



Episode 1,783: Can We Actually Win? Yes, and Here's How

Guest: Cliff Maloney

WOODS: It was great to see you over the weekend. You had a very successful event. Obviously, my listeners know a little bit about it, because as you mentioned, or as Eric Brakey mentioned at the event, I've kept talking about it to them. So before we get into our main topic, can you take a minute to talk about what just happened over the weekend?

MALONEY: Yeah, sure. A live in-person event where we didn't all melt away, despite what we've been told to fear. But yeah, we were in Melbourne, Florida. YAL has a coalition of legislators that we call our Hazlitt coalition. And what that is, is really just a name to kind of say, look, all these liberty legislators, it gives them something to be a part of, named after Henry Hazlitt, *Economics in One Lesson*. But the idea is to bring all of them together. The establishment does this. It's kind of interesting. They call it orientation. So we do this immediately after the election — that's why we just hosted it this past weekend — to kind of bring everybody together and say, Look, here's some tactics, here's some model liberty legislation, here's what they're going to try to do to you once it comes time to pressure you to vote for bills, and really show them that, hey, look, we've got 179 people we've got elected across the country. There's a path to stay principled and stay elected. And so it's a three-day training, and obviously the great one, Tom Woods, got to speak Friday night just about lockdowns and giving the legislators some ammo, if you will, to go after some of their governors and push back on some of this tyranny. And I've got to tell you, Tom, it's exactly what they needed. So I want to say thank you for coming down.

WOODS: Well, I was so glad, first of all, that the event took place at all; secondly, that it was less than an hour from my house; and then thirdly, I made it into, as I told you, a little adventure, because my six-year-old Sarah for some reason, she loves staying in hotels. And at first I thought it was she loves to travel, but really, it's just the being in a hotel part that she really likes. Because obviously I've had to disappoint her a little bit this year. There's no point in traveling to New York, which is her favorite destination. So I thought, well, even though it's only 45 minutes from the house, let's make this into a hotel stay for her. So oh my goodness, she couldn't have been happier. Couldn't have cared less what was going on in that room, but boy, did she like being in a hotel. So that was fun for her, and it was great for me and great to see all those good folks and to have that chance to give that talk, and I'm looking forward to sharing the audio of the talk with the podcast audience in the coming days.

So let's talk about Election Day, but not what most people are thinking. Let's talk about these so-called down-ballot races, because you and Young Americans for Liberty have had a strategy recently of where you want to focus your efforts and how you want to go about it. So explain that and then talk about the results you've had.

MALONEY: Yeah, absolutely. It's interesting, because you're exactly right, it's not what most people are thinking about. I kind of joke that that's half of the strategy Young Americans for Liberty, is that everybody's so focused on the presidential race. Everyone's so focused on who controls the US Senate and obviously the House of Representatives. But that's kind of been our strategy since we launched this program in 2018, which is, hey, we really are trying to understand how do we get more people that believe in libertarian principles to actually have a microphone?

I talked a little bit about this at your house, that look, political politics to me, after 2016, I'm not going to lie, I was kind of burned out. It was like, look, you saw at the party, the GOP did to Ron Paul back in 2012. Rand Paul, really, the campaign didn't develop into some national huge success. And now those of us that believe in libertarian ideas, it's like, well, where do you go from here?

And so I think one of the things we did was take a step back and say, okay, if we are going to value a political office, not because we think we're going to legislate liberty and we're going to get a majority elected that believe in our principles, no, but that when you get elected at all levels, you're added some sort of random credibility. And whether I agree with it or not, that's the reality we live in. If you're some local guy and you've got a comment about why we should get rid of the income tax, nobody cares. The headline is, "Local schmuck thinks we need to get rid of the income tax." But if you can get 1,500 or in some states 5,000 people to vote for you and you can get elected as a state legislator, all of a sudden when you put something forward and you make a comment that we need to get rid of the income tax, they give you a microphone. They'll let you write op-eds. The media will report on you talking about Austrian economics and talking about the idea that the income tax is actually a bad thing for society.

So this whole entire plan was kind of based on this idea that we need to start getting legitimate voices or finding out a way to legitimize the principles of liberty not by caving, Tom, or not by selling out, but by figuring out how we can get more microphones across the country so more people can hear the message. And there's one guy who did this very well without winning. We know him as Dr. Ron Paul. And so what we're trying to do is really take that and figure out how we use that strategy. And when we analyze, look, where can you not have to spend millions of dollars, and where can you really make a difference with a grassroots-type effort — which is what we've built in Young Americans for Liberty, all these young people excited about the ideas — we realize at the state level, it's a joke.

Dare I even say this on your show, but when I was at your house, I asked everybody, I said, *Look, who here knows who their state representative is?* And let me ask all your listeners out there: do you know who your state representative is? And here's the best part. Most of you are saying, I've got no clue who my state representative is. That's the point. We can put somebody on the ballot and we can win some of these races, because if I put ten students in a district and they knock a bunch of doors over the course of a month, and we drive the name idea of somebody like a Tom Woods trying to run for state legislature, we can get you elected. There's not millions of dollars fighting against that.

So that's my long answer to your short question, Tom, of we had an amazing night on November 3rd. We had 153 candidates on the ballot. We won 120 races at the state level for people who believe in libertarian ideals. So 123 wins, we had 30 losses. I'm happy to always dive in on the losses. They're lessons learned. We're not afraid to talk about those. But that

brings us to a total of 179 Operation Win at the Door victories since we've launched the program, and that's just in 2018, 2019, and 2020. So we're on our way. If I can get 250 people that understand libertarian ideas elected to the state office, we've got 5% of the entire country state house seats if we do that. That to me is getting enough microphones to take our ideas mainstream.

WOODS: Wow. Well, talk to me about where in the country were there particular regions or states where you were stronger than others?

MALONEY: Yeah, so we have winners in 33 states across the country, so I'm pretty excited about that. And I get this question a lot. People say, well, do you want to focus in on three states? Would it be better to have half of the legislature in one of the states? I will share with you that out of our 123 wins on November 3rd, 55 of them came from New Hampshire. Okay, I'm not afraid to tell you that New Hampshire this morning, the news just broke that the House majority leader is a guy whose email is literally Karl Menger. Let me say this again. The House majority leader in the state of New Hampshire, because of our coalition, is literally one of the biggest Karl Menger fans that you'll find that his email address has the words *Karl Menger* in them. I'm not going to give you his whole email; I don't want him getting blown up by the whole *Tom Woods Show* listeners. But that's the power of what we're doing.

So New Hampshire I point out is the big one in terms of — you know, we found in the Live Free or Die state, there is a certain environment up there, where if we put up a liberty candidate and we pound the doors and talk to voters, I mean, I'm telling you — I've said this before, Tom, and I'm probably getting in trouble for it. We will let the actual Speaker of the House in New Hampshire in 2022, or I will resign from my role at YAL. And I'm pretty strong about that, because the sentiment up there, there's something in the air and our program's working. But 55 in New Hampshire.

We've also got a couple other states. We've got over ten in Missouri. I don't know what that says about Missouri, but people are excited. Up in Maine, Eric Brakey has laid great roots. We've got nearly ten up in Maine in our coalition. But 33 states across the country. And I think, no offense to the Californias, New Yorks or Massachusettses, but we're trying to use our resources in ways where we can go into states and really make a difference.

And I've got to tell you, Tom, it's kind of interesting to think about, but hardcore red states have actually been some of our best targets, because there are so many of these Republicans that run that have no idea what it means when they say *limited government*. I mean, there are absolutely just these folks running who put an R next to their name. And my role, I have no loyalty to party. Loyalty to principle. Parties are vehicles. You find somebody under any party banner, if they believe in libertarian ideals, and they'll stand up for them, we'll support them. But to me, the red states have been funny, because there's a lot of seats for us to pick up because so many of the Republicans are horrible. So we can take them out in the primary, where it's cheaper, smaller universe, and we can just be hardcore. And we're trying to capture those seats. So it's been kind of interesting to see where these candidates pop up, but I'm excited about New Hampshire.

WOODS: All right, well, that's good. That's good. So now that we have these people at the local level, what kinds of things do you hope they might do? Now, obviously it varies by state, because different states have different priorities. But obviously, there's one pretty big

elephant-in-the-room kind of issue that seems to be affecting an awful lot of states. You've obviously talked to a lot of these state legislators. What's on their minds?

MALONEY: Yeah, so this is exactly why we brought you in, Tom, to talk to them, because when we were prepping for this event in Florida with all these newly elected legislators, we got some not feedback, but we put out a request and said, *Hey, what are you interested in?* And that was one of the number-one things they said is, look, how can we fight back against the mandates? How can we be prepared to engage in these dialogues and these debates on the floor of the state houses to talk about how this is just completely not the government's role to tell somebody if they can go to work, to tell somebody if they can eat Thanksgiving dinner with their families, that they have to stay in their house?

And so I think that that, I would say out of all the issues right now – you know, we do strategy meetings and sit down with each of the legislators one on one when they come in, and that's usually one of the first things out of their mouth, is: give me some ammo to go after my governor and just completely try to rein in some of this tyranny.

And so I would say that a lot of people when they think about, oh, you're trying to get people elected to politics, and they think that then we're going to measure our success based on bills passed. Okay, let me just squash that real quick. Ron Paul, when he was in Congress, he was not known for passing bills. I always try to get people to think through this. No, the first thing we want our legislators to do is to have a record that we can be proud of. If I'm going to spend all this time and resources and our students are going to get excited and move into a district for 30 days and talk to all these voters, we need your record to be solid. That's top priority.

Second priority is actually stop the bad stuff, right? There are tons of things that if we have one person in the chamber to force a roll call vote, to speak out against the governor or the leadership, I mean, there's a lot of things that you can do to stop bad things. And that's usually the second thing we're looking to do, is to figure out how we can condop the system in a way, in a good way for liberty, but figure out a way to do that so we can stop some of the bad things. And then from there, I think it's, okay, ow do you go on the offense with the lockdowns? How do you host press conferences and put out press releases and really dive in on some of the unconstitutional things that the governors are doing to hold them accountable?

And then I think down the bottom of the list – and I don't mean this like it's a bad thing, but down the bottom of the list is this idea that we can pass liberty-minded, libertarian legislation. And don't get me wrong. We've got some exciting things out there. We've pushed some pretty cool bills when it comes to surveillance, when it comes to some of the other privacy concerns, when it comes to some of the civil asset forfeiture and the criminal justice stuff. We've even had some bills not that have quite gotten through yet, but about gold and silver and some legal tender and fiat type bills.

And so it's interesting, but what you said is right, which is every state has different priorities. We have a guy in Rhode Island who is the minority leader in the state. Now, that's not saying much; there's only ten Republicans in the state. But the liberal minority leader believes in Austrian economics in the state of Rhode Island. But his battle is very different than people that are in a state like Texas, where the Republicans have a majority across the board, but all the Republicans want to raise taxes, increase regulation, increased spending, and none of them will stand up to the tyrannical governor that is Greg Abbott, because he's a Republican.

So all the battles are a little different, but I think it's about figuring out the most effective way to become somebody that people will listen to, because that gives them a larger microphone, and figure out how to be effective at spreading the message of liberty the best you can in your state with the cards you're dealt.

WOODS: I want to ask you about Nick in Virginia. When I last left — I mean, I know the situation, but I when I checked in on that, he was way ahead. What the heck happened there?

MALONEY: Yeah, so it was kind of interesting. Nick Freitas on election night was up by like 15 or 20 percentage points. And this is obviously his federal race, and everybody thought, hey, this is awesome. This guy's just crushed this Democrat incumbent. But early votes started to trickle in. The mail-in ballots started to trickle in. And somehow — I don't want to go on record here for some sort of saying that there's proof —

WOODS: Yeah.

MALONEY: — but the Dems added 70,000 new voters and the Republicans added 5,000, and it just by the end of it trickled over, and I think he ended up losing by about a point or two points.

WOODS: That's crazy. Can we talk, though, about, let's say, the political parties involved here? I assume virtually all of these people we're talking about are Republicans. On the local level, I find the more local they are, the better the Republicans tend to be. But I'm a little bit more indulgent at this point, because now that the opposition has become so opposed to civilized people, I'm pretty much willing to help along anybody who's going to hold back that tide.

But on the local level, most of the issues are going to have to do with basically trying to keep taxes low and spending low and so on and on. And sometimes on the local level, you do get some decent Republicans. But so what about people who will say to you, *All right, you're telling me that you've elected like a bunch of Ron Paul's, but look, I've been there, done that. These are probably just Republican Light sorts of people who are going to betray us at the first opportunity.* How do you answer that?

MALONEY: Yeah, so the first thing I'd say is this. When we launched Operation Win at the Door, pretty much the entire team of Young Americans for Liberty, I got real clear and said we're never going to have any loyalty to a political party. The loyalty has to be the principle, it has to be the ideas. And it's so easy to fall down that trap of, oh, we're going to play on Team Blue or Team Red. And then I feel like the whole thing goes out the door. So I'm happy to say, look, we've endorsed, of course, Republican candidates. We've won 178 times endorsing Liberty Republicans, the Thomas Massie types. But we've also endorsed the Independents, and we've also endorsed Libertarian Party members.

And look, I'm going to keep that threshold of saying they have to be principled and they have to be viable. And if you could show me a path where you can run as a Democrat and believe in libertarian ideas, I'd be interested. So I'm happy to report, Tom, this was the first cycle ever where we won with one candidate who did not run under the liberty Republican strategy. That's Marshall Burt in Wyoming. He took out a Democrat incumbent, running one-on-one as a

Libertarian Party libertarian on the ballot. And he won. We knocked a bunch of doors out there, and we endorsed him. Why? Because he was principled and he was viable. And so I'm kind of tired of people saying, *Oh, well, the party this, the party that. Some of these Republicans, they endorsed this candidate.* Look, I don't care. What I care about is if they're principled and they believe in libertarian ideals and they can win.

And the reason I say the winning part, I think so many people miss this. Look, Ron was running for president, so if you don't win, you can get a microphone, you can get attention. But at the local level, to get the microphone and to get the credibility, to get the ability for people to print what you have to say, you have to win. And the beautiful thing is that you don't have to spend so much money to do it. Like there's a process, and we can actually win. And so I'm going to keep that. I'm going to be very firm about that with the organization. And I'm proud of it.

I think the problem is so many people tell me, *Oh, well, how are we supposed to win?* Look, I don't want the excuses anymore. The left is so bad, *so bad* with the lockdowns. The Republican Party right now has no idea what they're standing for. I don't see any Republicans really leading against the lockdown, really leading unless you look at a few, like Nome, and we'll give DeSantis some credit here in Florida. But the party, if you're talking about like a brand, the Republican Party, I mean, it's an empty vessel right now. So I don't care what vehicle we use, but you've got to use a vehicle that can work and it's not going to be a detriment. And I think we're going to keep that motto.

WOODS: Well, fair enough. Now then, you said something about the races that you guys didn't win and you could always learn something from that. This sounds like a pretty good record that you guys have, but is there anything you're going to do differently two years from now? Any lessons learned?

MALONEY: Yeah, let me give you a wonky background that hopefully your listeners will appreciate. So let's break down the country. Okay, there's 5,400 statehouse seats, if you include all the lower chambers and you include Nebraska's unicameral. Some of them call them assemblies, some of the call them statehouses, some of them call them state delegates. There's different titles, but the lower chamber in every house is about 5,400 seats.

And what I've found is roughly 2,000 of them are strong Republican districts, 2,000 of them are strong Democrat districts, and over 1,000, let's say 1,400 seats, are what you would call your swing districts. Now, what that means for us is if you choose to play in a primary, there are 2,000 Democratic seats and 2,000 Republican seats, where all you have to do is win the primary and you're guaranteed the seat. I mean this, Tom. If you win in a Democrat plus 15 seat, if you win the primary as a Democrat and you put Adolf Hitler on the ballot in the general election, Hitler will win. And it's the same exact thing on the Republican side. If you put any horrible name on the ballot, it doesn't matter. And here's why: because people aren't voting for a person. They're voting for a party in the general election.

So what we can do with that is we need to make sure we focus more on primaries, and typically for us it will be Republican primaries in Republican districts, because when you do that, if you walk into the voting booth as a Republican on primary election day, you know how many people when we go to their door, Tom, they say, *Oh, I'll vote for the Republican? I'll vote for all of the Republicans. Sir, it's a primary, right?* I mean, no offense to the voter. I don't want to get in trouble for this. But like, this is what we deal with.

So when you force them to pick a name, which is what they have to do in a primary, that is where our model works, because we are driving the name ID and we are giving the voter a liberty issue that we know the voter will like, whether it is – and I'm not saying liberty, like hey, end the Fed. But you figure out these voters, they might be all in on gun rights. They might be all in on the idea that they want to get rid of the income tax. We find something that we can connect with them, and tell them that Anthony Sabatini in Florida, he's your guy. That's why you've got to support Anthony. We're all out here. We show the support.

But the big thing we learned with these 30 losses is in a general election, you have to rely on the top of the ticket. The people are showing up to vote for a party. There's \$10 billion that was spent between Biden and Trump, is the number they're putting out right now. \$10 billion. You have to try to compete with that turnout, not just with the presidential, but then you throw in Senate races and congressional races and state senate races and some of these other areas. It's such a competition. It's so competitive. So what we've learned is our biggest value add, where we can make the biggest difference in the primary where a voter has to pick a name and you're not dealing with all this party spending and this turnout, and the whole ticket Democrat or the whole ticket Republican, I think you're going to see YAL really start to trend in that direction, that primaries are where we can get liberty legislators elected.

WOODS: Okay, now, this is all very interesting stuff, and I think this is the kind of thing that people sitting in strategy sessions have maybe talked about. But it seems like you guys actually finally put the legwork in and the elbow grease to actually go ahead and do it. So I'm the sort of person who sits around and says we should probably focus more on the local level. And then I write things, because that's where my specialty is, but I don't know how to organize something like that. I don't know that end of it. I wouldn't know where to begin. And so that's a beautiful thing about the division of labor among our people, that we've been waiting for, frankly, a Cliff Maloney to do the things you're doing. Now, there. Now how are you going to respond to that kind of flattery? Go ahead, try.

MALONEY: [laughing] Well, here's the best part. Thank you for that, Tom. And we need you, and we need other intellects. I mean, we had Jeff Deist at the event. We had Thomas Massie, who's obviously at the federal level. I mean, we need people, like you said, we've got to have liberty voices from all over the spectrum. But I think the thing that we learned over the last year? No one wants to knock doors. It's a pain in the ass. Excuse me, I think you're going to be okay to say that on the show.

WOODS: No, that's perfectly fine. Yeah.

MALONEY: But yeah, the beautiful thing about it is this that's why it's so effective. Look, the reason we get YAL students to knock doors, Tom, is because they're so passionate about these liberty ideas. If you try to get someone to go out and knock doors for Jeb Bush, no one in their right mind would go out and knock doors for a Jeb Bush or some of these other milquetoast, do-nothing candidates.

And so I always tell people that when we first launched, we were kind of quiet. We're like, well, we think we have a plan that could work. We'll target these races where you can boost name ID, you can get your people in, kind of get these microphones. But then as time went on, I realized for one, no one enjoys knocking doors unless you really care about the ideas. And who cares about these ideas, when on most of these politicians, they don't have any ideas. They're not running on some set of principles that we disagree with the principles.

They don't have any principles. They're running so they could say that they're "the honorable" and they get to have this prestige. We're running because we believe in the set of ideals that we think would lead to the most prosperous society in the history of humankind.

So I always have said, people ask me, who are your competitors? Are these other liberty groups or these other right-of-center or free-market groups? And look, there really isn't anybody out there in a national way that has said, you know what? Let's focus on the states. And here's why, Tom. It's hard. It's not sexy. You have to go to donors, and you have to go to students, and you have to go to everybody in your network and say, Hey, you know how the news' wall-to-wall coverage is about the presidential and federal races? Well, guess what: we're not going to touch them. [laughing] Right? That takes a little bit of courage. I mean, some people thought I was nuts when we first launched this. because if you avoid doing those things, that's where people's attention is.

But because of that, we focus locally – and I joke because one person told me there was an event, I believe it was in DC. We had a speaker and somebody said to the speaker during the Q&A, they said, "What do you think of YAL's plan to take over the states with these libertarian idealists?" This was some neocon conservative saying this. And the speaker said back, he said, "What's the other plan?" And what he was saying was if you believe you can win over microphones, and if you believe you can actually get people to a place of credibility in the political spectrum, there isn't another plan. And I don't mean that as a shot at any of our federal folks. I mean, it worked for Rand Paul, Thomas Massie. Justin Amash is leaving Congress now.

But like, what I'm getting at is I think it is one of the things that excites me most, which is we put pen to paper and we did the math, and we said, okay, if we had \$10 million dollars, do we think we could elect 100 people to statehouse? Or would we rather try to get one person elected to Congress? And we decided, wow, we feel like the movement for a while that people have kind of had shiny objects. Somebody screamed, "Squirrel!" and said we've got this other project over here and here. And we think this is a real infrastructure, a real foundation. There's a way to raise the funds for it. There's a tactic, which is we go out and door knock. We've built the youth army through our college chapters. And it works because people believe in the principles of liberty. That's what motivates them.

So I don't think we're some political geniuses or that we've cracked some code. I just think we started to say, look, let's have some courage to actually not get lured into these big races where you don't have an impact, and let's do the grassroots work that no one wants to do. And look, in ten years, this experiment could be a huge failure. Or in ten years, instead of having one Thomas Massie, we could have 60 people at the federal level that believe in Ron Paul's principles. We could have ten different governors elected that are going to be not just Ron DeSantis-type anti- lockdown. I'm talking hardcore Ron Pauls elected in ten different states. I mean, I think when the battle comes down in the federal government, our dollar fails, and we're sitting here, we're going to need a couple of states to point to to say, look, these are the people that need to be leading the country, not these wackadoodles from California like Gavin Newsom who wants to tell you you can't have ten people in your house during Thanksgiving. That's the type of liberty leadership I really think that this plan can build on.

WOODS: Well, this is tremendous. How do people help you?

MALONEY: Sure, if you go to YALiberty.org, you can go to YALiberty.org/door, and you can kind of see our entire rundown. And one thing I ask your listeners, Tom, is we need people to step up and get involved with our activist program knocking door, sure. So if you know young professionals, if you're a young professional yourself or a college student, get involved. But even if you aren't, if you know people, reach out to them.

But I think one of the things people miss is, I'm not saying that you, talking to your listeners, have to run for statehouse. But you have a state representative. You're a constituent. Reach out to them and ask them to fill out the YAL survey. It doesn't mean we're going to endorse them. It actually probably means we won't. We had 1,000 people fill out our survey process questionnaire this cycle. We endorsed less than 200. So we're pretty strict about who we endorse. But you've got to remember this: every single person who fills out the survey that's elected, we now have them on record. We asked about 30 questions about their philosophy, their understanding of economics, civil liberties, peace. So if you're out there and you appreciate what we're doing, you could really help me by getting your local state legislator to fill out the survey.

And then obviously, you know what? We need dollars to do this. We've got an \$11 million budget to do all these doors. It costs a lot of money for us to recruit the students. But if people are really, really interested and want to engage, YALiberty.org. And then on all the socials, I'm @LibertyCliff and @YoungAmericansforLiberty pretty much on every social platform.

WOODS: Is it easy to find this survey?

MALONEY: Yeah, if you go to YALiberty.org/door, our survey is public-facing. We do that for a reason. So anyone can find it. There's literally a link on there, YAL's Candidate Survey, and people can check it out. And like I said, viability and principle. If people are interested. And by the way, if you're sitting there saying yes, maybe I should run for state office, I've been this anarchocapitalist and thought, to hell with that, I'm done, but you're thinking, man, I'd like to go in there and light the place on fire, then we would love to get to know you. Because that's what we need. We need radicals that are true believers.

And Tom, we have an event called Liberty Candidate Academy. It's a one-day training, and it's literally 18 steps to teach you how to build a viable principled campaign, how to get elected, and then most importantly, how to stay principled when you get elected. And that's at YALiberty.org/LCA, which stands for Liberty Candidate Academy. And even if you're just thinking about it, come out. We don't require you to say you're definitely going to run, but come out now. Maybe you end up running in 2024 or 2026. But we're trying to really get people to realize the value of having a microphone at that local level. And like I said, I'm very open to the people that want to burn things down. We're in the same camp.

WOODS: All right, well, I'm going to link to of course Young Americans for Liberty, just the general homepage, but I'll link to those specific pages as well, plus the Twitter account you mentioned. We'll get all that up at TomWoods.com/1783. So congratulations, it looks like you had a successful run, and let's hope for even bigger successes in the future.

MALONEY: I appreciate it, Tom. Thank you, as always.

