



Episode 1,707: When Neocons Attack: Bolton-Linked PAC Targets Libertarian

Guest: Eric Brakey

WOODS: All right, we're going to do two things in today's episode. We're going to talk about what you've been up to. We're going to talk about your congressional race and what wound up happening there, and then we're going to talk about what you're doing these days, both of which are interesting. So set the stage for us, especially those of us — I would say the vast majority of people listening, of course, do not live in Maine, so break down what Maine politics look like such that, on the one hand, if I go to Portland, whether it's Portland, Oregon or Portland, Maine, there is definitely a left-wing vibe to it. But yet at the same time, it's not outside the realm of possibility that an Eric Brakey could get elected to Congress. So what's it like there?

BRAKEY: Well, there are very much our two Maines, as we say. You're right about Portland, Maine and Portland, Oregon. In fact, I'm not convinced that they aren't the same city. You go into the bowels of one, you open a door, and you find out you're in the other Portland. They're very similar culturally, very kind of very progressive. I know in Portland, Maine, Green Party voters outnumber Republicans. So that's southern Maine. That's Portland. But in the other Maine, in northern Maine, we still have very much that frontier attitude; we want the government to leave us alone and let us live our lives as we choose. We're big on guns, are big on gun rights and big on just having the government leave us alone.

So for those who don't know, I've been on your program a few times, which I've appreciated, I got my start in politics as the state director for Ron Paul's presidential campaign in Maine in 2012. I ran for state senate two years later, won a state senate seat, got a number of liberty bills passed, from constitutional carry to medical marijuana to right-to-try, which I learned about right on *The Tom Woods Show*.

And in 2018, I was the Republican nominee for US Senate, though winning statewide as a Republican is a very difficult feat with southern Maine being the way that it is. But when the second district congressional seat, which is the northern half of the state, when that came open this cycle, I threw my hat in the ring, was a strong favorite and strong contender in the Republican nominating process. There were three candidates, and we ran a really strong campaign, got a lot of support, both in the state and from folks in the liberty movement across the country. It was a very good opportunity. So good, in fact, that the establishment in Washington, DC started getting nervous about how well we were polling. And then in the final few weeks, we saw a half million dollars show up from a dark money super PAC with ties to John Bolton that just kind of ran every negative administration you could think of against me, painting me as a Never Trumper because of things I said about Donald Trump when I was supporting Rand Paul for president in 2016. And apparently it worked. We didn't win this

primary in the last few weeks, but we gave a really good run at it. And it's just one battle in the larger war for the cause of freedom and liberty.

WOODS: So this just blindsided you? All of a sudden you got hit with this?

BRAKEY: Yeah, we were polling in first place for pretty much the entire campaign, and in the final few weeks, I heard that there was some opposition brewing from the establishment in Washington, DC. They actually tried to recruit Donald Trump himself to endorse against me in the primary. They didn't really seem to care which of my primary opponents won the nomination. They just wanted to make sure it wasn't Eric Brakey, because they knew that I was — the words that I heard specifically was, "Eric, they're worried that you're going to be another Justin Amash." And I guess I take that as a little bit of a badge of honor if that's what they were afraid of. But they tried to get Donald Trump to endorse against me. Thankfully, he didn't take the bait. I know that Senator Rand Paul called the president personally and encouraged him not to get involved in the race. And so I guess they just reached out to some of their bigger donors, and they spent a half million dollars in attack ads against us.

But so we didn't win this primary, which is a real shame, but at the same time, I know that there are some other really great Liberty candidates running this cycle. I know we've got Nick Freitas in Virginia, who's an awesome liberty guy, who just won the Republican nomination even though they tried to pull the same playbook against him. They also have Matt Gertler, who's running down in Georgia. I know he's been on your program before, Tom. I know his primary's coming up. I don't know when this program airs; it's coming up in a little less than a week, so we may know the outcome by the time that this airs, but —

WOODS: No, no, it'll be out August 6th.

BRAKEY: Okay, well, great. Well then, if those who are listening, if you have a chance to support Matt Gertler or Nick Freitas, there are two great hopes for Congress the cycle.

WOODS: Well, then that's very generous of you to point that stuff out, but let's stay focused on what happened here. So in other words, this money that came in, it wasn't aimed at endorsing a particular candidate. It was aimed entirely at attacking you.

BRAKEY: Entirely at attacking me. They didn't seem to care which of my establishment primary opponents won; they just wanted to make sure we didn't get a liberty guy in there. Yeah, they ran mailers against me. They ran TV ads against me, and it was all very much oriented at painting me as someone who opposes the president, which is ironic, because while I certainly have my disagreements with the President, we all know the reason they were attacking me was because I support what the president says about getting our troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan and these wars in the Middle East. This super PAC, they did something very clever to hide their donors. You look up who the donor is, and it's a 501(c)4 organization that doesn't have to disclose its donors. So they laundered the money. But we saw that the treasurer of the super PAC is also the treasurer of John Bolton PAC, so we know kind of the network of neoconservative establishment folks that it's coming from. And we know that it's the number-one issue where I have taken on the Republican establishment the most in Washington, DC since I got involved in the Ron Paul effort in 2012 is the foreign policy.

WOODS: So how soon before the election did this hit?

BRAKEY: About three weeks. So the final three weeks.

WOODS: What did you think when you saw — did you think, oh, my gosh, I'm sunk? Did you think maybe I'll still have time to throw something together to defend myself? What did you think?

BRAKEY: Well, I guess we kept putting out our positive message, and we hoped that people knew me well enough to know that the attacks were pretty ridiculous. And I guess it worked at the end of the day. Yeah, it's kind of funny, when you're running and you're putting yourself out there, and you see all these ads painting you to be someone that you wouldn't even recognize when you look at yourself in the mirror. But that's politics for you. It's nothing new.

WOODS: Well, are there any lessons that you've drawn that you might think other people in your position could stand to learn?

BRAKEY: Certainly, I think we as a liberty movement need to get a lot stronger. I think that some of the greatest accomplishments that we've had as a liberty movement has been electing people. We've been able to get people elected a lot to state legislatures across the country, but getting across the threshold in the Congress has been much more difficult because there are some various established, entrenched groups out there that want to keep folks out of the federal level who would question our nation's foreign policy. I think that we need to continue taking opportunities to go for federal seats when we can get them. It's why I'm of course watching and supporting the races of Nick Freitas and Matt Gertler.

But we also need to really, if the liberty movement is going to have a strong future in this country, particularly I know that a lot of folks are doing the LP route, which I completely respect and appreciate — I've been focused on how do we get this liberty movement to become an established power in the Republican Party — I think we need to win state legislative seats as much as possible, and that's going to make all of our efforts for federal seats more viable in the future. So I think as the liberty movement, we need to keep focusing on opportunities as they come and we need to look at opportunities, especially those that are closer to the home.

WOODS: All right, before we wrap up this topic and move on to the future, are there any final words you have for us about your experience?

BRAKEY: Well, I'll just say this. I think the fact that the Washington, DC swamp, the Republican establishment, John Bolton and all these folks, the fact that they had to come in at the last minute to rescue their establishment candidates with a half million dollars in deceptive, dark-money attack ads, I think that it really goes to show just how powerful the liberty movement has become and how much they're afraid of us. So what is it Winston Churchill said, you know the quality of a man by the quality of his enemies? The fact that they had to come after us like this, I think really it's a badge of honor in a certain right, and it means that we've got to double down and keep pushing. These are the last gasps of the dying neoconservative movement that doesn't control the Republican Party like they used to and they're afraid that they're on their way out, so our job is to make sure that we continue ushering their way out. So while we didn't get across the threshold in this race for Congress in Maine's second district, we've got plenty of great opportunities to keep pushing from Matt Gertler to Nick Freitas to so many candidates running for office on the state and local levels, and I'm focused on doing everything I can to keep pushing forward in the fights ahead.

WOODS: All right, well, good man. All right, so let's talk about what you're up to now. It involves the organization Young Americans for Liberty. I have had Cliff Maloney on the show, and I remember Young Americans for Liberty when it was Students for Ron Paul, and in the early days of that organization when it became Young Americans for Liberty, Jeff Frazee ran it, and I was close with him. And then just recently on the show, I ran a podcast episode from 2009 that was a podcast that a high school chapter of Young Americans for Liberty had all the way back 11 years ago. So I go way, way back. I go back so far that I think Eric Brakey may have been a Young American for Liberty. That's how far back I go.

BRAKEY: Well, you know what? When I first got involved in the Ron Paul movement, I thought I was late to the movement, to be honest, because I missed 2008. I was still brainwashed by Fox News, believing what Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity told me a Republican was. And so they told me to vote for John McCain, and that's what I did gladly in 2008.

WOODS: And little did you know at that time that those very people were going to show up later and scuttle your congressional run, the people you were listening to.

BRAKEY: [laughing] Who would have imagined? Who would have imagined? Well, who would have imagined I would have ever gone down this path in the first place?

WOODS: Sure, sure.

BRAKEY: Yeah, it's amazing when I meet some of the young people who are involved with groups like Young Americans for Liberty today, I felt like I was late to the movement because I didn't get on board until the Tea Party in 2010. And now I meet some of these young people who are excited and involved and activated and going door to door and they said, Oh, yeah, I used to be a neocon. It's like oh, yeah, me too. It's like, yeah, I didn't like Rand Paul when he ran for president in 2016. It's like, wait a minute, you got into this movement post 2016? There are so many new young people who are coming to the liberty movement through Young Americans for Liberty, and it's amazing to see that this movement is still growing, still vibrant, and still doing great things.

And so when Cliff Maloney called me and said, "Hey, Eric, you ran a great run for Congress. The Liberty movement still needs you. Will you come on board and help us with Young Americans for Liberty?" I threw my Harry's razor in my Away carry-on —

WOODS: [laughing] Yes.

BRAKEY: — and I came down; I'm down here in Texas right now helping Young Americans for Liberty raise some of the funds they're going to need for this election cycle, because we've got 1,000 college students ready to knock a million doors across America to elect liberty champions to state legislatures across the country. Of course, that's how I got into this and became a — I ran for state senate. I didn't run for Congress or US Senate out the gate. I ran for state senate. But we've got so many liberty champions who are stepping up, running for state legislatures across the country, and we can help them win by winning at the door, by getting our young liberty army out there, knocking doors to elect liberty champions. So that's what I'm helping Young Americans for Liberty to do. We've already raised 7.5 million towards this goal, but we've got to raise another 3 million by the start of October. So anyone who wants to chip in and help make liberty win, be sure to go to YALiberty.org.

WOODS: Let's say just a brief thing about what recently happened. Cliff contacted me I think it was the end of last year, and maybe it was just three months still to go in the end of last year, saying that he was having this big Mobilize 2020 event in Austin, Texas, which is where originally it was planned to be held. And he wanted me to speak at it come what may. And at the time, it looked like I had some trip lined up. I didn't think I could do it. Just one thing after another, there was no way I could make it, but he was coming up with scenarios for how I could make it happen still, and he really, really wanted me there, but it just wasn't to be. Well, anyway, Austin — and of course, this was all before the virus so nobody knew what was going on. But then he decided we're going to have it anyway. We're just going to keep something — PorcFest went on as planned. But something else in the liberty world has to just go on, for heaven's sake. There has to be an event for people who are willing to just live their lives. And so he was going to do it. And then Austin didn't work out, because then they had restrictions there. So he thought, well, let's go to Dallas. Can you say what just happened?

BRAKEY: Yeah August 6th was supposed to be the first day of Mobilize 2020. Folks were getting ready to hop on their planes. We had all the banners and everything. People were there kind of getting ready to set up at the hotel, and then without any discussion, without any notice, the city of Dallas decides to cancel the event, two days' notice. So yeah, it was a completely tyrannical decision with no input. It was basically one person deciding to nullify private contracts between private parties. And all along the way, Young Americans for Liberty and the hotel — and I will say, from what I understand the Omni hotel bent over backwards to accommodate Young Americans for Liberty, to accommodate these ridiculous, ever-changing demands from the city of Dallas. And Young Americans for Liberty was ready to jump through every hoop: mask mandates, social distancing, everything that we had to do to be in compliance with them. And at the end of the day, two days out, they decided, you know what? That's not enough. We're canceling this entire event.

And so it was a completely gross and tyrannical decision. I'm personally wondering when city council elections for the city of Dallas come up, because I happen to know a couple thousand young people who know how to knock doors for liberty and unelect bad politicians. So yeah, it's pretty disgusting what happened, and we're going to be pushing forward to make sure it doesn't stop us from accomplishing our goal of knocking a million doors across America this election cycle.

WOODS: This whole thing frustrates me so much. I mean, it's one thing to cancel the event. But to do it with so little notice, it's almost calculated to do it with that little notice. It's the same thing that happened with Freedom Fest in Las Vegas. They complied with every demand that had been made of them. They went out of their way to do whatever. And then at the very last minute, after huge expenses had been incurred, they said, sorry, we're going back to phase one or whatever the heck it was. And they did everything. They'd been in contact with the local authorities.

And then meanwhile, I was out in Las Vegas a few days before they were supposed to have Freedom Fest. I went out there early, and I got a picture of their poker room. The poker room was packed with people —which I have no problem with. But I snapped a picture of it, I sent it to Mark Skousen, and I said, "They can have this, but we can't have Freedom Fest."

BRAKEY: Yeah.

WOODS: And he wrote back and said, "What is this a picture of?" And I said, "This is their poker room." And he writes back to me every time I write to him. I didn't hear back. I think he was just fuming about this. Like he couldn't talk about it. It's just ridiculous. But on the other hand, Dallas is not known for being — I mean, Dallas is known for being kind of left liberal. I wonder if that was the best choice.

BRAKEY: Yeah, you know, people think of Texas as a red state, though, that's increasingly, sadly becoming a battleground itself. But the cities, Austin and Dallas, are very liberal. And so yeah, we're dealing with liberal politicians and liberal government bureaucrats. And I'll tell you, the double standard that we're seeing across the country just smacks you right in the face. When we see Barack Obama get up at a funeral for a prominent politician with everyone there, I didn't see a whole lot of social distancing there, and he's going on at this funeral about political matters, about abolishing the filibuster and getting rid of President Trump. And meanwhile, those of us, us mere rubes, if our loved ones die, their funerals are limited to ten people. Complete double standards that exist.

So it seems like when it's a Democrat cause or a Democrat political effort, something left of center, whether it's the protests going on, the riots going on, these are celebrated and encouraged. But anytime that anyone on the right side of the aisle wants to do a political gathering, that's when the heavy hand of government comes down to silence and stifle it and stop us from organizing. And this is in an election year. What do they say? Every single election is the most important election of your lifetime? This go around, it really feels like we're at a tipping point as a country, and they're really trying to tip the scales in one particular direction. It's very concerning to me, how basically the First Amendment, the right to freedom of speech, the freedom to gather and assemble is being completely suppressed in a clearly double-standard fashion.

WOODS: Are you going to be relocating to work for Young Americans for Liberty?

BRAKEY: I'm down here in Texas, so I'm going to be working out of Austin through the end of the election cycle. I figured since I'm not going to be on the ballot, I'm not going to be on the front lines, I'm going to help raise resources for those who are. And of course, my heart is still very much in Maine. That's my home. It's where my family goes back for ten generations, and I want to help make sure that Maine wins big this November, and we have some great liberty champions running for state legislature in Maine. And so I came on with an understanding that I'm going to help make sure that we get the resources to get boots on the ground for our liberty champions in Maine and other targeted high-priority states across the country. And I'll be doing that from Texas, but I'm looking forward to getting home to Maine once this cycle is over.

WOODS: Okay, great. All right, well, the website once again is YALiberty.org, so go check them out if you haven't yet. I can vouch for Cliff, who runs the thing. I can absolutely 100% vouch for him. He's 100% good guy, reliable, instincts are sound, allegiances are sound. You don't have to worry about that guy. He's great. And he's got Eric Brakey on his team. That tells you all you need to know. Thanks a lot, Eric, for the update. I appreciate it.

BRAKEY: Tom, if I could just say one more thing. I just want to say thank you to everyone in your audience. I know from coming on your show, so many people who chipped in and supported our campaign for Congress. And I just want to say thank you so much to everyone who did so. And if you like me, if you like what I stand for and what I fight for, you're going to

love Young Americans for Liberty. I hope that you will go and support Young Americans for Liberty, and also give a look to Nick Freitas and Matt Gertler, both running for Congress this cycle. They could be real reinforcements for Thomas Massie if we can get them to win these races coming up.

WOODS: All right, very good. Well, thanks once again, Eric, and best of luck. We'll talk again soon.

BRAKEY: Thank you so much, Tom.