowed to include a message for the future generation. I basically expressed as best I could my hope that they live in a more libertarian society than I do.

At Stanford I worked not only as a lecturer, but also as an administrator. I started out just coordinating the introductory courses with the lowly title of "Assistant to the Chairman." But after five years of hard work, I was managing an effective and efficient autonomous education unit within the department that had an annual budget of over one million dollars and I had the fancy title of "Assistant Chairman for Education." I even managed to do this without spending lots of departmental money, mostly because my entrepreneurial efforts with Stanford Instructional Television increased our revenue from \$167 thousand a year to over \$550 thousand.

Oddly enough, even though I personally value my abilities as a teacher more than my abilities as an administrator, the most prestigious award I won at Stanford was for my administrative work. I was presented the Dinkelspiel Award for Outstanding Service to Undergraduate Education by the university president at graduation (only two such awards are given to staff annually). Of course, six years later that same president was demanding that I be fired because he was afraid the umbilical cord of federal support might be cut, but I enjoyed the positive feedback while it lasted.

Since leaving Stanford I have applied for several teaching positions, but so far no school has been willing to take the chance of hiring me. Fortunately I now have the opportunity to apply my other skills to better the Libertarian Party as National Director. I've been given the opportunity to write this letter to share some of my hopes and aspirations in my new job.

First, I'd like to move the national office to a new location. The office is in a bad part of town. Most of our volunteers come by only once. I think the main reason some fail to return is that they don't want to come back when they see where we are.

I used to bike to the office last summer. We had too many bikes to lock each one to an immovable object, so I used to lock mine to a chair in our fenced-in back yard. One day I had to leave my bike overnight because I became ill and had to take public transportation home. The next day my bike was gone, the chair it was chained to torn apart. I couldn't leave my bike there even one night.

Working at the office also afforded me my first experience of witnessing a murder scene. One evening as I left the office I saw a crowd of police and neighbors across the street gathered around the body of a man who had just been gunned down in broad daylight. Whenever I worked at night and kept the back door open, I heard random shots being fired somewhere close by.

I would like to move to a professional office space either close to other political organizations on Capitol Hill or close to the college campuses in the northwest part of town. Our landlord is willing to let us out of our lease early, but we don't have any budget for moving expenses, a short period of overlapping rent, and whatever new furniture we might have to acquire. If 100 of you each give \$50, I can move the office this spring.

Another small but important project I hope to work on is developing a "Libertarian Data Book." I would like to collect data about Libertarians who are currently in office, previously elected Libertarians, vote totals from previous elections, ballot-access statistics, budget information, registration facts, and so on.

For example, wouldn't you be interested in seeing how much money the Libertarian Party and The Marrou/Lord Campaign raised last year and how they spent it? Aren't you curious about how many signatures we gathered in each state to get on the ballot last year? Wouldn't you like to see a list of those states that allow people to register as Libertarians and how many registered Libertarians we have in those states?

I hope the Party decides to maintain an official data book with these and other useful statistics, and I want to produce the first version of it. I believe it will be a valuable resource both for our members and for the media. Some of the information takes time to gather, and other information takes time to present effectively (e.g., using pie charts when appropriate). I believe I can hire an intern to do most of the work.

IF AN ADDITIONAL 100 OF YOU EACH GIVE \$50,
I COULD PRODUCE A 1993 DATA BOOK.

I'd also like to upgrade some of our equipment and software. We are using an eight-year-old photocopier that is dying a slow death. We currently have our service agent trying to locate a used drum for us because ours should have been replaced months ago, but we can't afford the expense right now.

Several of the computers we are using are so old and slow that they probably wouldn't bring even \$200 on the used-computer market. We're also working with a database that is difficult to browse

and maintain because we compress almost all of our individual pieces of data into long text strings so that we can fit the whole thing on our crowded 80-megabyte hard-drives.

I want to make sure that we have the equipment we need for the office and I want to have confidence that it is all functional and will stay that way. I want to work with John Famularo, who maintains our database, to improve the system so that it will be easier to maintain and use. That will probably force us to buy at least one new computer.

I also want to invest in a CD-ROM system that would provide us address information. Any well-run organization with a mailing list as large as ours uses such a system to catch invalid addresses and track down duplicates. Such a system will also eventually save us mailing costs by allowing us to make use of 9-digit zip codes and barcode labels.

This will become especially important as our database grows. Such a system will pay for itself, but it requires a capital investment that we can't afford right now.

WE NEED ANOTHER 75 OF YOU TO EACH GIVE \$100
SO WE CAN AFFORD THESE PURCHASES.

I am very concerned about the interface between the state and national parties. We are faced with too many challenges and cannot afford to miss opportunities and waste resources because our national office does not always interact well with our state organizations. We should provide all the support possible for our state parties.

For example, I want to produce a manual that describes office procedures and how states should interact with us. I would also like to explore improving the link between our national database and the databases of those states that keep their records on-line. This is a tough problem because each state uses its own system with its own idiosyncrasies.

We already have some electronic exchange of data, mostly with the national office giving data to the states. I'd like to expand the options for providing such data to the states and would like to enhance our ability to receive data from the states into our database. For example, currently if a large state sends us 100 renewals, we have to perform 100 lookups to record 100 transactions, even if the state party knows the ID numbers used by our database for those individuals. I'd like to explore having the states send us a diskette with ID numbers to simplify the process and reduce the work to one step rather than many steps whenever possible.

These projects do not require special resources, they just require time. But I won't have the time to work on them if I'm desperately trying to solve our cash-flow problems.

IF 50 MORE OF YOU GIVE \$250, WE CAN KEEP ENOUGH CASH ON HAND
THAT I'D BE ABLE TO FOCUS ON THIS AREA.

When I first went to work at the national office I was surprised to find that we have little or no contact with the many think-tanks and special-interest organizations located in Washington. We should be actively building ties with libertarian organizations and special-interest groups whose agendas happen to coincide with ours.

Running the office requires the full-time attention of an administrator, so we can solve this problem only by bringing additional staff into the office. Of all the expenditures I've mentioned, this one has the biggest price tag. But I feel it has to happen if we want to get serious. As much as we hate government, we have to learn to play politics if we expect to have influence. For this goal, I'm asking the smaller number of you who can make a bigger contribution.

IF THE FIFTY PEOPLE GETTING THIS LETTER
WHO CAN AFFORD TO GIVE \$500 DO SO,
WE'LL BE ABLE TO EXPAND OUR STAFF TO PURSUE THIS GOAL.

In general terms, my focus this year is going to be on improving our organization and professionalism. Everyone agrees that these are essential areas for the party to address.

AND NOW IS THE TIME TO DO SO!

You might think that because it's an off-election year, the party can get by with less support. That attitude dooms us to failure.

There is no time during an election year to work on the basics of organization and professionalism. If we don't do it now, we'll go into the 1994 Congressional races in the same shape we're in currently. Sure, we can take it easy now, but then we shouldn't be surprised when we get the exact same results.

An athlete who fails to train between competitions and a theater troupe that fails to rehearse between performances will always come off as immature, amateurish and unworthy of serious attention. I hate to borrow from Clinton, but we need to fix these infrastructure problems now and we have to invest in our future if we expect a brighter tomorrow. If we let this opportunity slide, we won't get another until 1995, and by then Perot's new group might be providing competition we can't match.

I sometimes wonder whether we aren't the party of Sisyphus, the character from Greek mythology who was doomed for all eternity to keep rolling a stone up a hill only to have it roll back down again.

So often it seems that whatever little progress I might make with my family and friends or that the party might make with the media and the people is wiped out by the powerful forces arrayed against us or overshadowed by the introduction of yet another egregious violation of individual rights. There are some days where I can't even bring myself to read the paper because it makes me so angry and depressed.

One idea that helped me through my Stanford ordeal and that has helped me ever since is Stanford's motto: "Die luft der freiheit weht," which is German for, "the winds of freedom blow." The phrase comes from a sixteenth century humanist named Ulrich von Hutten.

When Martin Luther was denounced as a heretic and called before the church officials, Hutten defended him with three "invectives" written in Latin. One of them translated roughly into, "See you not that the winds of freedom blow?" Stanford's first president chose these words to be the university's motto, changing them into an affirmative statement and translating them into German to honor Hutten.

Hutten was, of course, proclaiming the end of the Dark Ages when even the power of the church would be inadequate to stop the inevitable tide of reform. As Hutten foresaw, the human mind, once unleashed, cannot be constrained by force. Ignorance may win some of the battles, but reason and free inquiry ultimately prevail.

It's probably obvious by now that I'm one of those idealists who love things like Frank Capra's movie, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." I love the dramatic climax on the floor of the Senate. Jefferson Smith is clutching the reams and reams of telegrams that call for his resignation, but which were generated by the corrupt political machine in his state, and he says, "I'm going to keep on fighting until this entire room is filled with lies...because you always fight for the lost causes more than any others." I don't understand how people can watch that and not get all choked up and shed a few tears, but I'm one of those sentimental saps.

DIE LUFT DER FREIHEIT WEHT. THE WINDS OF FREEDOM BLOW.

Libertarian ideas will win in the end because they're the right ideas, even if the Libertarian Party doesn't get credit for them. The idealist in me knows that. But I'm also a realist. I know that the winds of freedom blow harder and faster with your contributions.

I hope my own story of "Mr. Reges Goes to Washington" doesn't end with me desperately clutching at unpaid bills while I pass out from exhaustion. I'm going to put everything I can into my work as National Director, but I can accomplish my goals only with your support.

I'll close with a thought from George Orwell. He wrote several novels about the British middle-class and their unwavering resolve to move forward with stubborn optimism no matter what hardships came their way, symbolized for him by the ubiquitous aspidistra plants in middle-class homes. So, as Orwell said:

Keep the aspidistra flying,



Stuart Reges
National Director

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will save us
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Freiheit Weht!