



**WOODS:** All right, we could talk about the Libertarian Party, but to heck with that for right now, because we've got to talk about the virus and the government response and, in particular, your perspective on it. And I just got done telling you, I keep promising listeners: look, we are going to cover other topics. And I have covered some of the topics. I covered Latin American history. I've covered North Korea, what's going on there. But doggone it, like a dog to its vomit, I am brought back to the virus, time and time again. And particularly after you wrote to me, I thought this is an angle that we really need to investigate. Now, tell people what it is you do for a living, because you are not chairman of the Libertarian Party of Florida for a living. So what do you do to put food on the table?

**NEKHAILA:** Absolutely. Well, I'm a franchisee and CEO for a Dairy Queen franchise down here in the Florida Keys. We actually picked it up after Hurricane Irma. I've been in the QSR industry for a number of years. QSR is quick service restaurant, or people know it as fast food. I helped run by my family's Wendy's franchise. We have eight stores, three in the Florida Keys, and we're going on five now in North Carolina. We just opened another one up two weeks ago. We also have a full-service restaurant called the Island Grill down in El Murata, and we own a local movie theater, all of which have been very much impacted by not only the virus, but primarily the government's lockdown in response to this whole thing.

**WOODS:** Let me say in parentheses — this is pure selfishness on my part, has nothing to do with the listening audience at all — but my favorite thing at Dairy Queen used to be a blueberry sundae. And now, at least in the locations I've gone to, they've yanked that away from me. I can't get a blueberry sundae anymore, and I'm not going to hold you personally responsible for that as a franchisee, but let's just say there's at least one person out there who's very sad about this development.

**NEKHAILA:** [laughing] Yeah, we get a whole bunch of people that express their sorrows whenever we pull their favorite item. We have people that ask us for Blizzards that have been around 10, 15 years ago and items that I've never even heard of that we stopped selling.

**WOODS:** You know what, let me just say before we get into the real meat of this, let me just say, I don't go to a lot of chain restaurants to sit down and eat. I do go to Dairy Queen, but in terms of sitting down to eat, I don't go to that many chain restaurants. But if I have to go to one, I do like Longhorn and I can live with Red Lobster if I have to. And in both cases, the thing that I most often ordered there was taken off the menu, and the explanation given to me was: nobody ordered it. And I thought, you're killing me. Not only did I order it, it was like it gave life meaning to me to order that one thing.

So anyway, all right, this is silly and ridiculous of me. Let's get on to the subject matter. So obviously there is a lot of takeout going on. There are some restaurants that I don't know that how much that really replaces their normal volume, because for example, a sports bar, people aren't really going there primarily for the food. The food's a nice add on. Whereas Wendy's, a lot of people go there for drive-thru anyway. Maybe that's been roughly a wash? How would you assess it?

**NEKHAILA:** Well, I would say that we are blessed to have the drive-thru. Normally it's about 60% of our business goes through drive-thru. 40% is takeout and dine-in. Now, obviously, about 99% of our business is drive-thru only, and about 1% is deliveries. So the industry has been

moving towards delivery slowly. We don't have it available in all of our locations, but we get Doordash down here in the Florida Keys and Key West, so that's getting real popular.

But I would say that for the local businesses that don't have a drive-thru, they are moving towards a lot of takeout and delivery, but they're still down about 90% of their business, because why do you take your girlfriend or your boyfriend or your husband or wife, whatever, your family to go out to eat, is for the experience, to dine in, to have quality service, to have together time. When you're competing with the grocery store, it changes that economically for families entirely. So luckily with Wendy's, we offer the four for four, Dairy Queen, offers certain packages, and people really just want something sweet to kind of take the edge off on, so we still get a lot of business there. But between the tourism and everything else, we're all down significantly. But the drive-thru service has been our saving grace through this whole thing.

**WOODS:** Are you talking to other businessmen about what they're experiencing?

**NEKHAILA:** Yeah, I know a lot of business owners down here, and I'll tell you, Tom, we're a tourist industry down here. o we rely completely on tourism. We're not selling sponges anymore. We're not selling turtles or cigars. We're not an independent republic down here in the Conch Republic in the Florida Keys. We rely 100% on tourism, and without that tourism, we're pretty much dead in the water. Not only that, but the Monroe County Commission has actually put a roadblock on the 18-mile stretch coming in, so there's actually a roadblock there where they check your ID, and if you're not a primary resident and you can't prove it, they won't let you in. So no tourists, no secondary homeowners. If they have it under a corporation, or something like that, it has to be under their name, and they have to have it on their ID. So without cruise ships, without tourism, we're definitely hurting.

And actually, in Dare County, we have our other two stores in the Outer Banks in North Carolina. I was just up there; we have a second home there. And we actually had to get in through our business permits, we had to get a special permit to go in under a business license deal. And that's the only way they let us in. There's no tourists there either. And I know there's local action in both of those counties to sue the local governments for overstepping their authority in this case, so it's definitely a constitutional issue whether or not they're allowed to do that, and technically they're not.

But business-wise, it's been terrible, because down here, we look at these months as our golden month. So from March till August, we make the majority of our money. We build our war chest to get us through the cold season, the slow season, which is from about September till January, February. Then things start kind of rolling back. And I was talking to a lot of business owners down here, that rents down here are just egregious, especially downtown Duval Street. That's like our main tourist Mecca, our Bourbon Street, if you will. And rent down there goes anywhere from \$13,000 to \$50,000 a month. And folks just aren't going to be able to pay that. Even if they do defer the rent for a month or two, you still have to pay it back, and these businesses aren't going to survive. So if I had to put a figure on it, I'd say about half the businesses down here and in Dare County as well probably aren't coming back. And I've been speaking to some real estate agents that are big down here that can confirm that.

**WOODS:** Holy cow. Well, when you listen to commentary from — I don't even know if it's the mainstream, I don't know if it's the left — it seems like everybody, just about, seems to think that business can just indefinitely absorb this situation. All they have to do is sit and wait, and then they can restart. Let's take, for example, owning a movie theater. I mean, what does it mean to say I have to shut this thing down indefinitely? Does that mean you have no costs during this time? What does that really look like for you?

**NEKHAILA:** Sure, so we have a little community theater, the Marathon, and we run it, and it's not a big moneymaker, but it's there, it's there for the community. It's a little one plex. We've been in a movie theater business before. And basically what that means for us is not only do

we have to deal with the stigma of actually coming out and sitting in a movie theater, which was already kind of there before the virus, but those kinds of businesses, I mean, being deemed non-essential, you're pretty much dead in the water. Your employees are not getting paid, so a lot of the employees down here are leaving, and we're not going to see the full repercussions of that until we reopen.

But basically, you've got food that's going bad, you've got Coca-Cola products that are going to get all gunked up that you have to throw away. You've got hundreds if not thousands or tens of thousands of dollars in inventory for a lot of these places, that people are pretty much just giving it away, because you can't sell it. So if you're a prime-cut steakhouse and you've got all this inventory, that is money that you're not going to see come back. You still have to pay taxes. You still have to pay some utility costs. You're still paying your mortgage or your rent. And you still might even try to float a few key managers to make sure you retain them for when we hopefully reopen.

But the big thing for business owners right now is that there's so much uncertainty, and a lot of businesses are closing down because they have to weigh: do I want to wait four or five months and rack up \$50,000 a month in rent costs and have \$200,000 of rent that I have to pay when I reopen and hope and pray that tourists actually come down and help me service these costs, or do I just shut my doors today? And that's something that a lot of business owners are having to gripe with.

**WOODS:** What's been your impression of how the governor, Ron DeSantis, has handled the situation?

**NEKHAILA:** So I was hopeful at some points that he would see the light and reopen businesses. It seemed at certain points that he was getting put under some pressure to reopen. But it seems like a lot of constituents really are in favor of a lockdown. And I think it has a lot to do with who you speak to, because if you're a family of five and you're over-leveraged up to your eyeballs in credit card debt and auto payments and mortgages and all that, I mean, you would hope to get back to work. The big problem in Florida is that the reemployment down here, the system is completely broken. So last I checked, about 6% – and this was about I think last Friday or Thursday – 6% of all the applicants for reemployment insurance have actually gotten some money. So there's folks out there that are really in a tough spot just trying to make ends meet.

But there's people out there that have somehow I guess been able to make it work. I don't know, because there's people out there that do want the shutdown, which is beyond me. But for a lot of people out there, I mean, there's food banks running miles, and it's real tough for those people. So with Ron DeSantis, I hope we open things up soon. I think he's done a bad service to all of us through this whole thing by shutting down and basically snuffing out Florida's only major industry, which is tourism.

**WOODS:** He can't seem to satisfy anybody, because on the one hand, people like you and me think he's not doing enough to open up, and on the other hand, he hasn't satisfied the shutdown people because he hasn't shut down quite enough or he shut down too late. They all claim he shut down two weeks too late, yet there was never a surge of hospitalizations. So if he did shut down too late, where was the surge? So those people I'm sure came out and apologized for hyping this up. Oh, wait, that never happened. Sorry, that didn't actually happen. So at this point, he's alienating the people who voted for him. And he got in by a hair's breadth. I mean, it was less than half a percentage point between him and his opponent. So they're upset. The lockdown people are upset. Do you think it's just a matter of: he doesn't want to be one of the first governors to do it? He wants to wait and see and then get a little political cover when other people have done it for a few weeks? Do you think it's really that?

**NEKHAILA:** I think so, Tom. I think that he's under a lot of political pressure to kind of balance out his approach and try to appease everyone. I can tell you from a local perspective, I think

it's really the exact opposite. I think locally down here in Monroe County, you've got these older in-their-70s, 80-year-old representatives, county commissioners, and mayors, that if you had asked me, they're in the most vulnerable age bracket, they're still receiving a government paycheck. You know, let them eat cake. So I think for a lot of these folks, they're not economists, they're not business owners, so they couldn't really care less if we kept things shut down as long as their constituents are happy.

And I think that there needs to be some kind of sympathy or at least a level of understanding for what businesses are going through and how that affects workers and employees, because I really believe that the landscape of the Florida Keys is going to drastically change after this. Because when Hurricane Irma hit in 2017, and that took us down for about three weeks, it hit the middle Keys mostly. That's where it made its major impact and just completely really destroyed Big Pine Key and a lot of the middle Keys, but Key West wasn't as affected directly by the storm. But we were impacted economically. So during that time, a lot of the workers, which is usually our younger workers, a lot of immigrants — we get a lot of immigrants down here that come to work — and a lot of those folks moved to cheaper places, because they can't pay their rent. Rent down here for a one-bedroom apartment is about \$1,800, and it goes directly up from there. So folks kind of room up together, and if you don't have a big savings you're going to leave. So a lot of the wage laborers, a lot of the workers, the servers, the auto mechanics, the people that we need to function down here are probably either moved in with their parents or have already moved to places that are cheaper. So we're definitely going to go through a worker shortage, and that's going to have impacts on the local economy, as well, that are unaccounted for.

**WOODS:** Let's talk about what the Libertarian Party of Florida has been doing, because I don't want to comment on the national party.

**NEKHAILA:** Sure.

**WOODS:** I'm not interested in that. But what you have been doing on this issue.

**NEKHAILA:** So we have built some coalitions with Reopen Florida groups. We did endorse the Reopen Orlando protests, and we had one of our members out there who did a livestream. It got a lot of controversy, and I think that's good press, because we had a couple of news organizations reach out to us. I was interviewed for Telemundo Orlando, and we had a couple of other people reach out to us for some stories and things like that. It had I think about a 200,000-person reach on that livestream, a lot of negative comments, but also a lot of positive ones. And I think we need to stir the pot, and we need to have our people know that this is what we support, and this is a very libertarian issue.

So I spoke with a gentleman named Josh Ellis, who runs the American Revolution 2.0. It's more of a conservative organization, but it's nonpartisan, and they're making a 50-state push for May 1st to protest nationwide against these lockdown measures. They want to support basically your personal decision-making, personal freedom, and all this. They recommend people wear protective equipment, but they don't say you have to. It's really up to you. And we did endorse that. We're partnering with them to have a protest in Tallahassee on May 1st. And there's a Facebook group you can join or you can go online, type in "American Revolution 2.0," and follow the links to the Facebook group. We've got some guys headed there on Friday, and I'm hoping to hit up there too. And I'd like to meet with some representatives on Capitol Hill, as well, and do some lobbying while we're there.

But that's how we're taking advantage of this, because aside from thanking our people that are still out there doing their thing and supporting us, we as Libertarians are, as far as I'm concerned, the only political party in Florida that has really taken a stand definitively on this issue.

**WOODS:** And it seems to me that this is the time for the Libertarian Party to differentiate itself from everybody else. Because, yes, it's true, a lot of people aren't going to like us for

taking that position, but a lot of people don't like us anyway. And the fact is nobody is taking this position, really. Not the Republican Party, that's for darn sure. They're terrified. So I mean, you hear some isolated Republicans saying this or that, but almost all of them are mealy mouthed. So to have a candidate say, like let's say a presidential candidate, I would want the presidential candidate for the LP, whoever it turns out to be, to say, "Our position is we're against the lockdown." Now, you're going to lose soccer moms over that, who want to keep us locked up forever, because they think the virus will go away if we stay in our houses. I get that. But there will be some people who will hear about the Libertarian Party for the first time and say, "Well, they're probably not going to win, but doggone it, these are the only people with the stones to say what a lot of us are thinking and are too afraid to say because we don't want to be called murderers who want to kill our grandmothers."

**NEKHAILA:** I agree, Tom. I think we can't mince words here, and we have to be polarizing. Polarizing, it's what drives people to rallies. People need to be passionate about these issues. And I have a bit of a personal beef with the LP too, which is that we need to be taking hardline approaches on things, and that's the only way we're going to rally real support, not support from people who are kind of on the fence or casual observers. That's not the people I want on my side. I want people who are really passionate about the issues and actually want to make a difference. That's why we've got people all across the state willing to drive to Tallahassee. And Florida, it's about a ten-hour drive from here to — actually, think it's 13 hours from here to Tallahassee, so it's not a day trip. And we need passionate people to support us, support this movement, and I think that's what makes us so special as a political party, is that we take controversial stances and we support them, we back them up.

And I'll tell you right now, I took a poll on a Florida Keys Facebook group today and asked, "Do you support reopening the keys to tourists? Yes or no." 15% of the answers were yes, and 85% were no. And sometimes, that's the numbers we're grappling with. And I think that the majority of people will go with whatever their elected officials tell them. If their elected officials tell them tomorrow that it's safe to reopen, and now we've beat the curve, let's go, they'll do it. So I don't count those people into the folks that I necessarily want to change to my worldview. Politics is about making a political effort either to change policy or to win elected positions and change things from there. So that's what I hope to do with the Libertarian Party of Florida, is to be aggressive and get the people that we want the support from and reach those objectives. I don't want to be liked. I want to be divisive. I think that's the only way to do it.

**WOODS:** Let me leave the conversation with this question. Obviously, the response you get is: it's not safe to reopen, and you value money more than human lives, and that's typical of libertarians because all they care about is greed and keeping what they've earned and all that. Now, incidentally, it's so funny to hear this complaint made about libertarians all the time, that, *I've got mine*. That's what they think our philosophy is. *I've got mine, and I'm not going to let any of you have any of it*, when not present company excepted, but most libertarians I know are not really that well off. Like for example, most of billionaires in the US are registered with the Democratic Party. I'm sure a few are Republicans. But billionaires are not members of the Libertarian Party as a general rule, let's say, as a general rule. And yet, there's this view of us we're these rich fat cats with our phony baloney economic theories that are really just a grandiose rationalization for greed and all that. It doesn't correspond to what's really on the ground. But how do you answer that primary objection?

**NEKHAILA:** Absolutely. Well, I'll answer it a few different ways. I was talking to somebody from a local group, we're actually planning on suing the county and changing policy, lobbying, and all that to get the Keys reopened economically. And it's funny, because the person I was talking to, she said that people are calling her on Facebook selfish for wanting to reopen the county. And I said that's funny, because you would think that people that are safe in their homes telling other people that they can't go out and they can't work for their personal safety, I think that's selfish.

If I truly believed that cost-benefit wise, opening the Keys would result in more deaths or more this or more that versus staying closed, it might change my opinion, but I really believe that this lockdown is hurting us all so much economically, that really the moral position, if we're going to look at it from a bleeding heart perspective, is how much damage is being done on the folks that we don't see, that don't — I mean, food banks are lining up for miles. There's a massive amount of people out there that are just over-leveraged in household debt — and perhaps this is a wakeup call to those people, but it's part of our consumer culture — that are going to be defaulting in droves. There's businesses that are never going to return, and their employees aren't going to return. There's a lot of economic damage from this. There's going to be a tidal wave of bankruptcies and people moving out.

So when I consider the human impact of all this, people have to realize that this lockdown was never meant to cure the virus. It was only meant to allegedly slow it down. But we've got hospitals that are empty. We've got workers that are getting their hours cut. I know local workers at Lower Keys Medical that are getting their hours cut down. People are getting furloughed. There's hospitals across the nation that aren't going to be coming back, because they can't even make enough money to keep the doors open waiting for this tidal wave of coronavirus patients that were allegedly supposed to come.

And I think at the end of the day, we have to choose if we're going to be the land of the free, the home of the brave, or land of the scared, the home of the quarantine. And to me, if folks think this is all about profit, believe me, this isn't about profit. I think that most people down here are aren't making any profit. This is about survival. And yes, there's an economic interest for me to keep my businesses going, but there's also an economic interest for all my employees to keep paychecks coming, and it has to be considered.

So there's meat shortages that are going to be coming through soon, and I know a lot of that has to do mostly with COVID cases at these meat processing facilities, but we can also look at government and government's role on that issue, which is government does not allow the direct sale of cattle to private processors that are outside of the FDA system or to consumers. So we can put the blame on the government in a lot of different ways, and we can point to solutions there. But to me, Tom, the real selfishness is from the folks that think that staying inside and using government force to keep people in their homes too, that to me is the real selfishness.

**WOODS:** What is the website of the Libertarian Party of Florida?

**NEKHAILA:** It is LPF.org. And if you head over there, if you're interested in joining the party, feel free to get involved, feel free to send us a volunteer request if you want to get involved locally. If you're interested in running, we're making a big push for 2021 and 2022. We need to get you prepared now, if you've ever thought about being a candidate. Or if you just want to donate to the party and help us do our work and continue, please, I encourage you, and I thank you for your generosity and kindness to support us in these very difficult times. I know it's not easy on folks. And if you can, that would be very much appreciated. If not, sign up for our newsletter, and see what we're doing and we hope to support you as the only party fighting for liberty in the state of Florida.

**WOODS:** Well, thank you very much, Steven, for what you're doing and for your time today.

**NEKHAILA:** Thank you, Tom. Thanks for having me on.