



Will libertarian Barr be next Nader?

By: [Terry Michael](#)

June 25, 2008 04:08 PM EST

The Republican Party and John McCain should be afraid, very afraid, of Bob Barr.

For only the second time since it began running presidential candidates in 1972, the Libertarian Party has a leader who has actually been elected to something (the first being Ron Paul, in 1988, then also a former Republican congressman).

A Republican congressman from Georgia for eight years, Barr has a real constituency in his home state. Combined with a heavy black turnout, the participation of Barr partisans could easily deprive McCain of Georgia's usually Republican electoral votes.

But Barr goes beyond the one-key-state problem that megalomaniac Ralph Nader caused Democrats in 2000, when the self-righteous, self-styled consumer advocate deprived Al Gore of more than enough chads to lose Florida.

And Barr is a considerably more skilled, articulate campaigner than Paul. Like many children of the '60s now in our 60s, he has traveled a circuitous route to his libertarian philosophy. He was a military brat, born in Iowa City; grew up in Malaysia, Pakistan, Panama and Iran; and became an anti-Vietnam War Young Democrat in the 1960s, when he studied at the University of Southern California. He then discovered the philosophy of Ayn Rand and joined the Young Trojan Republican Club at USC; he went on to embrace movement conservatism in the 1980s. He rekindled the libertarian side of his conservative inclinations after being involuntarily retired from the congressional Republican Party after his census-redistricted campaign for reelection in 2002.

Like a number of small-government Republicans who came to Washington in the Republican Revolution of 1994, Barr's separation from the corrupting influences of K Street power led him to rediscover just how much liberty was being sucked out of our personal as well as economic lives in these — to use the well-earned cliché — 10 square miles, surrounded by reality, known as Washington, D.C.

He may be proof that political wisdom can grow when not polluted by the mindless partisanship and seductive careerism that contaminates Capitol Hill.

An anti-drug warrior in the Reagan Department of Justice as well as in Congress, Barr now supports medical marijuana rights and questions neo-Prohibition. The author of the Defense of Marriage Act while in the House, he now opposes the federal constitutional amendment against gay marriage and advocates states' rights on the issue. A supporter of the post-Sept. 11 Patriot Act, Barr now publicly regrets that vote.

Perhaps most remarkable for a man made famous as one of the House managers in the Clinton impeachment, the anti-Iraq-war-Republican-turned-Libertarian recently gave this answer to MobLogic.tv interviewer Lindsay Campbell when she asked him to choose between George W. Bush and Bill Clinton: "Why you doin' that to me?" he sighed. But he quickly answered, "I'd have to go with Bill Clinton. Bush has done such damage to freedom, liberty and privacy." Wow.

As a libertarian Democrat (there are about six of us, I think), but also an Obamamaniac, I

certainly appreciate all the support Barr can provide in helping to thwart a third Bush term.

But as a small “I” libertarian, I welcome Barr’s contribution to explaining what the philosophy of free markets and free minds means to voters, who got little sense of it from the personality- and rhetorically challenged Paul.

To be sure, the bespectacled and mustachioed Barr may be too dour for prime time — though not necessarily boring, for those who recall his licking whipped cream off the chest of a woman at a fundraising event several years ago. But he speaks in complete thoughts and succinct sound bites, with occasional flashes of humor. There may be enough gravitas in him to rescue the Libertarian label from the potpourri of wackery that keeps its candidates from breaking the 1.1 percent of the presidential electorate that was its zenith of national vote-getting. That happened in 1980, when Republicans had a self-described libertarian candidate running for president, Ronald Reagan.

With a statist conservative as the GOP standard-bearer this year, Republicans who can’t hold their noses and vote Democratic may find Barr an appealing place to plant their protests against a party that has sold out to a Rove-ing band of “compassionate” big-government “conservatives,” more interested in the perks of power than in principle.

And that has to be welcome news for Barack Obama in several other Southern states and the Rockies and Intermountain West. But good also for those of us who would like to see a contest of ideas in the next five months that goes beyond a silly left/right food fight.

Go, Bob, go!

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