

LNC goals for 2018 and the 2018-2020 term

Message from Jim Lark to LNC-Business e-mail list, July 9, 2018

Dear colleagues:

I hope all is well with you. I am writing to initiate a discussion of LNC goals for the rest of 2018 and the 2018 – 2020 term.

In what follows, I offer some comments and suggestions about selecting our goals for 2018 and the 2018-2020 term, in addition to comments about some projects and outcomes I would like the LNC to consider. I hope you find my comments to be helpful. (Those who served with me during previous LNC terms may recall that I sent similar messages concerning goals for those terms.)

Allow me to emphasize that the purpose of this message is to initiate a discussion of goals. While I have enclosed below some prospective goals for your consideration, I have not offered suggestions concerning the specific strategies, tactics, and resources required to achieve such goals. I believe we should prepare a list of reasonable goals for consideration, determine the ones for which suitable strategies and tactics exist (given our resource constraints), and then select and prioritize the goals we deem most appropriate.

I. Assumptions and Preferences

In offering these comments I have the following preferences and use the following assumptions:

- 1) Based upon information provided at the initial LNC meeting by treasurer Tim Hagan, I believe it is possible the LNC will conclude the 2018 fiscal year with a net operating surplus. However, since I prefer to be very conservative in estimating revenues, I shall assume for the purpose of discussion that the LNC will conclude the 2018 fiscal year with a net operating deficit between \$50,000 and \$125,000.
- 2) At this time, I believe it is not unreasonable to assume the LP will have between 15,000 and 17,000 sustaining members by Dec. 31, 2018.
- 3) I have a very strong preference for selecting goals involving matters over which the LNC has the ability to control or to influence substantially. For example, the quality of LPHQ service to our members and the suite of goods and services available to our members are matters over which the LNC has effective control.

Although I have this preference, I have suggested below membership and fundraising goals for the 2018-2020 term; these goals are in some sense exceptions to this preference. That is, to a substantial degree our membership and fundraising levels are influenced by events outside our ability to influence substantially, much less control. For example, actions taken by President

Trump may generate substantially increased interest in the LP. In addition, an endorsement of the Libertarian Party and its candidates by a prominent celebrity with no previous connection to the libertarian movement could help us greatly.

4) At the risk of belaboring what may be obvious, I believe it is very important for the LNC to ascertain to the extent possible the preferences of our members and affiliate organizations. In particular, I hope my fellow regional representatives are soliciting information about such preferences from their state affiliates.

II. Goal Categories

For the purpose of exposition, I shall use the list of categories below; they are listed in no particular order of importance. I hope you find this categorization method to be helpful. I realize there are other ways of categorizing our activities; you are welcome to recommend other ways for our consideration. Please note that these categories are not mutually exclusive; many goals can be included under several categories.

1) Financial Resources

This category concerns issues associated with raising funds for our operations. Specifically, we should determine our financial needs in relation to our goals for the year and term, and identify the means by which we obtain funding for those needs. As part of determining goals in this category, we should consider the following:

- * How much do we need during the 2018-2020 term to accomplish our goals?
- * How do we attract new donors (including those who are not LP members)?
- * How do we encourage current donors (including LP members) to increase their donations?
- * How do we recognize and reward donors for their generosity?
- * Are our current methods of fundraising appropriate?
- * Should we increase the amount we allocate to a reserve fund (e.g., a "rainy day fund")?

I believe we should continue to enable our donors to select more easily the budget categories (or perhaps specific projects) they want their donations to fund. While LP.org already provides special webpages for affiliate support, ballot access, the building fund, historical preservation, the Legal Offense Fund, and the State CRM project, it may be helpful to provide a larger menu of choices (e.g., candidate/campaign staff development, youth outreach) to which donors can direct their donations.

2) Member and Affiliate Support

This category involves several areas of activity. I consider these issues to be of particular importance:

- * Do we have an acceptable level of performance in providing service to our members? In what ways can we improve our service?
- * In what ways can we improve our support to our affiliate organizations? This support can occur in many ways, such as funding ballot access activities and/or outreach activities, providing advice on improving organizational structure (e.g., filling potentially dangerous lacunae in organization bylaws), and providing legal advice on dealing with government regulations (e.g., campaign finance regulations).
- * How do we help our members become better activists and candidates? In particular, what educational and training programs should we sponsor?
- * In what ways can we improve the process of recognizing and rewarding our members?
- * In what ways can we improve LP.org, *LP News*, *Liberty Pledge News*, and our social media webpages to provide useful information to our members?

If I understand correctly, the work performed by Andy Burns (State Affiliate Development Specialist) has been very well received by many state affiliates. The LNC should consider in what ways the program supporting Mr. Burns can be improved.

During my service as national chairman (the 2000-2002 LNC term), executive director Steve Dasbach and I considered the possibility of funding a "regional director" to assist the state affiliates of New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. We thought a "regional director" might be able to take advantage of economies of scale to improve the ability of these affiliates to respond to prospect inquiries, to generate media coverage, to monitor important legislation, and in general to make the affiliates more effective in their efforts. The LNC may wish to consider a similar idea.

I am investigating ways in which to fund "field organizers" to assist with building Libertarian groups on college campuses, perhaps as part of a broader program to provide assistance to affiliate organizations. The LNC may also want to consider the possibility of funding "field organizers" as part of its support to affiliate organizations.

Incidentally, the LNC has funded such programs in the past. For example, Joe Knight of New Mexico served as a "field organizer" to assist in building campus organizations during the early 1990s. If I remember correctly, by 1993 the LNC had discontinued the program. I believe the LNC decided that the program did not produce results that justified the cost. I believe the LNC also funded a position of "field organizer" for Marla Bottemiller during roughly the same time period. Again, the LNC eventually chose not to continue the program. I suspect the position was not continued for the same reason the campus field organizer program was not continued;

however, I do not know this with certainty.

3) Membership Recruitment and Retention

This category involves issues of how we recruit new members and retain current members. Of course, our ability to recruit and retain members depends upon many factors, such as the success of our candidates and the quality of our service to our members. Some questions for our consideration include:

- * Should we target specific population segments for recruitment efforts? For example, should we emphasize outreach to college students, owners of small businesses, members of certain demographic groups, etc.?

- * In what ways should we seek new members? These ways could include direct mail (both postal and Internet), advertising in various media (including radio and cable TV ads, YouTube videos, Google ads, billboards), and outreach efforts at conventions of various organizations.

- * In what ways can we improve our literature, website, and social media to facilitate our recruiting efforts?

- * In what ways can we improve the process of recognizing and rewarding our members? (This issue is common to several categories.)

As you may know, I am involved in various ways in libertarian outreach to high school and college students. In addition, some of the funds I have donated to the LNC are under my control as the campus outreach coordinator. Also, I am a member of the board of directors (and member of the board of advisors) of libertarian organizations that promote outreach to college students.

Thus, I may have conflicts of interest with regard to the approval of LNC goals involving campus outreach. Should I believe such conflicts exist, I shall bring them to the attention of the LNC and refrain from voting on such matters.

4) Influence/Impact

This category involves issues of how we can influence the political landscape, and how we can increase the impact of our activities. Some questions for our consideration include:

- * In what ways can we improve our influence with various news media and information channels? (I use the term "information channel" to describe entities such as blogs.) For example, should we issue more press releases? Should we devote more effort to finding interview opportunities for LP members and candidates? Should we invest more resources in "social media"?

* In what ways can we improve our ability to mobilize our members and friends to support specific projects? For example, if we need to mobilize our members to support/oppose a specific piece of legislation in Congress, how can we best achieve this? (One important aspect of this may involve how we recognize and reward those who respond to our calls for action.)

* In what ways can we establish and improve relations with "libertarian movement" organizations (e.g., Cato Institute), "friend of the family" organizations (e.g., National Taxpayers Union), and issue-oriented organizations (e.g., Marijuana Policy Project)? For example, should we make a greater effort to obtain speaking invitations for LP members at conferences sponsored by the aforementioned organizations? Should we invest more resources in sponsoring information booths at such conferences?

* In what ways can we benefit by working with other organizations on specific projects, such as promoting good legislation/defeating bad legislation in Congress?

* Should we consider participating in litigation to achieve specific results? For example, should we consider additional challenges to campaign finance regulation?

* Should we increase our participation in organizations that seek to make redistricting less partisan? Should we be more involved with efforts to move toward voting methods such as ranked choice voting? (Note: Our distinguished colleague Bill Redpath serves as treasurer of the Board of Directors of FairVote. In addition, former LP stalwart Paul Jacob serves as vice chair of the Board.)

I believe an important component to our increasing our influence/impact is for the LNC to improve its capacity for strategic thinking and long-range planning. In particular, I believe we must do a better job of anticipating opportunities for the LP to make a positive impact on the political landscape.

5) Candidate Support

This category involves issues of how we can best support our candidates at all levels. Some of the questions in this category include:

* In what ways can we support candidates for election this year?

* In what ways should we support the 2020 presidential campaign? For example, in what ways can we generate support for inclusion of the 2020 LP presidential ticket in the debates?

* What programs should we sponsor to train our candidates and campaign personnel? These programs should include not only training in the "nuts and bolts" of running successful campaigns, but also helping candidates to develop platforms that are both Libertarian and appealing to voters. (Note: It may be appropriate for us to outsource certain types of training to organizations such as the Leadership Institute.)

* In what ways should we publicize our candidates, both inside and outside the LP? In what ways should we recognize and reward our candidates?

* In what ways should we support our elected and appointed officials?

As part of candidate development and support, I believe we need to develop and maintain a high-quality repository of information about prior campaigns, both to provide information about what ideas have been tried and to compile a list of "best practices" for campaigns.

6) Operations Issues

This category includes various issues involving the operations of the LNC and our responsibility to conduct the affairs of the Libertarian Party. Some of the issues we should address include:

* What are our goals for the 2020 national convention in Austin, Texas?

* How should we evaluate prospective national convention sites for 2022 (and perhaps 2024)?

* Do we need to review our internal rules and procedures? For example, do we need to conduct a review of the Policy Manual?

* Should the LNC adopt a more formal (or perhaps, more extensive) committee structure to assist us in our efforts?

* Should we conduct a formal evaluation of the LP Bylaws and Convention Rules, with the purpose of offering suggestions for improvement to the 2020 Bylaws Committee? (Various problems associated with the LNC at-large and Judicial Committee elections at the 2018 national convention suggest that an evaluation of the Bylaws and Convention Rules could be helpful.)

* Should we evaluate the current organizational structure of the LPHQ staff? (Of course, such an evaluation would require the participation of Wes Benedict in his capacity as Executive Director.)

III. Suggested Goals

Allow me to suggest that we consider adopting goals along the following lines. They are listed in roughly a descending order of importance. Please do not hesitate to offer comments and suggestions about the goals we should consider.

G1: The LP will have at least 20,000 sustaining members as of May 1, 2020.

G2: The LNC will take action to see that each state has an operational affiliate party by July 1, 2019. I suggest that "operational affiliate party" be defined in the following manner:

* There is a properly maintained website for the affiliate (perhaps the website is paid for and maintained by the LNC).

* There is at least one LP member in the state who actively serves as an official contact for the affiliate in its dealings with the LNC, and there is at least one LP member in the state who actively serves as a contact for the affiliate in its dealings with the state government.

* LPHQ has a copy of the current bylaws and associated documents for the affiliate, along with a copy of the relevant laws of that state regarding political parties and ballot access.

(We may wish to add to the definition something along the lines of "Inquiries to the affiliate receive a response in a timely manner.")

G3: The LNC will raise at least \$3.5 million from July 1, 2018 until May 1, 2020.

G4: The LNC will develop and approve new and revised outreach literature, to be available no later than Dec. 31, 2018. Some of the literature (e.g., issue pamphlets) should be available in the form of PDFs that can be downloaded from LP.org.

Note: I believe the LNC should pursue this goal as part of a more general process of literature development and evaluation. In a separate message I shall send you some suggestions concerning this more general process.

G5: The LNC will sponsor a series of seminars/workshops in 2019 at various locations around the country. The workshops could be structured largely along the lines of the "Success '97" and "Success '99" seminars (instruction on the basics of affiliate development and candidate development). Note: Approval of this goal should be contingent upon the degree of interest demonstrated by our members and affiliates.

As far as I can remember, the LNC did not vote to adopt goals for the 2016-2018 term. I believe it would be appropriate to discuss prospective goals for the term (along with goals for the remainder of 2018) between now and the next LNC meeting (probably to take place on Sept. 29-30), and to adopt goals during that meeting.

IV. Additional Considerations

In addition to the suggested goals, I hope the LNC will accomplish the following during the next several months:

* Develop a well-maintained calendar of the events at which it is desirable to have an LP presence (e.g., speaker, information booth, literature distributed to attendees, advertising in conference program). For example, the calendar would include the dates of the national conferences of "friend of the family" organizations. Presumably the calendar would also include information as to event location, contact information for event coordinators, etc.

* Utilize *LP News* and LP.org more effectively to recognize and reward quality activism. For example, I would like to see an article in each issue of *LP News* that recognizes an outstanding effort by an LP activist, affiliate organization, and/or candidate. Similarly, I would like to see at least one article per month on the website that recognizes such outstanding efforts.

As an aside, I realize the work required to identify and recognize outstanding efforts can be substantial. Moreover, I realize that such recognition can actually cause problems. (Some members may believe the honorees do not deserve such recognition. Other members may feel slighted by the fact that their efforts have not been recognized.) However, all things considered I believe we shall benefit by including more material in our "house organs" about fine work by our members.

* After analyzing the results of the 2018 elections, develop and approve a plan by Feb. 15, 2019 for dealing with ballot access issues during the 2019-2024 time period.

I shall greatly appreciate any comments and suggestions you have concerning LNC goals and projects for this year and this term. In addition, I would be grateful if Mr. Benedict and his staff colleagues would review this message and offer their comments.

I consider it likely that I have omitted some issues you will deem worthy of discussion. Hence, I may send a revised version of this message in the near future, along with a revised list of goals for consideration.

Thanks for your work for liberty, and for your consideration of this message. Best wishes to you in all your endeavors; I look forward to seeing you in late September, if not before.

Take care,
Jim

James W. Lark, III
Professor, Dept. of Systems and Information Engineering
Professor, Applied Mathematics Program, Dept. of Engineering and Society
Affiliated Faculty, Dept. of Statistics
University of Virginia

Advisor, The Liberty Coalition
University of Virginia

Region 5 Representative, Libertarian National Committee