Episode 1,194: Why There's No Point in Not Being Radical: Libertarian Strategy with Tim Moen, LP of Canada

Guest: Tim Moen

WOODS: We both just got back from New Orleans. I was not officially in attendance at the Libertarian convention, but I did make an appearance and wandered the halls and said some hellos and things of that sort. I did see the debate in 2016 in which Dr. Feldman gave that never-to-be-forgotten "I'm That Libertarian" address. So beautiful, so fantastic, never to be forgotten, as I say. And to see that as the slogan of this year's convention was actually kind of heartening and could bring a tear to the eye. As a matter of fact, you mentioned in your opening talk to the convention an episode that I just had found out about. He of course was an anesthesiologist, and you have training as an EMT, and apparently, was it in Orlando you encountered somebody who had been in a hit-and-run situation?

MOEN: Yeah, I was actually — the Libertarian Party flew me down there to speak, and right before I was set to take the stage and address the audience, someone came up and grabbed the mic and said, "Are there any medical personnel in the house? Someone was just hit by a vehicle, hit-and-run outside. They're lying unconscious and bleeding. We need medical personnel now." And so in my brain, I'm like, well, okay, I'm a paramedic; I should probably go out there, but these people paid money to get me here today to deliver a message. So for a split-second, I was like, oh man, what do I do here? And then I saw Feldman jump up, this little anesthesiologist, this gas man running out of the room. And I'm like, okay, I can't let Feldman show me up here, so I ran after him, hot on his heels, and we went out there and rendered first aid to this guy. So here was a presidential candidate, a prime minister candidate, and someone snapped a picture of it. I think it made the local news. But I thought that you're never going to see that kind of thing happen at any other convention than a Libertarian Party convention.

WOODS: That's very heartening and just a wonderful episode. Let's start off by having you tell us who is Maxime Bernier and why is that name significant?

MOEN: Maxime Bernier is a member of Parliament. He's a member of the Conservative Party of Canada, and if I had to liken him to a U.S. figure, I'd say he's similar to Rand Paul. He's very libertarian-leaning. And in fact, he ran — Stephen Harper stepped down after he lost the general election as leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, and Maxime Bernier ran for that position and narrowly lost. He got 49% of the vote. But he ran on a very libertarian platform and rallied a lot of support and energy and excitement, and he lost by less than 1%. He actually lost by about 12 votes, 12 dairy farmers, to be frank, because Maxime Bernier — one of the big issues in Canada is supply management. The dairy cartel specifically in Quebec seems to have a stranglehold in Canadian politics, and Maxime Bernier,

the guy quotes Mises, he's friends with Ron Paul, and he came out strongly against supply management and protectionism. But his opponent, Andrew Scheer, rallied the dairy cartel and a bunch of dairy farmers bought party memberships and made sure Andrew Scheer won and not Maxime Bernier. So that's Maxime Bernier.

And so since then, Maxime has found himself kind of in a gray zone, because in Canada, it's not like the U.S. You can't be a Rand Paul or a Ron Paul in the Conservative Party and bang the pulpit and speak out against the party line. As leader, I have to sign off on candidates, and Andrew Scheer has to sign off on candidates. We have to personally endorse them. And so that engenders this kind of party loyalty, almost cult-like loyalty to the party leader. And if you're not toeing the party line, they can kick you out of caucus, which Maxime Bernier was recently kicked out of caucus, and find yourself on the outs and maybe even without a party. And if you don't have that party, you're not likely to get elected again.

So Maxime Bernier's in a bit of a predicament now. He doesn't have the support of his party, and so we've been putting a lot of pressure on Max to dump the zeroes and get with heroes. I think he could bring a lot of energy to this movement. So I'm actually sitting down with Maxime at our national convention and hoping to woo him over. I feel like we are kind of the friend-zoned party. We're the good guys that have always been there. We're Mr. Right, but he keeps dating these bad boys that break his heart, and so I think that would be a big win for us if we could get him over to our party.

WOODS: I like that friend-zoned imagery. That works very well. You know, I think you've answered what I was intending to be my follow-up question, which would be, if you have somebody who can come that close to victory in the Conservative Party, then it does raise a bit of an existential question for the Libertarian Party: what do we need you for? We've already got the infrastructure of the Conservative Party, and if this guy can come this close to winning, then maybe we should just pour our energies into that. Now, there are many possible objections to that, but certainly the one you've just given me, which is that a guy like this now is more or less politically homeless, I think answers it.

MOEN: Yeah, and I think there will always be a place for the Libertarian Party. My big goal in the next election is to try to get on the national debate stage. I think I can get the Conservative Party to support me in that, because right now, on that debate stage, you have the Green Party; the NDP Party, which are essentially socialists; then you have the Liberal Party; and then you have the Conservative Party. And there's a lot of libertarian-leaning folks in the Conservative Party, but the leader on that stage, if he wants electoral success, he has to build a platform based on poll numbers. So they're essentially like the Democratic Party in the U.S. when it comes to their actual policies and the platforms they put out. So they're getting pulled very strongly to the left towards statism, towards big government, and I think they would love to have a wing nut on stage with them that makes them look like a centrist and moves the Overton window on that stage a little bit more towards liberty. So I think I can make that argument.

And I think that's really the role of the Libertarian Party. To me, a win isn't necessarily a seat in Parliament; it's a freer society for my kids. And I think the only way you get a restrained government is when you have a population that demands liberty or death and the government has to follow that. And so I think the role of the Libertarian Party is to shift culture to that liberty-or-death culture, and the role of mainstream parties is electoral

success, and you do that by reflecting and amplifying culture, even if that culture is really crappy like it is now.

WOODS: The example of Bernier reminds us that libertarians — or actually, you tell me if I'm saying this right. But libertarians are expecting people to vote on the basis of ideas, and yet what very often happens is people want to vote on the basis of their own material interests. Now, of course, those two things can very easily coincide, but for somebody who's just an amateur observer of politics, they're probably not at that level of sophistication. They think, well, I'm part of the dairy interest, so I'm going to vote for the dairy interest. How do you overcome that?

MOEN: Yeah, I mean, that is the challenge. The only way you can do that is to plant seeds, I think, to stand on that stage and tell the truth. And so we're looking for candidates all across the country, someone to stand on that debate stage. And there's a lot of sacred cows that need to be killed in Canada. Universal health care, for example, you learn in day one in poli sci class that you do not challenge universal health care if you want electoral success in Canada. And that has to change, and the only way that's going to change is if someone's standing on that stage challenging it.

And so I remember at one debate, it was a small town, very conservative town, almost 100% of that town was going to vote Conservative. And I stood on that stage and I gave what I thought was a very reasoned response. I said, look, I'm not looking to take away your public health care; I'm looking to legalize health care. I should be able to go buy a blood test and see what's in my blood. In my community of Fort McMurray, a typical household pays about $30,000 a year to the health care system, and in return, they get three-month lineups to see a family physician, six- to nine-month lineups to get an MRI done, and it's not working. We should be able to at least buy universal health care. Well, one of the Conservative people in the audience stands up to the mic and says, "This is to the Libertarian candidate: I just want to say you can take my universal health care and pry it from my cold, dead hands." And he drops the mic and the crowd erupts in applause.

Now, that's a very difficult position to be in. Now, if you're looking to have electoral success, you can't stand up there and challenge that, but that has to be challenged and I think that is the role of the Libertarian Party, is to stand on principle, to tell uncomfortable truths, and plant seeds. And you know, my response to him was, "Sir, I'm a paramedic. I give health care; I don't take it away." And the crowd kind of politely applauded and were like, oh, okay, that's a good point. But I planted some seeds and I shook some hands afterwards and people said you really got me thinking. And so I think we need to do that over and over and over again until our culture shifts.

WOODS: That's actually one of the most persuasive answers I've heard, which is simply that we need some institution that's not obsessed with electoral success, that will just be able to say to people what they need to hear. And that leads into I think what is very fertile ground for discussion, namely Libertarian Party strategy and what it ought to be.

There is within the Libertarian Party in the U.S. — and I can speak only about that one — a Libertarian Party Pragmatist Caucus, and in fact, they had a booth at the convention, and their domain, it's LPCaucus.org. So it almost looks like LibertarianPartyCaucus.org, so it works out very nicely for them. So I actually went on my smartphone; I said, "Who are these people?" And more or less, this is the argument that's going to be made against you, which is

that it's very sweet to spread ideas, but look, we have think-tanks to spread ideas, we have newspaper columnists who can spread ideas. The purpose of a political party has to at some point be to win elections, and we're not going to win elections by going out there and being radical libertarians. So if we want to just lose all the time — I mean, that would — you don't need me to tell you what the argument of the other side is. But it does need to be — when people say, "I don't want to win debates, I just want to win, I want to win the election," what's the answer to that?

MOEN: Well, I may be wrong about this. I'm willing to keep an open mind here. But the thing that convinced me to dip my toes in politics — it took a lot of convincing to get me to do this. I had no desire to be in politics. I'm an ancap, and I was one of those ancaps that — In fact, I wrote an article explaining why voting might be borderline immoral and how you should avoid political action. And then six months later, I found myself running for prime minister.

But the thing that changed my mind was I did some film work with Neil Young and Daryl Hannah when they came to my — I live in the oil sands community in Fort McMurray, and so of course we have all these leftists, environmentalists from Hollywood fly in there to slag our community all of the time. And I embed myself into these productions to try to get them to shift their focus to something a little more positive. But I wrote this article explaining the hypocrisy of Neil Young that I saw when I worked with him. Caught the eye of some Libertarians in Canada, and they worked on me to convince me to become a candidate for — And I was very resistant, but the thing that they kept saying was, "Tim, you can't tell me that Ron Paul didn't make a difference, that he didn't shift culture."

Now, the thing about Ron Paul is that he didn't legislate liberty. He didn't have much success, as far as I know, passing laws or passing bills like auditing the Fed or anything like that. But he infused culture with these very rich ideas that I think are going to find fertile ground and eventually blossom into some liberty. And so my argument to people is that: listen, here is a stage, there is an audience, and if you think your ideas are important, you need to stand on that stage. You can't pooh-pooh the stage and say you're too pure for that stage. You need to stand up there and preach.

And then the other thing I will say is this: we have to really define what a win is. Is a win electoral success? Is it getting a seat in power? Or is a win shifting culture to a culture that demands liberty? Because to me, that's a win. I want a freer society for my kids. That's what motivates me. And I think the only way we get there is when we have a population and a culture that demands liberty from its government, because politicians and electoral success comes from following culture. You have to follow it. And so we're never going to see a restrained government. And so I can tell voters everything they want to hear. I can whisper sweet nothings in their ear. I can soft-pedal our message, and I may be able to get electoral success. But then what? Now I find myself in the belly of the beast and I'm handcuffed. I can't legislate against culture. I'll never be able to get the support I want to restrain government in the way I'd like to.

So I'm very skeptical of this idea that we need to water down the message or we need to tell people what they want to hear. I think the most important thing we can do is stand on principle and promote these ideas that Western civilization is built on.

WOODS: The way I think of it is this: let's suppose there were an episode of mass hypnosis that made the general public go out and vote Libertarian. That would mean victory in the

electoral sense, but that would be an extremely short-term victory as soon as they emerged from the hypnosis. They would immediately undo it. They would challenge us at every turn, and you would have no lasting effect from that. So obviously we can see that there's more to life than just electoral success, and you need to have that educational foundation if any of your electoral stuff is going to take root and actually be lasting.

Now, I estimate — See, you and I both know, because you used to be one, there are a lot of folks in the libertarian movement who are anti-political, period, because — and I understand why. Politics is a rotten game, and there's a lot of betrayal and just rotten stuff that goes on, and I totally understand that. But I can't tell if the anti-political people are more numerous than the pro-political people or if they're just louder. I honestly don't know within the libertarian world. But what I do know is I have a lot of such folks who listen to me, and a lot of them are very dear friends of mine. So they're going to be a little disappointed — They already know I don't have any philosophical opposition to voting; I just rarely see a reason to exercise the right to vote.

But I increasingly believe that the idea that there's some principle involved in isolating ourselves from the political conversation — which, like it or not, that's what you're doing by not participating — isolating ourselves, I don't see how that helps us. Whether we like politics or not doesn't matter. The point is, as you say, it's an opportunity that you don't get otherwise to stand in front of a group of people who are stuck there and have to listen to you. Where else in life do you get that chance, unless you're a college professor? But in that case, half the kids don't show up and they don't remember anything you said anyway. This is an opportunity, and it seems to me that, as a minority group, we ought to take every opportunity to convey our message.

MOEN: Absolutely. I mean, it would be like if you see a group of people that you think is having a harmful belief — maybe you think Islam is a harmful belief, and the imam invites you to speak to his audience, to the congregation and explain why their belief is harmful. I mean, if you think that's important, why wouldn't you take that opportunity? And that's my message to people that are anti-political. If you think your message is important, get out from the underworld, staying up until three in the morning on Facebook explaining why people are wrong, get on that stage, and whether your voice is shaking and your knees are knocking, tell the truth and spit fire into that mic and try to change hearts and minds on there. And you'll become a better communicator as you do it, as well.

I've found that — I was one of these guys that would stay up until three in the morning, clubbing people over the head with reason and evidence and logic and belittling them and doing all these things. It wasn't until I actually had to get in front of people — and these people, the thing is, they're genuinely curious about our message. They are asking questions. These aren't the people you encounter on social media, on Facebook, who you're engaged in arguments with. Suddenly, you have to shift the mindset. You're no longer battling bad ideas; you're promoting good ideas and you're trying to connect with these people at their level and walk them through the logic and the beauty of liberty. So I think people who pooh-pooh politics are doing themselves an incredible disservice if they take their message and their ideas seriously.

WOODS: I don't want to just keep lobbing softballs at you, but I'm just thinking out loud here. You had mentioned the example of Ron Paul. Take Ron Paul's influence in, say, 2012 and compare it to today. Now, he's still an elder statesman who's respected a great deal by

libertarians, but his audience is a tiny fraction of what it used to be. Would he have built an audience without the huge platform he got through politics, I'm not so sure. But at the same time, the counterargument is: how many Ron Pauls have you had in over 200 years of American history? That's true. That's very true.

But I guess what I think the potential of the Libertarian Party is is that you could be involved in politics without being annoyed by having to compromise because the head of the party tells you that the platform says you have to support milk subsidies, after all, and you don't want to, and then you have to make deals with other people. You don't have to do any of that in the Libertarian Party, so that seems to me would be the great benefit of it.

Now, let's talk a bit further about strategy here, because you are — I'm just going to put you right on the spot here. Would you describe yourself as an anarchocapitalist?

MOEN: Yeah, I am. I'm an anarchocapitalist.

WOODS: All right, so let's say you're on the debate stage, and I say, "Tim Moen favors privatizing the military. Go ahead, Tim, you have 30 seconds." What are you going to do?

MOEN: Yeah, well, I'll say, look" — and this is my approach to every government program. It scares people to think of a stateless society, and I get that. And you know what? To be honest with you, I don't think I'll every be satisfied. I don't think Ancapistan or Libertopia, I don't think there's such a place, and I think if we reach such a place, I still wouldn't be satisfied with it. I'd want more liberty tomorrow than I have today. And that's my motto. Basically less government tomorrow than we have today.

And so my answer to all of these questions is: can we find a way that we can serve these vital functions that government is providing in a lousy way — I mean, the military makes us less safe, it seems, these days than more safe. Can we find a way to do this in a voluntary way without pointing guns at our fellow neighbors? Can we instantiate in culture the idea that it's my personal duty, that I feel it's my personal duty to defend my culture, that I have an armed household, that I train regularly? Is that the kind of country that is likely to get invaded? Can we move to that? And so I would say: what can we do tomorrow to reduce the infliction of harm on our neighbors for these services? Can we find better ways of doing that? It's a really tough sell, but that's kind of the approach I take to a lot of these questions, and it's the same with universal health care, which is probably the hardest one to sell to Canadians.

WOODS: Now, let's face it. Right now, libertarianism is a marginal ideology. Now, we know that we are better known and slightly more liked than we used to be. That's true. But we still are on the outskirts right now. We're not among the so-called major parties. So what that tends to mean, as with any marginal group, you attract in some cases marginal figures. You attract people who always hang out with the weirdos or who always have the oddball opinion. And a lot of these are wonderful folks, but some of them are, frankly, sinister people and they think, well, here's an organization that can't reject me [laughing]. They tend to flock to those things.

MOEN: Right.

WOODS: And then as the leader of the party, you're in a position where you feel like I have to protect the brand and I've got — I don't know how many candidates the Canadian party runs every year, but in the U.S. it's an awful lot. And I don't know how you monitor all of them. Obviously, you have to use your state parties, really, because the chair can't do everything. You've got to have the state parties keeping an eye on people. But what is the way to handle it when there's somebody who is crazy in some way or who is clearly in opposition to the platform? I mean, the Republican Party, let's say, runs a lot of people who are in opposition to their platform, but they don't care about their platform and they just let it go. If the guy is absolutely outrageous like I guess that Nazi guy who's running in Illinois, then they come out and they finally say something, but generally, they take a very laissez-faire attitude. For once, they're going to be laissez-faire. It's on this. How does the Libertarian Party of Canada handle a situation like that?

MOEN: Yeah, that's a difficult one to handle, for sure, and I'm not sure that I have the right approach here. My general approach is to try to decentralize the authority to select, recruit, vet candidates to the local level and just sign off on those. Now, the sticky part for me is that I have to personally endorse them, and sometimes, man, it's hard to sign my name to some of these candidates that I'm a little bit leery about. But I think that the way you do this is, as leader of the party, it's my job to overpower these people with my message, to shine a light on — to point the camera lenses and the spotlight on the message and the positive message that I want people to hear, and to say, listen, I don't agree with this candidate, I don't agree with his tactics, but we are the party of freedom and we try not to censor people; we try to let people have their say, and this isn't what the party subscribes to, but we're going to let this candidate have his way.

So I don't know if that's the right answer. I get the arguments from the other side all the time, that rather than running a lot of candidates all over the place, maybe we should just have a select few candidates who are very polished, very presentable, and great communicators. I don't think we're at that place there. I think that we have to popularize libertarianism and attract more candidates, and eventually we'll be able to recruit some higher-quality candidates.

But it is a problem, and part of the problem I wonder too is the party structure. These parties are built kind of like governments are built. They're almost like quasi-socialist structures, and they're instantiated that way in law. The idea that we ought to vote, that popular opinion ought to set the direction of our organization: no business runs that way. And so I think that might be a bit of a handicap for the Libertarian Party, so I think what you need is a really strong leader who delivers a really powerful, clear message that overshadows a lot of the kind of dissidents and the kind of fringe tinfoil-hat-wearing people that might not promote the brand as well.

WOODS: Do you guys have the same ballot-access headaches that Americans have?

MOEN: No, we actually have very easy ballot access. All we have to do is get 100 signatures. One of the stumbling blocks in the past for some candidates was coming up with a $1,000 deposit, what you need to come up with to get on the ballot. But even that was relatively minor. But that's gone now too. There was a recent court challenge of that, and it was decided that that was unreasonable. So now you don't even need to put any money down; you just get 100 signatures and get my endorsement and you're on the ballot as a Libertarian Party candidate.

WOODS: Now, that is very interesting to hear. Obviously in the U.S., we're stuck in this situation where, in order to get relief from onerous ballot access regulations, we have to appeal to the very people who have a vested interest in maintaining those regulations. I mean, it seems very, very challenging, and my gosh, is that mind-numbing work. And yet it would have to be done.

MOEN: Well, yeah, and I mean, I'll tell you, this is what impresses me the most about the Libertarian Party down here: the amount of volunteer hours and the grinding that goes on and the door-to-door knocking and just the amount of hours put in to get the ball moving is unreal. It really pumps me up. Like, I am motivated. I'm going to our national convention next weekend, but coming here is like coming to church for me, because it lifts my spirit to see all these people working so hard for the same cause, and it is quite something to see.

WOODS: So tell me what you think makes life more difficult for a libertarian in Canada and maybe something that makes life easier for a libertarian in Canada, as compared to the U.S.

MOEN: Sure. Well, the easy, easy part for a libertarian person who is engaged in political activism is that it's quite easy to get on the ballot. It doesn't take much investment. But the hard part for a libertarian in Canada is that we have a very statist, left-leaning culture. Again, universal health care is a sacred cow, social safety nets, all these social programs. And we don't have the culture of liberty. I mean, the U.S. was founded on basically violent revolution against the Red Coats, and so there is a strong thread of liberty deeply ingrained in the American spirit that I see widespread that just isn't there in Canada. We're just very polite, affable, and we see the government as kind of a committee of virtue. They're there to provide all our needs and alleviate all our anxieties, and that's a very difficult kind of culture to overcome.

WOODS: I personally think that the next presidential election cycle is going to be a real challenge for libertarians in the U.S., not because people are going to fight over Bill Weld is a good nominee, but rather because — it seems like every four years, people have a reason not to vote for the Libertarian Party. They say, *Well, we love a lot of what you're saying, but this year the whole republic is at stake. There's not going to be an America if we* — And then four years later, somehow, America has managed to struggle along and there still is an America, but they say, *This one, now this is the one we just can't afford to throw our vote away,* and all that.

But I think, though, that this coming one is going to be particularly contentious because of the Supreme Court issue, because if they've replaced Ruth Bader Ginsberg, then it's, "Katy bar the door," Trump got the Supreme Court, and all bets are off. But if she's still hanging on, then they know in that next term the next president is going to be able to shift that court decisively in a direction one way or the other for a long time. And that's going to be the year that nobody, left or right — even the Green Party people I think are going to think to themselves, *I may have to hold my nose and vote for the Democrats.* I think that's a real struggle. Now, you don't have to deal with Ruth Bader Ginsberg's 85 years in Canada, but do you have any thoughts — do you think I'm wrong about that? I mean, obviously you follow American politics?

MOEN: Yeah, absolutely. And we face a similar problem. Every election cycle, it's the end of the world. And for example, in my writing I had strong social conservatives knocking doors for me. Now, I have to have a five-minute conversation with them to explain the meme, "I want

gay married couples to protect their marijuana plants with guns," that kind of popularized me, but social conservatives got it in five minutes. Look, social conservative values emerge in a substrate of liberty. They emerge from what Burke called the little platoons: churches, charities, businesses, the family. It doesn't come from the top down, and we give our opponents that ideological weapon to use against us if we try to legislate morality from on high. Social conservatives seem to get that very quickly, and so I had all these social conservatives door-knocking and doing great work for me, but then when they saw that Trudeau was rising in the polls, one by one, they called me and they said, "Tim, we love you. We wish we could vote for you, but we have to vote against Trudeau. It's the end of the world if he gets elected." And you're going to face that every single election.

And so I guess my message to folks in the party again is: what is a win? Is a win your vote count? Is it getting a seat? Or is a win you have planted seeds and now there's an army of social conservatives in that writing who have adopted liberty principles? And the fruition of that is, look, Maxime Bernier almost one leadership of the Conservative Party of Canada. He wouldn't have come close to winning, I don't believe, if it hadn't been for the work of the Libertarian Party popularizing this message. And so that's a good thing. I see that as a good thing. If the other mainstream parties have to adopt our platforms because there's a culture that demands liberty, that's what we want.

And so if you convince someone to adopt the principles of liberty and subscribe to them, even if they vote for another party because they're scared and they're frightened or whatever, I think it's still a win for us, because I think over time — we're here playing the long game. We have to make sacrifices in the here and now if we want a better tomorrow, and I think that's part of it. And so I encourage libertarians not to get disheartened by vote counts, just to keep grinding it out, because we're getting there. I see signs everywhere that the message is spreading and the culture is shifting.

WOODS: What's the website of the Libertarian Party of Canada?

MOEN: Libertarian.ca.

WOODS: Libertarian.ca. And do you have your own website?

MOEN: I don't right now. No, I kind of dropped the ball on this one. I should have a Patreon page. I should have all sorts of things going on, but you know, I'm back grinding it out in the fire department again, working as a firefighter, trying to pay some bills, because I cashed in my retirement fund to run for prime minister last time, so I basically sentenced myself to work till I do. But that's fine; I don't see the purpose of life without work anyways. But yeah, so Libertarian.ca. Look me up on social media, on Facebook, on Twitter, and watch for what's coming.

WOODS: Well, excellent. Well, I wish you the best of luck. I hope the Libertarian Party of Canada flourishes, and I hope you have a great deal of success as well. Thanks so much for your time.

MOEN: Thanks, Tom. Appreciate it.