



Episode 1,504: Dave Smith: How Screwed Up is the Libertarian Movement Right Now?

Guest: Dave Smith

WOODS: All right, this one's just easy to do, this one. You and me talking about the state of the libertarian movement? Oh my gosh. We've got some pretty interesting topics, I think, this week, and tomorrow, we're going to be talking about just comedy in general. We'll have some political stuff to say about that, no doubt, but I just want to talk to a comedian about comedy. Just like last week, or two weeks ago, I talked to a magician about magic. I had a guy on the show who'd been on Penn and Teller's *Fool Us* –

SMITH: And stumped them.

WOODS: And stumped them, yeah. And I thought, yeah, I want to talk to this guy. I mean, he's a libertarian, but I almost don't care. I just want to know about this.

But let's talk about this. Now, let's get this out of the way. All right, let's get the annoying part out of the way, because Dave has officially retired from – I guess we should mention his name; let's not be children about this – from the Nick Sarwark Wrestling World. He's out of it. Dave, as most of you know, was involved in a Soho Forum debate, which he won by Oxford rules, on the general subject of: the Libertarian Party should never again nominate people with views like those of Gary Johnson and Bill Weld. And arguing against him was the chairman of the Libertarian National Committee, Nick Sarwark.

And Dave has since then – I mean, first of all, Dave did the debate, and then after that, I really recommend people listen to the podcast episode that he did with Sarwark in studio the day after, because there were a lot of very interesting concessions that Dave, in a way rung out of him but he almost volunteered him. He almost didn't have to ring them out of him, so it was very interesting. But I understand that with debates like this, they never end. The other side is always continuing to lob arguments at you, and at some point, you just have to say, *You know what? I've said what I have to say. I'm not doing anything else.* And so, Dave, I want to say: thank you for your service. We expect nothing further from you.

But if we're going to talk about this topic, it seems unavoidable that this subject would come up. So what are your comments about that?

SMITH: Well, it was an interesting experience. I mean, I've never done an Oxford-style debate before, and I really enjoyed it. And there were a whole bunch of really great people who came out and made the trip to New York. Michael Heist from the Mises Caucus and a whole bunch of those guys came out. And so it was a really fun experience.

And a lot of why I said, like, I'm just kind of done with this — and as I mentioned to you when we were talking before off air, I said I was half saying that to myself as much as I was saying it to my audience, because just to be completely honest, I don't really think Nick Sarwark warrants any more attention than I already gave him. And I kind of felt like, particularly after the podcast that I had with him, as you said, I got enough concessions, if you want to call them that. I mean, I got enough kind of statements on him that I was like: okay, so I don't really need to add any more to this.

I mean, once the chairman of the Libertarian Party is saying, yeah, if we run Dick Cheney, you're obligated to vote for him, and if we run Adolf Hitler, yeah, you still might kind of have to vote for that guy. Also, foreign policy does not affect the domestic population. And just these statements that it's, like, okay, does any more need to be said? I mean, can we all just say, okay, that's this guy's position?

Now, let me just say — and my final takeaway from it would be this: obviously, the thing with me and Nick is personal. And I know me and you are very similar in this way, where people attack us or say nasty things about us or whatever, we're kind of quick to just kind of let that roll off our shoulders. Yeah, maybe you go back and forth and whatever, but when people go after your friends with attempted career-ending slurs, that really bugs me. And it's something that I've always had in me, going back to like the second grade. I've always had a thing in me where I defend my friends, and I will not stand for people like attacking people who I love, who I know, who are very good people. And that's really where a lot of the animosity came from. So that was like the personal aspect of it.

The more professional aspect of it, look, I could understand — not everybody is going to see the world the way you do, the way I do. Not everybody has the exact same strand of libertarian philosophy that we have. Fair enough. I think we're right, but whatever. If the chairman of the Libertarian Party was to have the attitude of saying: *Hey, I'm a big-tent guy. If Bill Weld wants to say he's a libertarian, and move over to the party, okay, I want to welcome him with open arms. Anybody who wants to come on board liberty, I want to welcome them* — but then was also saying: *And of course, I want the Ron Paul people, I want Tom Woods, I want the Mises Institute, I want Lew Rockwell, I want Jeff Deist, I want all these guys on board* — I would completely get that, you know?

Now, I would still be a little bit wary of people who support wars, who were lobbyists for Raytheon. You know, let's keep our eyes on those guys. But I could support that. But if you're going to tell me, we'll take the Hillary-Clinton-supporting Raytheon lobbyists, but we can't have Tom Woods, Ron Paul, or Jeff Deist, that's a real problem to me. That's like, okay, so what we can't have the good libertarians? We only have the fake ones? How is that a strategy?

WOODS: It was interesting to hear him say, by the way, at one point, where he was listing people that he's willing to grant —

SMITH: Yes, that's right.

WOODS: Like he'll concede to you, all right, look, I'll grant you — and he listed Walter Block, and he even listed me. And I thought, how about that? After all this fighting, he'll concede that maybe I'm all right.

SMITH: But oh, God, that bothered me more than anything. He said, "I'll give you Tom Woods, "or something. Well, thank you so much.

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah, that was kind.

SMITH: Thank you. *I'm willing to give you the guy* – like if you put all the people that you've brought into the liberty movement, you could fill at least like a hotel. And if you brought all the people he's brought in, you couldn't fill a room in a hotel. So it's like, oh, thank you so much. I'll grant you the guy who's infinitely more respected than me, has a massive following that I'll never have in my entire life. It would be like me saying, "I'll grant you Ron Paul. I'll grant you him."

WOODS: Yeah, who are you?

SMITH: Yeah, exactly. Like, who are you to decide you'll grant this person? And then of course, then this was the thing that was the interesting contradiction. He goes, "But Hoppe's a bridge too far." It's like, okay, well, listen, I'm not somebody – and I said in the debate, I said, "Hans-Hermann Hoppe is a hero in the liberty movement." And I absolutely stand by that. I mean, I think some of the work he's done is some of the best stuff that's been written by any libertarian, that he was quite possibly, quite debatably the most brilliant, important, living libertarian. No, I don't agree with everything that Hoppe's said. I have a couple problems with a few different things that he's said. But why is *he* a bridge too far, yet somebody who advocates war, who was a lobbyist for Raytheon – I cannot repeat that enough – who supports Hillary Clinton, that's not a bridge too far?

And right there is where you see, that's the difference between me and Nick Sarwark, is that it's like, well, what really is a bridge too far? And this what was like at the heart of the conversation that we got in on my podcast. And it's like, why do we have to play on this statist, left-wing playing field, where we guarantee them victory. Like if we concede right away that racism, for lack of a better term – which basically can turn out to mean anything you want it to mean – is worse than advocating state-sanctioned mass murder, which is war, somehow the prior is worse than the latter? Well, if that's true, if that's true, then the left wins, period. We never win. I mean, if you're going to say that this term, racism, which basically is a spectrum that covers anything from like genocide to saying "blacks" instead of "African American," like anything in there, and maybe even more than that can be called racist – if that's worse than state aggression, then I promise you the left wins and libertarians lose.

WOODS: A couple other things along these lines. You were talking about the Federal Reserve and war. And he was saying, look, the American public is not that against the wars, for one thing. And secondly, he says, although I would like to have a candidate who's against the Fed, the fact is the general public doesn't care. Does not care about that. So that, I guess, was to justify his emphasis on certain things rather than others.

But I didn't totally buy that, because – not that I want to bring everything back to myself, but in the same way, nobody cares about Tom Woods, right? I mean, outside liberty movement, it may be the case that nobody cares about or knows about the dual mandate of the Fed, but likewise, most people don't know me either. And yet, for some reason, he had ample time – I mean, far more time than he spent on the Fed in the entire calendar year 2019, he had time to spend on me. And I know people hear this and they say, "Oh, we're so tired of this fighting

back and forth." But look, the fact is, it is a legitimate defense to say: he started it. I mean, there's a reason you say that when you're seven years old: because it's legit. He started it. I didn't start — you think I would start with this guy? I didn't even know who he was. I'm not even kidding you. I didn't even know who he was when he first attacked me.

SMITH: Yes, and there's a reason why defense, even by libertarian principles, defense is acceptable and aggression is not. And I understand, not to say that any of this is an act of aggression, but it's like, yeah, if somebody comes at you, and doesn't just come at you, like, "Hey, I think Woods got this and this wrong in his book." I have no problem with that.

WOODS: Yeah.

SMITH: If somebody wants to say, "Hey, I disagree with Lew Rockwell's immigration policy," hey, that's completely legitimate. I'm actually, while I'm not exactly an open-borders guy, I am somewhat sympathetic to the consistent anarchocapitalists who argue for that. I also understand where Lew Rockwell is coming from. By the way, within the Mises Institute, there's a lot of diversity on that issue. I mean, Walter Block disagrees with Lew Rockwell's immigration policy. I think Jeff Deist, the president, is somewhere in between the two of them. It's like, that's fine. But to go, "Hey, Lew Rockwell is a secret racist," it's like, no, that's not okay. You actually have to have some evidence to demonstrate that, and to start insinuating that people are fascists or fascist sympathizers, this is something where you're trying to ruin somebody. So that's a whole different thing. And not only does that justify a response; it demands one, I think, in a way. So I think you're exactly right.

Now, what you were saying with the stuff with the Fed, so he goes: well, a lot of people support the wars, so we can't be that strict about being antiwar, but people don't support racism, so we can be really against racism, or something like that as well. The problem with that mentality is like, okay, well, most people aren't libertarians, so should we give up on libertarianism? I mean, most people support the state, so do we just have to support the state? I mean, obviously, our job is to change the minds of people. Like that's what we're doing, and if we give up on that, then what is the point of us existing? What's the point of the liberty movement at all if we're not trying to change what is accepted? It's like, yeah, we live under a \$4-trillion-a-year monster. A lot of people seem to at least, on some level, accept that. That's not good enough for me. And look, I know Robert Murphy — he's an economist. You heard of him?

WOODS: I've heard of him.

SMITH: He's done some good work. He said at one point, it was really funny to hear him talk about, but he said that he thought in 2007 when Ron Paul was campaigning, he was almost like, *Uh, don't talk about the Fed so much. No one's going to care about that.*

WOODS: Oh, yeah, I said that too. Maybe you're blaming him for my stupid view, but that's what I said at the time.

SMITH: I know, it's just, you know when there's a stupid view, I tend to put it in Bob Murphy's direction.

WOODS: Blame Bob? I mean, that's a pretty good instinct in general.

SMITH: [laughing] But no, I think he said that, as well, but I'm sure you felt that way, too. And it makes sense. But it's like, okay, well, let's learn the lesson from the Ron Paul campaign. Then there's all these kids shouting, "End the Fed," and you're like, you know what? I think it was a pretty good idea to talk about the Fed.

And the point I'm making is that it's the most important issue. There is no other libertarian issue that you could talk about without it coming back to the Federal Reserve. I mean, it's like if you were to get rid of the Federal Reserve, it pretty much solves all these other problems. You're just not going to facilitate this gigantic government without a central bank. So, okay, there's that. There's the Ron Paul, how popular that message was with him. There's the fact that it's the most important issue, and it's our job to make people care about it, whether they do now or not.

And also, I'd go: if you look at the populist movements, both left and right in America right now, I couldn't think of a better time to insert the Fed into the conversation. I mean, look, you've got guys like Bernie Sanders who talk all day long about how the banks are screwing people over, but never addresses the central bank? I mean, think about that. It's really unbelievable, that if they're going to talk about the banking system and all of this? I mean, look, you had an Occupy Wall Street movement on the left that was very targeted at the big banks and their corruption, so it's like, okay, why would you not insert the central bank, essentially the parent company of these banks? And then on the right-wing populist, like Bannon-Trump movement, I think they'd be open to hearing about the Fed. Donald Trump kind of talks about the Fed in a negative way, more than any other president that I can remember. So I don't know, seems like about as good a time as any to start bringing this up, and it's like the most important issue, so let's go for it.

WOODS: When he says things like what you're describing, that there are certain things that maybe we as libertarians care about, but the general public doesn't; however, the general public does care about A, B, and C – the trouble there is, well, for example, it calls to mind the Brett Kavanaugh hearings, where the LP went and tweeted something like, "Libertarians oppose sexual harassment." I mean, it wasn't much different from that. It was basically just a ridiculous tweet about nothing. It was the usual "we're against cancer" kind of tweet that get a lot from them.

SMITH: Right.

WOODS: And I guess they can justify that on the grounds that, look, everybody feels this way, so it's good for us to take that position. But think about the kind of temperament somebody has who needs to be reassured that other people are against sexual harassment. That is not the kind of independent thinker who's going to join a minority party. You are appealing to the last person on earth who's going to join the Libertarian Party.

And then finally, let's wrap this up with this thought, before we move on here, because I just want to make clear that I, too, don't really want to carry on with this particular person, because this is a person who after he ceases to be chairman of the Libertarian Party – let's just be blunt here – nobody's going to care about this guy. No one's going to say, "Well, I'd like to move forward with this or that issue, or I'd like to clarify our position on this, but let's see what Nick Sarwark thinks." I mean, nobody says that any more than today – when was the last time you said, "Well, I'd really like to formulate a position on this foreign policy matter, but I just need to get Gary Johnson's input first?"

SMITH: Right.

WOODS: Nobody thinks that way, and people will think that way all the less about this guy. He'll be a nonentity. He has a position, in terms of having a voice, in the so-called liberty movement simply by virtue of the office he holds, but for no other reason. So there's no need to dwell on him.

SMITH: Yeah, that's exactly right. And conversely, there'll be tons of times where something big politically happens, and I go, "Oh, I've got to hear Lew Rockwell's take on this. I've got to hear Ron Paul's take on this." You just really want to know how those guys will look at it, because they're really interesting thinkers who are unafraid to say something bold.

I mean, it's like the idea that we are going to make any difference by just saying the exact same thing that anyone else who's pandering would say, and compete at a game that you will never win – I know you've made this point before. It's like, you're never going to out social-justice-warrior the left. So okay, you can make this little statement, but to me, it's weak, it doesn't do anything to convert anybody, it doesn't differentiate yourself from anybody else who's in there when we actually have some views that are very different and, I think we would both agree, rather important to get out to the public. So it's weak and terrible strategy.

And I said this – I might get in trouble by saying this on your show, but after talking to Sarwark on my podcast, I've never understood more why Murray Rothbard went in the populist right-wing direction. Like, I can't explain to you how much more I would rather talk to Pat Buchanan than to Nick Sarwark. And maybe if you mapped out our political views, I might actually be closer to Sarwark than Pat Buchanan, but you know what? At least that guy's an original thinker who's not pandering, who's willing to say something bold, who's just a lot smarter. It's just going to be a more interesting conversation. I mean, I completely understand why Murray Rothbard was like, I want to talk to this Pat Buchanan guy, and not the "libertarians" in the Libertarian Party in 1992.

WOODS: All right, well, I agree with what you just said there in terms of Buchanan being smarter, more interesting, and he'll say things that are unexpected. I mean, not unexpected if you know Pat well, but unexpected to the average person. He was one of the first ones to criticize the postwar sanctions on Iraq back in the 1990s. It was right-wing Pat Buchanan who said, "This is a humanitarian catastrophe." It was right-wing Pat Buchanan who said it was immoral to have dropped the atomic bombs on Japan. I could excuse a lot when somebody takes those positions boldly.

SMITH: Yeah, that's right. And it's like, okay, so we don't agree on trade, but you're speaking to like a brilliant guy who's bold and, after being a Cold Warrior for so many years, was willing to go: now, you know what? This warfare state really is out of control. That's something I really respect.

WOODS: Yeah. Yeah, and there are libertarians who will occasionally say something like: I really think Ralph Nader is very good on issues X, Y, and Z, even though I wish he would be better on the other issues. And yet Pat comes along, and he's pretty good on issues A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, and K, but issue Z makes them crazy. And by the way, I don't really believe it is issue Z. They would say it's trade. It wouldn't matter if he wanted to abolish every tariff in the world. They have cultural reasons for not liking Pat, so I don't buy that.

SMITH: That is such a good point. That is such a good point that I think crystallizes the entire thing. I mean, I even got some people who would say something like – because I said at one point in that debate that I thought that Hans-Hermann Hoppe was a hero and Lew Rockwell's a hero and libertarians should be bold enough to say so. And that gets some people who react weird to it. But again, if I were to say to that same room, that, hey, I think Noam Chomsky is a hero or Ralph Nader is a hero for being antiwar, there's nothing controversial about that at all. Now, that tells you something when a room full of libertarians – now, I won't say a "roomful," because most of the people in the room were agreeing with me – but that there's anyone who's a libertarian who would say, "Oh, yeah, it's completely risk-free to criticize people who are either socialists or flirt with socialism, but I can't embrace Lew Rockwell and Hans-Hermann Hoppe." It's like, what's going on here?

And if that's the game, like I said before, then the left will always win. If the game is, basically, we have to assume everyone on the left has the noblest of intentions and they're all good people, and we have to assume that everybody on the right is like secret Nazis, even though there's nothing they've ever said or written that we can point to that indicates this at all, we just kind of have to assume it. And Pat Buchanan gets that in completely unfair ways. I've heard people call him a Holocaust denier before. It's like, have you read his book? He details the evil of Hitler's genocide.

WOODS: Right, his thesis doesn't make sense if there's no Holocaust.

SMITH: Right. I mean, his whole thesis is that, basically, the genocide of the Jews in Nazi Germany was a heinous crime. It was a crime against humanity, but it was a war crime, and if you could have avoided the war, you probably could have avoided the Holocaust. Now, explain to me how you can have that thesis and also somehow believe the Holocaust didn't happen. This is absurd.

WOODS: Yeah, but as usual, we've determined, using our mind control efforts – The whole thing is not even worth talking about.

So now, how about right now, as we've got a few minutes left here, the liberty movement's in a tough spot right now, because we are more divided, I think, than before. And I think now that Ron Paul is retired, the anti-Ron Paul people have been able to crawl out from the sewers they reside in, which they didn't dare do during his campaigns, because they would have rhetorically had their heads torn off, and they knew what was good for them, so they kept quiet. But now it's all, *He's not good enough for me. I'm the pure libertarian. I've read three articles. All right, okay. I'm sure I would have been just as bold and principled in power, and I wouldn't have been persuaded at all.* Yeah, these are people who, whatever the left tells them to think every 15 minutes, they can't get on board fast enough, and I'm supposed to believe that if I sent them to Washington, they would be hardcore liberty the whole time, unswayable like Ron Paul?

SMITH: Right.

WOODS: Yeah, okay, sure. But it is tough not just for that reason, but also because it looks like for the time being what you have is Trump versus some horrible Democrat. And our voice is not really part of that, and it doesn't seem like anybody really misses us, frankly.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, I mean, look, I am still to this day quite heartbroken over the direction that the liberty movement went in the last five, six years. And that's, I think, something that came across in that debate, and I talk about this a lot. But in 2012, I still don't think a lot of people realize how close we came to doing something huge.

The Ron Paul movement did something incredible, but Ron Paul was within a nose of winning both Iowa and New Hampshire, and if he had done that, it would have been off to the races. I mean, look, nobody wins Iowa and New Hampshire and doesn't get the nomination. But even if there was some way that they were able to take the nomination away from him after winning Iowa and New Hampshire, no one could have ignored him anymore. It would have been impossible.

And it was this huge movement. It felt like all of the energy was with the liberty movement. The young people on the Republican side were all leaving toward the liberty movement. It was the only one that had any intellectual energy and passion. And it was Ron Paul versus a bunch of tools of the military industrial complex. Everyone was boring, except him. Everyone was lying except him. It was an amazing moment. It was a great time, there was so much energy, and I thought the future was ours.

And I was wrong. And it's really tough to accept that. So yeah, I think the first thing, if you care about a liberty movement, you've got to recognize we're doing a lot worse in 2019 than we were in 2013.

That being said, are we doing worse than we were in 2003? I don't think so. I think we're doing better. There are a lot of libertarians out there. The term "libertarian" has been mainstreamed, to some degree, thanks to Ron Paul. And I think that, if this whole thing could go away that quickly because Ron Paul wasn't the leader anymore, maybe it could come back really quickly if we get another great leader up there. And so that's kind of my hope.

And it's possible that, like, look – and you know this I think firsthand – after the financial disaster in 2008, a lot of people got real interested in Austrian economics. And unfortunately, this might be kind of one of the tragic/beautiful things about life, it might take another one for people to get interested again, and start going, *Oh, wait, so there's this one group of people who kind of have an explanation for this boom and bust?* Because, really, the Austrians are the only ones who do.

And so maybe some things have to line up. We need the right leader. We need the right moment. But at least there are a whole lot of people who are aware of these ideas now. There's a whole lot of the different podcasts and people in this world, obviously, you being kind of like the leader of a lot of us. But maybe that's what it takes, and maybe we can get back to where we were. I certainly hope so.

WOODS: Well, that's the way I feel, and I have my own thoughts about who might step forward. And I know that libertarians don't like to hear that what we need is a leader, because they think, we don't need leaders; we just need individuals. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know. But it's not a coincidence that Ron Paul retires and the thing fractures. That's not a coincidence.

SMITH: Yeah, and I've always rejected – it's kind of like when libertarians, like, if you say something like "we" or "us," and they go, "That's a collectivist way of speaking." It's like, yeah, we're not against groups of people acting together. Libertarians are against rulers; we're not against leaders. Leadership is something that's very important in life. Nobody's ever gotten anywhere without someone providing some leadership for them. It's kind of like when the left-anarchists just say, "We're not against rulers, we're against hierarchy." And you're like, what? This is ridiculous. There's hierarchy everywhere in life. It's impossible to not have hierarchy. So leadership is something that's very important. You want to get great at anything? You're going to need some leadership, some mentorship, someone look up to. And so I don't think there's anything that's conflicting with the ideas of liberty that we would want a good leader.

WOODS: And incidentally, I have a thought about this, and I have no idea if this will ever happen. But Glenn Jacobs, came from the WWE? Of course, he's mayor of Knox County, Tennessee now. I see a path for him. Why doesn't he become governor of Tennessee, and why doesn't he run for president after that?

SMITH: Sure, yeah.

WOODS: He's a complete hardcore Ron Paul guy. He's the size of you, me, Michael Malice, and Andrew Heaton put together, and on that debate stage, if somebody is going to insinuate that he's some kind of a wimp for not wanting to go to war, well, I'd like to see the visual of that.

SMITH: [laughing] Yeah, no, I'm with you.

WOODS: So that to me, that's my preferred scenario. I have not discussed this with him, but it's my preferred scenario. So we'll see how it unfolds. All right, *Part of the Problem* is Dave's podcast. You should be subscribing to that. I'll link to Dave's material at TomWoods.com/1504, and that will include a link to Dave's comedy special, that *Libertas* that I liked so much. And Dave, thanks a lot. We'll see you tomorrow for another episode in Dave Smith Week.

SMITH: Can't wait.