



## Episode 1,520: New Leadership for the Libertarian Party? My Guest Hopes So

Guest: Joshua Smith

**WOODS:** So you are running for chairman of the Libertarian National Committee again, and I want to talk about 2018, when you did this last, and what's going on in the party and all the juicy fun stuff that people tune in for. But first, particularly for people who are hearing from you for the first time or who just don't remember the details, I want to talk about you, Joshua Smith, who you are, first of all. So I'd like to start off not with your libertarian background, like what book you read or what it was that turned you into a crazy like the rest of us, but more about you personally, where you grew up, what your interests have been, that sort of thing. Just who's Joshua Smith, basically.

**SMITH:** So I grew up in a pretty poor family in Antioch, California, low income. And I was just a pretty normal kid. I had my problems like any other American. I grew up in a pretty bad neighborhood. So that's kind of how it goes. I was an overachiever in school that kind of lost interest sometime around high school, and I've been a blue-collar guy ever since. I joined the military right out of high school. I think it was 2002, I joined the US Navy, and actually that's a big reason why I became a libertarian, to begin with.

But yeah, I mean, I've been a blue-collar, working-class guy most of my life. I've done a lot of construction and trade work, and I eventually became the director of facilities for a skilled nursing facility. So that's what I do now. I mean, that's pretty much my life. I got a nursing degree back in 2014, kind of out of the blue, just a nursing certificate. Somebody got me fired up on going to this 13-month nursing program, so I did that and got it and then never really worked as one. So I make more money in the trades, and I enjoy the work more.

But yeah, that's pretty much my whole story. I've never been like some interesting guy. I've just been a blue-collar, working-class American that kind of found his way into politics. And I've shared a lot of the same problems as most blue-collar, working-class Americans.

**WOODS:** Now, how old a guy are you? You mind if I ask?

**SMITH:** I'm 36. I'll be 37 in March.

**WOODS:** Oh, you're a pup.

**SMITH:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** For heaven's sake. Okay. So all right, now let's move on to the next question, which is the old story: how did you become a libertarian?

**SMITH:** Yeah, so like said, I joined the military around 2002, right after September 11th sometime. And I thought I was going to defend my country, and I had to go and fight for my freedoms over there so we could keep them here. And within about eight months or so, nine months of being in the military, I was in the Persian Gulf on the USS Constellation. And my battle group was a big part of the shock-and-awe campaign. If you're familiar with the shock-and-awe campaign, it was basically, let's drop billions of tons of ordnance on Baghdad where people live and have family pets and children. And it was an eye-opening experience and something that really jaded me on the government and jaded me on especially the military industrial complex.

And when I got out, I had been this neocon Republican, and I was really jaded on both of the two old parties. I didn't really see an opportunity for me to feel at home in either party. And then I found Ron Paul sometime around 2007, and this was right around the time that the Occupy movements were starting, if you remember the Occupy movements. And I live right outside of Oakland, California, where it's kind of like the hub for the Occupy movement. So I really, really got attached to Ron Paul, and I started campaigning for Ron Paul at the Occupy movement, which was an interesting thing. But that was really what started opening my eyes to free market policies and being anti-interventionist.

And I still wasn't super clear on the term libertarianism until I started reading Murray Rothbard. And I found Murray sometime around 2008 or 2009, sometime after that presidential campaign of Ron Paul's. And that had a huge impact on my life. *For a New Liberty* changed my entire life. It was a window that, once it's open, you just can't close it again. And so it was not long after that I found out Adam Kokesh and I started following Adam Kokesh and I started hearing about the Libertarian Party.

And so I joined the Libertarian Party sometime around 2010. And here in California, I just never found an outlet for my activism with the party at that time. I didn't know there was a state party. I just knew that I had joined a national political party and switched my voter registration. And now what do I do, you know? And so I kept doing my own brand of activism and eventually stopped giving to the party after just a couple months. But I helped to found Think Liberty, if you're familiar with that. It's a pretty large publication. And I kind of always just did my own brand of activism like that.

And until 2016, I was looking at these two other candidates, and I'm going, there's no way that I can vote for these people. Let me see what the Libertarian Party's up to. And I knew Gary Johnson from his 2012 campaign. And so I was like, well, I think I get behind Gary Johnson, and so I joined the party and ended up becoming a regional rep for the Washington state party. I was living in southern Washington at the time, and I was building affiliates there and campaigning for Gary Johnson. And I really just got involved in the party at that point.

But the further I got involved, the more I was unhappy with a lot of the things that happened in leadership. And so I ended up announcing for chairman in 2017. September of 2017, I announced for chairman, and I never expected it to blow up. Like I said in the beginning of this, I'm just a blue-collar, working-class guy who has the ability to inspire, apparently, but I didn't know that at the time. And so this thing kind of spiraled out of control, and I got to travel to 26 states and 20 state conventions. I spoke in front of thousands of people. I got to keynote a ballroom behind Ron Paul in Omaha, Nebraska. And just all kinds of really cool stuff happened, and I got to really make a dent and build relationships with donors and activists and media personalities like yourself. And it was really a life-changing experience.

And in the end, I lost. I took about a quarter of the vote. And I'm sure we'll get into some of the reasons why I lost on this podcast, if talking to you before it has any bearing on it. But it was an interesting time. And then come 2018, I ended up on the board anyways as an LNC-at-large, and I'm still watching the same leadership things that I wasn't happy about before happen, and so I've built a following. I've been able to really build up a following with LPMC, the Mises Caucus, being the candidate committee chair for them. And we've been able to help tons of candidates. And I've kind of left my mark, and so I figured I'd give it another run and see if we can make a difference again.

**WOODS:** Well, you kind of hinted at why you're doing it, because that was my next question. It seems like a thankless job. It's an unpaid position.

**SMITH:** Sure.

**WOODS:** And it involves a lot of travel, and it must be, frankly, a real headache to do. So what would motivate somebody to seek a position like that? I mean, I could understand somebody doing it for purely idealistic reasons, that, *Yes, I know I'm going to have to make a lot of sacrifices, but this is an important thing that, like it or not* – maybe I'm giving your answer for you.

**SMITH:** [laughing]

**WOODS:** But the chairman of the Libertarian Party in the minds of the public represents libertarianism. It's going to fall on deaf ears to say, *Well, he's not really purely libertarian. He's this or that.* Yeah, okay, well, he's the chairman of the Libertarian Party, so he's as close as I'm ever going to get to a libertarian, most people will think.

**SMITH:** Sure.

**WOODS:** So it's important purely symbolically for that person to be uncompromising and hardcore. So I could see somebody saying, I'm going to run because I need to be that person, or somebody needs to be that person and nobody else is stepping up to do it, so I may as well do it. What's going through your – because if I ever – which I'm not doing, but if I ever thought to do it, it would be for that reason. That would be why I would do it.

**SMITH:** You sure, Tom? You sure?

**WOODS:** I'm afraid so. I have too many disqualifiers in my own mind. So what is the most motivating factor for you, or factors?

**SMITH:** Well, I think that's a huge part of it. I mean, you answered a lot of it, is these philosophical reasons. When people on the outside hear of the Libertarian Party and they see the chairman of the Libertarian Party – this is the highest internal office we hold – not representing their values in libertarianism, it hurts our cause. It hurts our cause inside and outside of the party. And I mix it up with thousands and thousands of small L libertarians every week, all over online, and there's people who are just unhappy. And so for that reason, I am an uncompromising libertarian. I am antiwar, and I do believe in free market principles. And when we have the highest party position messaging antithetical to that, it's bad news. And so that's a big reason for me.

But also, over my last year and a half on the LNC, I've had the opportunity to see the struggle of our candidates. These candidates are kind of thrown to the wolves. They don't really have any help, and they're getting beat up on by their own party. They're getting beat up on by the state governments and these ballot access laws, and it makes me want to fight. It does. It makes me want to fight for them.

And working as the candidate committee chair for the Libertarian Party Mises Caucus, I've had the opportunity to actually get them financial help through the caucus, which has been nice. But that's a small scale, and I want to do it on a much bigger scale. I want to find creative ways to help our candidates and make them more successful, because those are the people that are going to have the biggest opportunity to make changes, especially at the community level, because those are the people who are going to be able to nix bad laws and implement things that are going to actually enrich the lives of their constituents. And so those people to me are very, very important, and that's another reason why I'm running for chair, because I want to see the party help our candidates at every level, and it's just not getting done now. So those are probably my two biggest reasons.

And then third, I think we need a chairman who's going to be extremely aggressive with the media. The media has no vested interest in us whatsoever. Outside of libertarian blogs and podcasts and occasionally we get on Kennedy, maybe a candidate or Nick or Cliff goes on there and talks about some really cool libertarian stuff, and occasionally the Judge obviously, but we need to have somebody who's aggressive. We need to have someone who's putting out op-eds and letters to the editor and trying to get on every show they possibly can. And I talked about building a regional media team and having somebody in each region who's ready for primetime, that if a situation arises, we can send that person to be on there. And if it's not the chairman, then it's this person who's already ready to represent the party in the media.

So there's just a lot of changes I think that we can make that can make the party more successful and also more principled. So that's what I'm doing it for, and I didn't see anybody else step up, you know [laughing]?

**WOODS:** Sure, yeah, makes sense. Well, what can you tell us about your time as an at-large member of the Libertarian National Committee that might be interesting to the audience for one reason or another?

**SMITH:** Yeah, surprisingly, being on the LNC is a lot of arguing [laughing]. I'm sure it's not that surprising. Libertarians argue all the time. It's what we do. But we have this LNC email list, and the majority of the time, it's arguments. And I've had people on the LNC get mad at me, because I don't get on there and argue all the time. I get on there, I give a brief you know statement as to why I support or don't support a motion, and then I go and do real-world stuff. I have hundreds of emails in my LNC inbox of fundraisers, people that have donated to the party under my fundraising link or have become new members or renewed their membership under my fundraiser link, because that's the kind of stuff I focus on. Because at the end of the day, we cannot operate as a national political party without funding, and we're barely keeping the lights on.

So it's a lot of arguments. That's really what the LNC is. And there's some people that do little pet projects and cool things, but it's not really this always-together, cohesive unit that's

running a political party. And it shouldn't be, but we have a lot of other stuff to focus on, and I think having a chair that can kind of set a culture tone like that will be really important.

**WOODS:** All right, let's talk about 2018. Now, look, you're coming from a position of nobody knows who you are, at all.

**SMITH:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** And you went from there to getting a position as an at-large member of the Libertarian National Committee. That's no small achievement in itself. So it's not like, well, any competent person could have won that race. That's not it. And that somehow, there must have been something uniquely wrong with Joshua Smith that made him lose. That's not at all how I'm approaching this. But at the same time – because I think you had a very difficult battle – but now you do have some name recognition. You've visited a lot of state parties. In fact, by the way, I met a guy, I don't know if he wants me to mention his name, but from the Rhode Island party, who was sitting next to me at a table, and he overheard me chatting with some people. And we were talking about you, and he came over and introduced himself and said, *I'm voting for Joshua Smith, and I'll tell you why I'm voting for him. Because he called me.*

**SMITH:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** *He actually talked to me. He cared about what was going on in my state party, and I respect and appreciate that.* So it wasn't so much because of any ideological differences that might have existed between you and the current leadership. It was just, you did that. You put in the effort. So you did a lot of work.

But at the same time, it didn't work out the way you wanted, and so naturally, you have to do kind of an inventory of what might I have done differently? And you got, let's just say, as with anybody in your position, a lot of unsolicited after-the-fact advice about what you might have done or what went wrong or whatever. But I will tell you, because I want to be – let's be frank and honest about this. I was at the convention for at least a short time in 2018, and I had people come up to me who said, *Look, I don't like the way the current chairman has treated you. I think it's appalling and ridiculous and indefensible. And I agree with you that it's all wrong. However, I'm voting for him anyway.*

**SMITH:** Sure.

**WOODS:** And they said, *Because he's professional. He runs the meetings very well.* That's almost become a cliché. Now we laugh about it. *He runs the meetings effectively.* But also they were saying, *Joshua's heart may be in the right place, but he's such a bomb thrower, and even if he's right, his temperament just doesn't seem suited to this kind of position.* And so even though you might have been representing the way they thought, it was the tone, it was the bellicosity that was perceived, that they thought this is just not going to be what the party needs. How do you address something like that?

**SMITH:** Sure, absolutely. And it's all stuff I've heard several times, and luckily, I have a team of great people now that give me elbow nudges. But I'm not perfect. I'm an imperfect human. Like I said, I've always been a blue-collar guy, and my temperament last year really came

from my passion for the issues, right? I saw this opportunity to do something good for the party and the movement as a whole, and I didn't know how to take, especially the bad criticism, the criticism where it was like putting a finger in my chest and telling me, *You're this and you're that and you're this* — I had no idea how to deal with all that stuff. I was green. I was green. Outside of state politics, I was really green, and I didn't deal with it well.

And like I said, I'm an imperfect human, but I'm learning to control it and channel it, and I'm getting better daily. Like I said, I surrounded myself with advisors, basically, who happen to be some of the greatest minds in the Libertarian Party. And they give me little elbow nudges and say, *Hey, man why don't we switch this up and change this up?* And so I've been learning to kind of channel that into my issues and my work as opposed to, *Well, you're wrong, because you're this and that and this and that.* It's kind of like, *Well, I understand that, but can I show you the work that I'm doing?* And I've had to learn. It's been a learning process. And was I ready to be chair in 2018? Maybe not, you know? But like I said, just might my temperament over that year, outside of the fact that there was a lot of slanderous and libelous things going on —

**WOODS:** Oh, yeah, you were subject to quite a bit of abuse, yeah.

**SMITH:** Oh, it was horrible. But I didn't know how to deal with any of that, right? Like I said, I'm a blue-collar, working-class guy. We tell you to F off, right? And so it took a lot out of me, but right after the convention, I took some time off for myself. I kind of regrouped. I wanted to figure out which direction I wanted to go, how I wanted to handle this, and I just channeled all that into my work.

And that's what I've been doing for the last year and a half: working with candidates, working with the Mises Caucus. I became the chair of the Affiliate Support Committee for the national party and running a contest to help affiliates, and I became an at-large representative for the California executive committee, and so I'm working with the California committee as well. And I'm the treasurer of my local party, and I'm on the platform committee. And I channeled all that into work. A lot of people last year, they told me, *You don't have the experience that we want in a chairman.* So I went out and got to work. My campaign slogan in 2018 was, "Let's get to work." That's what I did [laughing]. And like I said, I'm still not perfect. I'm still learning. I still have little blow-ups with people here and there, but I've definitely gotten better, and I'm taking the criticism and I'm working with it now.

**WOODS:** Now, the other thing that comes up is the debate between the different candidates for chair, and you were unhappy with how you did.

**SMITH:** Very.

**WOODS:** So looking back on that, how do you think you could have improved? What do you think went wrong?

**SMITH:** So here's the funny thing, is I sat down for dinner with Larry Sharpe right before that debate. And Larry went over —

**WOODS:** And Larry endorsed you for chair, by the way, just for everybody to know.

**SMITH:** He endorsed me and did my nomination speech.

**WOODS:** Yeah, that's a big deal.

**SMITH:** It was huge. It was huge for me. And I sat down with Larry, and I went over it. And he said, *This is what you've got to do*, and I just didn't stick to the plan. I didn't. I got baited into all kinds of arguments and saying stupid things. And then when it was time to ask my question, I was a deer in headlights and said something like, *Hey, Nick, what do you think about Bill Weld?* Just really dumb. And a lot of it was from me being green. I had never been in a live debate in my life. Not ever. That was my first live debate I'd ever done, and it was in front of 1,200 people, with the lights and there were signs and screaming, and I was nervous. My hands were shaking. I was very, very scared.

And so that was another thing that I did after convention, is I wanted to get better at debates, so I started doing debate prep, and I started going to Toastmasters. And I worked with people like Michael Pickens and Larry Sharpe and Aaron Adams and all these great people who really helped me out and kind of are getting me more centered, so that if another debate does arise like that, I won't take the bait. I will talk about the issues. I will explain what I've been doing over the last year and a half. And I have a lot more meat to talk about now, because I've actually been in it and I've actually done it. So it was a bad debate, and I take full credit for how bad it was. And I know that it'll be better going forward.

**WOODS:** The current chair had a very strange tweet a few weeks ago, where he told everybody that it doesn't matter to him how much criticism he takes, how often he gets ratioed on Twitter – ratioed means there are more replies than there are likes, so that means that everybody is letting you have it for something that you said – because after all, he's got a nice family and several nice careers. And I thought, what a strange thing to say. I mean, if you were secure in yourself, that is the last thing you would say.

**SMITH:** Sure.

**WOODS:** So it was such an odd thing to say. But also, why would the chairman of the party not care that he's constantly getting ratioed? The people who are ratioing him are all libertarians, and some of them party members. And if every single time he posts a substantive tweet, everybody's saying, *Look, you're dead wrong, and the people you're criticizing are 100% right* – I mean, I look at any time my name comes up, you just look at the thread. It's 95% in my favor every single time. And for him to say, *I just don't care about that*, that's tone-deaf. Why wouldn't you? Those are your people, and they expect you to reflect that message. And if you're not doing it, to the point where you're getting constantly abused in this way, that should mean something to you.

**SMITH:** Yeah. Well, here's the thing, Tom, and a lot of people agree with me on this, and Michael Heist and the Libertarian Party Mises Caucus – I mean, we've been saying this stuff for a long time, right? The people in the Mises Caucus, the people at the Mises Institute. He's the other side of a fight that's been raging on in this party for 40 years. But here's the thing, is a lot of us believe that he's kind of going scorched-earth, right? He may not run again. There's a really good possibility he doesn't run again.

But if he doesn't run again or if he does run again, he wants less of the Mises-sympathizing people to show up at that national convention, right? Whether he's running or not. And so if he makes all of these really, really bad tweets that runs those people off, and they say, *I'm not going to join the party now*, then we lose our recruiting efforts, and we have less delegates that show up, and he can basically ram through whatever candidate he's been grooming, or he can run and win again, right?

And so we believe that's his plan, is let's see how many bad tweets, how many tweets that are alluding to me supporting the military industrial complex or the warfare state, let me go on Dave Smith's show and talk about how the warfare state doesn't affect the inside of our nation, and let me talk about how the party should vote for Dick Cheney and feel obligated to vote for Dick Cheney if he was the libertarian nominee. And it's just like, you're looking at this trend of things happening, Tom, and it's almost hard to say that he's not trying to scorched-earth the whole thing.

And the Mises Caucus, we just hit \$2,000 a month reoccurring donations. We've recruited 120 people already that are interested in becoming delegates, and we have spreadsheets, and we just sent over \$6,000 out to eight local candidates that we're helping, and we're working on a gun rights initiative in Texas, and we worked to decrim Denver, and we're becoming successful. We're becoming the big push in the party. And that scares people like him. And so we really believe that he's just trying to do everything he can to hurt our recruiting efforts, but we're going to keep working. So he can say whatever. May's coming around real fast.

**WOODS:** Well, what about the arguments that people might make in favor of the current leadership? They may say, *Look, we've got 50-state ballot access, which has been elusive. We've got lots of new voters.*

**SMITH:** Yeah, Gary Johnson —

**WOODS:** Yeah, you know those sorts of arguments. So how do you answer that? I mean, that is at least some kind of numerical, empirical argument.

**SMITH:** Sure. Gary Johnson, he got us 50-state ballot access with his presidential campaign. That's what he did. Outside of that, we probably grew to 20,000 members as a national party, and now we're hovering around 15,000. We were down as low as 13,000. Our fundraising is half of what it was in 2000. Back when Harry Brown was the presidential candidate, we had 30,000 national members and probably a \$3 to \$4 million budget. Now we're sitting somewhere around a \$1.2 million budget with 15,000 members. That was great that we got 50-state ballot access. That helps our candidates. It's super, super important to me that we keep ballot access around the country. It's important to me that in places that try to defy us ballot access that we fight to get ballot access there, in places like Alabama and Ohio and Arkansas.

But at the same time, we have to grow our membership base and we have to fundraise. And if we're not getting any kind of continuity there, then we're failing, because that's what keeps our lights on. That's what helps us with ballot access fights. That's the kind of stuff that gives us new candidates and new activists and new volunteers and people to run social media. And we can't survive without those things.

So it was a great success to get 50-state ballot access. I think that's great. But now it's time to take it a step further. And the current leadership has been there for almost six years, and it's not going any further. And so those are great things. I think it's important that we keep ballot access, but we also have to do this and this and this and this, and those things aren't getting done, right? So that's my argument. We have to go further, and we need bold leadership that's going to go out there and take those opportunities for us.

**WOODS:** So if people want to know more about Joshua Smith or support you in one way or another, how do they do that?

**SMITH:** Sure. So can find me on Facebook at Joshua Smith LNC at Large. Obviously, I'm on Twitter, @joshuaatlarge, and then the big thing for me is just getting around to conventions again. I'm shelling out a lot of money traveling. I have to go to all the LNC meetings that I pay for, and then I get asked to lot of conventions, and I'll probably have a goal of about 20 conventions again this year, leading up to the national convention. So if you guys wanted to help out financially, that'd be great too. I have a [Paypal.me/JoshuaSmithChair2020](https://www.paypal.me/JoshuaSmithChair2020). That's where you can help out. But come and find me first and send me a message. Especially if you're interested in becoming a delegate and voting out the old leadership and trying to help move this party in a more principled and successful direction, please reach out to me or the Mises Caucus, because that's where we're doing all our delegate coordination.

**WOODS:** All right, we'll link to your social media stuff at [TomWoods.com/1520](https://www.tomwoods.com/1520), the show notes page for today. And best of luck, Joshua. Thanks again for being here.

**SMITH:** Hey, thank you so much, Tom. I really appreciate it. Any time you want to talk, just let me know.