

Annual Report 2002: From the Communications Director

2002: Soaring achievements

by **George Getz**

LP Communications Director

No doubt about it: 2002 was a year of soaring achievements for the Libertarian Party, interspersed with some serious setbacks.

The setbacks occurred as the party continued to stumble from the aftershocks of 9/11. Like so many nonprofits, our membership and funding continued to decline along with the sputtering economy.

As if the body blow inflicted on the nation by 9/11 wasn't enough, in 2002 the politicians saddled Americans with massive federal spending that will further weaken the economy; rolled out plans for a war in Iraq that will be divisive, even among Libertarians; and sucker-punched us with a new campaign finance law that will tie our hands with more red tape.

Despite those challenges, Libertarians scored a number of triumphs in 2002:

- * We ran the largest slate of third-party candidates since World War II -- and got 58 of them elected.
- * Our top-of-the-ticket candidates broke the million-vote glass ceiling -- and were credited with affecting the outcome of races for governor and Senate.
- * Our state parties achieved a number of impressive victories, saving taxpayers millions.
- * Several LP candidates displayed the star power to command major media attention, while others appeared in nationally televised debates.
- * The LP national office racked up over 700 broadcast interviews, and TV shows such as Crossfire and The O'Reilly Factor continued to ask for Libertarian guests.

Here's a quick review of 2002:

Candidates, victories, and officeholders: In 2002 we ran 1,711 candidates -- the largest slate of third party candidates in over 60 years. As a result we elected 58 candidates for the year -- more than three times the number we elected in '98! Better yet, during the past three years the LP has elected

more people to office than in the previous 27 years combined. We now have 562 Libertarians in public office, 340 of them elected.

In the vote total category, many LP candidates exceeded expectations. In Wisconsin, Ed Thompson raked in the second-highest percentage ever for an LP gubernatorial candidate with 10.4%. In Massachusetts, Michael Cloud earned 19%, the highest percentage in LP history for a Senate candidate in a two-way race. Collectively, our "top of the ticket candidates" (usually U.S. Senate or governor) smashed the political glass ceiling by earning over 1 million votes for the first time. LP state legislative candidates also garnered a record 1 million votes.

Even when our candidates didn't win, they had an impact: Libertarians played a role in ousting two incumbent drug warriors: Democratic Sen. Max Cleland and Republican Rep. Bob Barr. And pundits credited us with controlling the outcome of governor's races in Alabama, Wisconsin, and Oregon, and the U.S. Senate race in South Dakota.

Media coverage: Libertarians are definitely ready for prime time, and we proved that again in 2002.

Ed Thompson was the subject of favorable articles in The New York Times magazine, The Washington Post, USA Today, Chicago Tribune, National Review, and The Economist of London. A camera crew from NBC's Today show even followed Ed on the campaign trail.

Rachel Mills, the North Carolina statehouse candidate who starred in the "Ladies of Liberty" lingerie calendar, generated coverage from the Washington Post, the Associated Press, and appeared on Fox News' O'Reilly Factor, MS/NBC's "Nachman" and CNN's "Crossfire."

Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate Ken Krawchuk and Ed Thompson both appeared in debates that were televised nationally by C-SPAN.

Colorado Sheriff Bill Masters appeared on C-SPAN's Washington Journal to explain why he turned against the destructive and futile War on Drugs. Washington Journal also interviewed newly elected national Chair Geoffrey Neale at the LP convention.

The Wall Street Journal ran a feature on a fully informed jury measure on the South Dakota ballot spearheaded by LP member Bob Newland -- who also got a phone call from CBS' "60 Minutes."

Speaking of favorable news coverage, nothing speaks louder than an endorsement. Nine LP candidates earned newspaper endorsements in 2002, and they came from widely respected publications such as the Denver Post, the Boulder (CO) Weekly, the Fort Wayne News Sentinel, and even the Chicago Tribune, which endorsed LP Illinois statehouse candidate Jerome Kohn.

Meanwhile, the LP national office set two non-presidential year records by averaging 109 media contacts and 56 broadcast interviews per month. Our "television breakthrough strategy" continued to pay dividends as LP spokespeople racked up 20 interviews, including multiple appearances on Crossfire and The O'Reilly Factor. All told, 64 of our op-eds were printed on opinion pages around the USA on issues ranging from "fat taxes" to student drug testing to the war on Iraq.

Ballot Access: Through a combination of hard work, advance planning, and filing legal challenges when necessary, the LP continued to make gains in ballot access in 2002. We are now on the ballot in 26 states for 2004, more than any other third party.

Internet: Our e-mail announcement list swelled to 45,135 subscribers in 2002. We used this list to recruit candidates and volunteers, help LP candidates raise funds, and raise over \$70,000 with lightning speed to run our full-page ads against the drug war.

Special projects: On February 26, the LP ran the provocative, full-page ads mentioned above in USA Today and the Washington Times. The ads accused America's drug warriors of financially supporting terrorism.

A parody of an ongoing advertising campaign by the drug czar's office, the ads generated tens of thousands of hits on the LP website; landed Political Director Ron Crickenberger on The O'Reilly Factor; brought in tens of thousands of dollars from the drug reform community; and proved once again the LP's ability to mobilize supporters quickly over the Internet.

Lobbying and initiatives: From Massachusetts to Oregon and from Georgia to Colorado, Libertarians shook up the political landscape.

In Clayton County, Georgia, Libertarians led the charge to defeat a 1% increase in the sales tax, saving their community \$200 million.

In Bethany, Oklahoma, LP member Christopher Powell led the campaign against three local bond proposals on the January ballot, saving taxpayers \$3.85 million.

In Oregon, the LP helped quash an effort by the legislature to close a budget gap by imposing \$800 million in new "sin" taxes. The Oregon LP also targeted six Republican state senators who had raised taxes -- and five of them lost.

And in Massachusetts, voters sent shock waves through the media-political establishment when 45% supported an LP-sponsored initiative to end the income tax.

The LP also worked for freedom on the legal front, joining a lawsuit aimed at overturning an Oklahoma law that discriminates against third parties, and a suit to overturn the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act.

Yes, 2002 was a year when Libertarians triumphed in the face of adversity -- and proved that we're still America's leading third party.

But don't take my word for it. Listen to what the media had to say about us in 2002:

"The 30-year-old Libertarian Party believes in less government, lower taxes, and gun rights. Major parties ignore them at their peril." [Seattle Post Intelligencer]

"The Libertarian Party's time has almost arrived. Don't be surprised if a few Libertarians land some lofty offices throughout the United States." [Boulder Weekly columnist Wayne Laugesen]

"[Of all third parties,] Libertarians probably have the best chance of becoming a serious and effective party. They have the third-largest number of members, have run thousands of candidates, and have many 'mainstream' populist views about limited government, lower taxes, open markets, and political freedoms." [Florida Sun-Sentinel]

Now let's keep up the good work in 2003!