

The Free State Project
Guest: Carla Gericke
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Carla Gericke is president of the Free State Project (freestateproject.org).

WOODS: I want to talk to you—believe it or not—about the Free State Project. Now, in particular, before we get into some of the details about what’s going on these days, give us your typical pitch for the Free State Project, what it is and why it’s important.

GERICKE: Sure. The Free State Project is a mass migration movement. We’re trying to concentrate 20,000 liberty lovers in the state, the great state of New Hampshire. We’ve been around for about ten years and we’re really starting to pick up. We just announced that we have over 15,000 people who have signed up. The way it works is that when we hit that 20,000 participants number, people have five years to move to New Hampshire. Now in typical libertarian style, a lot of us decided not to wait.

We know this is a strategy that in fact is working, and so we have about 1,500 people who have already moved to New Hampshire. My husband and I moved out in 2008 and we’re really starting to see an acceleration of that. So really what we’re trying to do is to concentrate a bunch of smart people who get it, who can understand and see what’s emerging, together in one place and see if we can effect real tangible change within our lifetime. We picked New Hampshire because it’s a pretty free state. I know it’s up in New England and sometimes people are like “What?” But you know it really still is that last little bastion out here with a real live-and-let-live flavor to it.

WOODS: Well, I grew up about half an hour from the border of New Hampshire in North Andover, Massachusetts, and I love New England. I don’t think there would be anything at all keeping me from living in New Hampshire. I think it’s a wonderful place to live.

So you’ve hit this 75 percent mark. Now when I saw you at the Liberty Forum in February of this year—I think that was the first time you and I met—where were the numbers then? Has there been a substantial jump just in this year?

GERICKE: It definitely is accelerating. I don’t know what it was in February, but we have sort of seen a nice little acceleration. I crunched some numbers actually right before Liberty Forum.

Up to this stage, we’ve been an all-volunteer organization, which sort of gave the good things that come from that, but also the challenges. You know, all of us having other jobs and other things to do. I actually just went full time, so I’m really kind of hoping that we can accelerate it. Basically, back when you and I met at Liberty Forum this year, I had looked at some numbers and I figured if we do nothing, if we just kind of stay at the pace we’re at, we will start to trigger the move in 2018, which would give the people the

five years to move. And when I realized how old I was going to be by then, I thought: “No, let’s get this party on the road. Let’s really start to accelerate this.”

And I did run an average depending on what’s in the news and all of that, but between four to eight signers a day if we accelerate the triggering of the move to 2015, which will be three years earlier, we need to be running that to about eight a day, and sometimes we hit that and sometimes we exceed that depending on what’s in the news. We just recently had an incident in Concord, New Hampshire, with the police chief there. The Department of Homeland Security decided the Free State Project together with Occupy New Hampshire and sovereign citizens is a domestic terrorist organization, so we were in the news a lot. Obviously we made quite a stink out of that. Just because you don’t agree with policies of the federal government does not make you a domestic terrorist and we certainly are not that, and so we saw big signups when those kinds of things happen. In some ways, I love it when the state agents come out and say kooky things because it’s good for us.

WOODS: Yeah. At the time I thought it was horrifying, but one of the best things in retrospect that ever happened to me was the *New York Times* attacking one of my books. Why would I think that was a bad thing? That was a great thing. So the same principle definitely holds with you guys. It is free publicity, for one thing. Plus, anybody who is politically awake at this point knows that 99 percent of the time when they throw around these terrible smears, usually the people on the receiving end of those smears are pretty good guys. We kind of know: “Oh, wait a minute, these must be some interesting people. Let me check them out.”

I want to ask you some other things about the Free State Project that I’ve been curious about. For one thing, and I think I was intending to ask you this on the Peter Schiff Show and then it turned out that I wasn’t hosting that day, but I always wanted to ask you: It seems like there’s a race going on in the Free State Project. On one hand, we want to get liberty-loving people to New Hampshire quickly so let’s get moving and see if we can carve out liberty for ourselves in our lifetimes, as you say. On the other hand, you have all these idiots in Massachusetts who have screwed up Massachusetts. Massachusetts doesn’t work anymore so they want to get out, and now they want to move to New Hampshire. They’ll screw up New Hampshire and they also won’t know why New Hampshire won’t work at that point. One good thing is that the 1,500 Free Staters are also active. It’s like having 15,000 regular people. But still, how do you stave off this danger of society-wreckers from Massachusetts coming in and doing the same thing in New Hampshire?

GERICKE: I think that it is a bit of a challenge. I’ve actually heard studies, I know they do one out of the University of New Hampshire where they said although the perception is that the—as I fondly like to refer to them, Massholes—come over to New Hampshire and then there’s this “let’s increase the state” attitude, but for the most part, according to that study—I can look it up and email it to you—but they said even though that’s sort

of the word on the street, that's not really practically what happened. I certainly know based on the people who I've met who have moved, escaped from Massachusetts and Connecticut and certainly many of the New England states, really the people who do come, they're not looking for that level of services. I think it's a little different down south from the border. Some of the ways I think we can address that is we have some activists who do run and who do engage in the political process and I'd love to see some of the business taxing change here. I had to go into Boston this morning and that commute—I left here at five and it took me two hours to get to Boston, so it's all the people living in New Hampshire taking advantage of what makes the state great—you know, no personal income tax and sales tax and all of those good things—but then they're going down to Boston for the economic reasons. And I'm like, okay, let's get some more Free Staters in the state house or awaken the liberty lovers that are already people who are native to the state and let's reduce some of the business taxes here and maybe do something, maybe some great favorable tax break. You know if you start a software company here, I would love to see us build. There's so much potential here. There are economic incentives we can use. There's just educating people and then ultimately it's just put your foot down. No, you don't get to get those excess services and no you don't get to come and spoil what makes this a great place to live.

WOODS: Tell us about some of the victories that you have had. In a way it's kind of an unfair question because the move hasn't been triggered and although people have moved there anyway, not in the numbers that will occur once the move is triggered. But it does seem that in the short run there have been examples of things that have happened in New Hampshire because you guys were there.

GERICKE: Sure. I would say Free Staters do things on three fronts, if you will. People come and they run for office and get on school boards and sort of use or work with the system. And then we have the business free-market folks and then we have the civ-dis [civil disobedience] folks. But I would say on the legislative front, the big ones that spring to mind are individuals worked for same-sex marriage, so that was a big win. New Hampshire is the only state that now has enshrined jury nullification, which is where the jury is supposed to be able to say, "Yeah, we think this guy was guilty, but you know what? We think it's a dumb law so we're not going to put him in jail." In other states the judge sort of has the discretion to know about that, but in New Hampshire now it is actually enshrined and it's enshrined in a way where the defense attorney, or if you're doing *pro se* if you're representing yourself, you're allowed to directly address the jury and go, "Hey, I think this is a dumb law and you guys shouldn't find me guilty." So that was a big win. In terms of budgets, in 2010 when it was a Republican House and New Hampshire is one of those purple states where it's mostly independent, so it swings blue, red, blue, red and that sometimes confuses people who are interested in the free state because they'll see the last cycle and say, "Well it went blue," and it's like, "yeah, don't sweat it. It will go red next time." People just kind of like that independence here. So those are some of the examples. Legislatively, with the budget in 2010, they actually

cut the budget, real cuts, not the funny-money cuts we tend to see on budget, but a billion dollars, it was 11% line-item budget cuts. So those are some of the successes.

We would certainly love to see more people come, more people get active. I've heard a number kicked around that said in the state of New Hampshire there are about 8000 people who are really politically active. And for the most part we're talking about status and they work with the unions and that whole cycle of nonsense, so if we trigger the move and we have that influx, I really do think we can start to see dramatic inroads on a lot of the liberty-loving things that we love and that we want to see implemented so we can show people these ideas actually work.

WOODS: Carla, this may be a sensitive subject, but where would be the fun in not asking sensitive questions? I want to know about the relationship between different sorts of people under the Free State Project umbrella. There are some people who indeed want to engage in political activism and get into office and try to change things that way, but there is also, particularly in Keene, a very apolitical or anti-political strain that wants to achieve liberty in our lifetime in their own sort of way. Is this a kind of friendly relationship, is it hostile or is it, "You do your thing and we'll do ours," or what's it like?

GERICKE: Well you know, as Ron Paul says, freedom is messy. We're big-tent and different people use different tactics. What I've been seeing over the time I've been here, the seven years I've been here now, is back in the day, there was sort of "My way is the right way, my way or the highway, so if you use the political system and I'm a devout anarchist, your way is wrong." That has really changed. A lot of the Keeniacs are running for office now. They run, there was a Keeniac who ran for mayor and he got 13 percent of the vote in Keene, which is a college town and very liberal. So the one thing we as libertarians have sort of agreed on is sort of live and let live, and so we take the approach that the Free State Project first of all is just bringing the people here and once the people are here they do what they want. I started phrasing it a few years ago as there are these different approaches you can use. You can use the system or work outside the system or bring your business and work with the free market, and that seems to have taken off. And I think maybe when Ron Paul ran last time, New Hampshire was the first primary state, and he actually came second in both the Democratic and Republican primary here, so he had a good showing and at that stage people were sort of like, "What, you're going to vote?" and I was like, "Yeah." First of all, it's a primary and second of all it's not going to work, I don't think the approach here is going to work if everyone moves here and they don't vote. We really tactically should be trying all of those approaches. So I think what we're creating in New Hampshire with the Free State is a marketplace of ideas where people can come and we can compete. If someone can show me that civil disobedience, and it often times does, attracts more media attention and that's good to get more signers and I'm all for it and we're not here to police people. Let everyone's ideas compete and let's see what works.

WOODS: Well, I'm glad things seem to be going well for you guys, with 15,000 people pledging to move. I mean, it's not a small thing to uproot yourself and move to New Hampshire even though you know you're going to have a lot of friends greeting you there. It's not an easy thing to do. That people are willing to do this testifies to the level of our commitment, but as you say also to the fact that we see the you-know-what is hitting the fan and you've got to put your foot down and do something about it. Any last thoughts before we let you go?

GERICKE: No, thank you for having me. I don't know if you'll be around in February, but if you are we would love to see you again at Liberty Forum and if not, then I think this is the year you should come to PorcFest.

WOODS: We will see, but just a few weeks after, you can never know the exact date, but just a few weeks after Liberty Forum we are expecting another child, so I'm going to be sticking around at home around that time, but I hope you guys have another successful event. I could not get over the size of the crowd, the composition and enthusiasm and knowledge base of the crowd, all the different vendors that were there. I mean, that was just a tremendous time, so if you're anywhere near the area, and you need some good liberty companionship and you just want to have a good time, the New Hampshire Liberty Forum is definitely the place to go. So FreeStateProject.org is the Free State's website and then tell us again what the Liberty Forum website is.

GERICKE: It's NHLibertyForum.com.