



Episode 636: Libertarians for Trump? A Debate

Guest: Walter Block & Robert Wenzel

WOODS: I just got done telling people that I'm a big fan of both of you guys. I could not live without EconomicPolicyJournal.com and TargetLiberty.com. Could not live without. Probably the number of times I check my phone during the day, it would be reduced by at least 40% if those sites weren't around, so there's that. And of course I very much respect the work Walter has done. So we're all friends here, but we have something important to hash out, and that is the issue of Donald Trump. And the way I have worded the resolution is as follows, and both participants agreed to this wording: Resolved: Libertarians should support Donald Trump in his quest for the Republican nomination for president of the United States. So we have Walter Block, who will be arguing in the affirmative, and Robert Wenzel will be arguing in the negative. So we're going to start off with an opening statement from each one, and in the past, for those of you who listen to the show regularly, you know that I've had a strict clock where we've timed people, but we've decided that we're all gentlemen there, so we're just going to go on the honor system and just be reasonable. So Walter, why don't you take a couple of minutes to explain your position?

BLOCK: Let me just start off by saying not only are we all reasonable, but we have a mutual admiration society, each of the three of us for the other two, and I'm delighted to be with two of my very good friends. Okay, that didn't count in my time (laughing).

WOODS: Okay, go ahead. Starts now.

BLOCK: Okay, no I'm going to start. Libertarians should support Donald Trump for the Republican nomination. Notice, for the Republican nomination. LFT, Libertarians for Trump, has agreed to disband as soon as the Republicans pick a candidate, whether it's Mr. Trump or any of his two now competitors or any of the other competitors, like, say, Jeb Bush or Mitt Romney or anyone else. Once they pick someone, LFT is over, because we only favor him for the Republican nomination, and we say nothing about any election in November.

Why, then, do we choose Donald Trump? Because he is the least non-libertarian or the most libertarian. And why do I say that? And it's mainly because of his foreign policy. He is awful on economic policy. He is no better than he should be. He's really bad on personal liberties. But the third part, the third aspect of libertarianism, foreign policy, is the most important, and I follow Murray Rothbard and Bob Higgs and Ralph Raico.

Let me say that Ralph Raico and Donald Miller are the two other conveners of Libertarians for Trump, and we all have this view, namely, that we're least likely to get into World War III with Mr. Trump as president. And World War III would be a very bad thing from a libertarian or any other point of view.

And what is my evidence for saying this? Well, he's against NATO. No one else ever came out against NATO. He is for pulling troops out of Korea and Japan and Germany and everywhere else. No one else — that is, no other candidate, with the exception of Rand Paul, of course — has said anything remotely resembling that. Donald Trump has said things like, well look, we killed Qaddafi in Libya, we killed Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and are things better there? No, and not on my watch. It's true he's contradicted himself a little bit, but what the heck? He's just a politician, so you can expect that. But none of the other neocons have said anything remotely resembling that.

And one other point, one time Chris Christie, who was another candidate, was asked, we have a no-fly zone in Syria, suppose a Russian airplane violates that, what should we do? And Chris Christie said shoot them out of the air. And Rand Paul quite correctly said, well, if you want World War III, vote for this man. Well, Chris Christie is no longer there, but Cruz and the other guy from Ohio, they're neocons too. They want to pick a war with Russia, of all countries. And another point in Donald's favor is he says he can get along with Putin, and Putin says he gets along with Donald Trump. So I rest my case. Donald Trump is no libertarian, but he's the closest to libertarianism of the viable candidates.

WOODS: Okay. All right, Walter, thank you for that. Bob, the floor is yours.

WENZEL: Okay, first, Walter, I want to bring up a point. I think you sort of have a moving target here as to what Libertarians for Trump is. In your first article on Libertarians for Trump, you did state that Trump would make the best president, and you did not indicate that the campaign was only for him as nominee for the Republican Party. In your second article, you quote Ralph Raico, and you quote him as saying the reason he's for Libertarians for Trump is because he's against Hillary Clinton. Now, at the end of that one you do talk about the Republican nomination, but so I think it's a little bit confusing as far as where you're going with this thing.

But to just support someone because they're the one that is the most least libertarian strikes me as a very odd way to look at something where you have to sort of throw the libertarian movement behind it. I mean, if Stalin and Hitler ran for the Republican nomination, would we have to come out and try and determine which one is better between Stalin and Hitler and start a Libertarians for Hitler or Libertarians for Stalin? The whole idea I think of libertarianism at this point is to sort of get our message out, and I don't think that is done in any way with regard to Libertarians for Trump. As you made perfectly clear, he's terrible on civil liberties, he's terrible on trade, and I don't think he's anywhere close to being less militant on foreign policy. I mean, he has said he wants to send troops in to fight ISIS. And your point with regard to Higgs and Rothbard I think misunderstands the nature of Donald Trump. Higgs and Rothbard specifically say that foreign wars cause problems internally. Trump is going to cause

those problems internally whether there's war or not. He wants to throw out 11 million illegals. He wants to expand the Patriot Act. He's talking about fighting ISIS.

Anderson Cooper at CNN recently asked him what he saw as the three major areas that the government can have an influence in. He listed security as number one. What does security mean? The government doesn't really protect us. The only thing it can do is track us, control us more. He doesn't want to disband NATO; he wants to get our satellites to pay more, and he wants the focus of NATO to change so it is against fighting terrorists. But terrorists are tiny, tiny cells, so how do you track terrorists? How do you reform NATO? You're going to be tracking people. It's a horrific policy. And I don't see anything good about it at all.

WOODS: All right, so you're all finished, Bob?

WENZEL: Yes, I am.

WOODS: Okay, Walter, you can take a minute to respond, and then, Bob, you'll get a minute to respond, and then we'll get into the questions.

BLOCK: Well, in one of my articles I said we're slaves and the master allows us to vote between Overseer Goodie and Baddie, and Overseer Goodie will beat the crap out of us once a month and Overseer Baddie will beat the crap out of us every hour on the hour, and we all pick Goodie. It doesn't mean we support Goodie; it just means we support him vis-à-vis. Now, Hitler and Stalin is a real close case. I don't know, probably I'd pick Hitler if I had to, because Stalin killed more people than Hitler, but that's a real close one and it's hard to judge. But between Kasich, Cruz, and Trump it's not that close. Yes, Bob is quite correct to say that he wants the Patriot Act and ISIS, and he's not as good on NATO as he could be. You know, there was a joke: an economist was asked, "How is your wife?" and the answer came, "Compared to what?"

See, what I would have wanted Bob to say was Trump is worse on foreign policy than Kasich and Cruz, but he didn't say that. He didn't even mention Kasich and Cruz. All he said is Trump is certainly not good on economics and certainly not good on much of anything else, and then he said he's not even good on foreign policy. Yes, he's not good on foreign policy, but it's a matter of comparison. Is he better or worse than Cruz and Kasich? And when you put it that way, he's head and shoulders over them. And it's true that Higgs and Murray Rothbard and Raico say that the key of foreign policy is that it impacts domestic policy. But look, World War III is a very bad thing. It can ruin your whole day. So I rest my case. Donald Trump is not good; he's just better, and he's a lot better than Cruz and Kasich than, say, Hitler is better than Stalin or vice versa.

WOODS: All right, Bob, now your chance to have a word.

WENZEL: Yeah, Walter, I just don't see where that's necessarily the fact. When your Goodie/Baddie model makes it clear that you can clearly see whether one Slave Owner is better than the other, where there's a goodie and a baddie, and I contend you can in this case, because Donald Trump has said that he wants to put U.S. troops to fight ISIS.

He has also said that he wants to reformulate NATO, which to me sounds like he wants to do more tracking, coordinated tracking between the United States and Europe. It's simply horrific. And it might be better; it might be worse, but I just don't see a clear situation. I don't know how you can be making this evaluation. And am I clear in understanding that you would be forming a Libertarians for Hitler?

BLOCK: (laughing) Well, it sounds a little weird, but if I had to choose between Hitler and Stalin —

WOODS: All right, I don't really want to go down this road if we can avoid it.

BLOCK: But I really think that Hitler and Stalin are too close, but I don't see that Kasich and Cruz on the one hand and Trump on the other hand are that close. Yes, he wants to reformulate NATO, but at one time he said he wanted to pull out of NATO. And nobody, Cruz or Kasich, ever said anything like that. Yes, he wants to go and kick ISIS' butt, but the others also want to kick ISIS' butt. Again, you don't mention Kasich and Cruz, Bob. All you say is Trump is no good. Well, yes, Trump is no good. I agree with you. But he's way better than those guys, way better than Hitler or Stalin is better than each other. Those are, you know, it's sort of they're roughly equal, whereas Trump is way better than Kasich or Cruz, and you never mention Kasich and Cruz.

WENZEL: Yeah, Walter, I can mention Kasich and Cruz. They're terrible, absolutely terrible. I just don't see where you can say that there is such a significant difference between Trump for the better versus Kasich and Cruz. Trump wants to throw 11 million people out of the country and then allow them back in once they're licensed. Libertarians don't want government licenses on people. That's totally insane. It could open up terrorist attacks here in the United States. If he's going to throw out 11 million, there's at least 10,000 yahoos who are not going to like it and will start terrorist attacks here. As far as NATO, he's really not attempting to close that down. And with regard to the expansion of the Patriot Act, I mean, that's just horrific stuff.

I just don't see where he's better than Cruz and Kasich. He may be better. They're all terrible, and you don't really know what they're going to do until they get into power. But I don't see what the gain is from advocating Libertarians for Trump. It's going to confuse people as far as libertarians — when Trump comes to mind, people think he's a guy that wants to throw 11 million people out, that he wants to attack ISIS, and they're going to get a complete misunderstanding of what libertarianism is about, so even from a marketing perspective, I think it's as terrible as Libertarians for Hitler.

WOODS: All right, I'm going to jump in now, because now it's time for each of you to get the opportunity to ask one pointed question of the other. So there's no weaseling. It's one question; you've got to answer it. So Walter, since you're arguing in the affirmative, you get to go first and ask Bob a question.

BLOCK: Bob, do you admit that at one time, Trump said he wanted to get out of NATO and the other guys never said anything remotely resembling that?

WENZEL: He may have said that, but if you listen to what he says — I mean, he misspeaks very often, and he's not clear, and he changes his mind, and it seems that his most consistent position is that he wants the satellites to pay more for NATO and that he wants to reformulate NATO so it becomes more oppressive to Europeans and Americans.

WOODS: All right, Bob, do you want to — well, whether you want to or not, ask Walter a question of your own.

WENZEL: Okay, I'm going to phrase this, Walter, in terms of, I think it's very difficult to understand how these people are going to operate once they get in government. Unless you've got someone like Ron Paul who's been consistent for years and years, it just doesn't happen. Did you not think that Alan Greenspan was going to reform the Federal Reserve?

BLOCK: Yes, I thought Alan Greenspan was going to reform the — (laughing). I did; I thought he would, and obviously I was a little bit disappointed. A lot disappointed.

WOODS: Okay, now it's my turn. I'm going to ask you guys some questions, and so I'll ask Walter one first. Walter, probably my question contains nothing you don't already know, but yet I still I want to take all these thoughts and put them together to make a case and see what you think of it. My impression of Donald Trump is that, as I'm sure is yours, is that he has no fixed principles. He doesn't have an ideology. He says he's a common sense conservative, which is his way I think of saying I have no fixed principles, I believe whatever — you know, I'm just a smart guy, and I'll figure everything out, so don't worry about your Constitution or whatever; I'll figure things out, because I'm a smart guy.

And so for instance, we saw that in — this is not the greatest of his offenses, but in Iowa, he was for ethanol, and he was upset at Cruz for being against ethanol, sort of, even though the obvious free market position is to be against ethanol. So what possible reason could he have for making an exception for ethanol, other than you have no principles? And that's true of his views on all kinds of things. On entitlements, he's just dogmatically against any change to them at all. He's got horrific views on Edward Snowden. We've already talked about surveillance and so on and on, and not to mention that even on foreign policy he's not what he should be. When we put this all together, it's a guy with no fixed principles who has said a few helpful things.

Aren't you afraid that if we attach the libertarian name, even to just a little group like Libertarians for Trump, most people are not going to read your articles and see all the nuances that you're inserting? What they're going to see is Libertarians for Trump, and they're going to think, huh, I guess libertarians more or less hold something like the kind of views that Donald Trump holds. All we have is our name, Walter. That's all we have. Aren't you afraid that you're going to compromise and damage that name?

BLOCK: If I worried about what people were going to think, I would never write much of anything, so I don't really care what people think. I'm only after the truth, and the

truth is that this will be a big boon to libertarianism. People will associate him with peace. Look, I favored my man Barack Obama against McCain in '08, and I favored my man Barack Obama against Mitt Romney in '12. Why? Because I thought McCain was going to drop a bomb, a nuclear bomb on people, and I didn't think Obama would do it. Obama would just kill a few people in weddings, whatever. He's a nasty kind of guy. He's not a great guy, and there are a lot of problems with him, and we all would agree that Obama is no libertarian. But McCain was vicious and horrible, and Mitt Romney was trying to pick a war with China, of all places.

I don't see there's any besmirching of libertarianism, and if there were, I don't care, because I'm not trying to promote libertarianism; I'm trying to promote the truth. I'm trying to promote the truth about libertarianism, and if it says that we would prefer Nazis to commies, what the heck? Let the chips fall where they may. I'm not a marketer, but as a matter of marketing, I think this is a good idea. We will now — by the way, I'm also favoring Libertarians for Bernie Sanders vis-à-vis Hillary, because I think Bernie Sanders' foreign policy is a lot better than Hillary's. Now, people like Bob are going to say, well, you know, Bernie Sanders isn't a Ron Paulian on foreign policy. No, of course he's not. He's not that good, and neither is Trump, but Trump is a lot better.

Look, who else says he can get along with Putin? You mention the word "Putin" to any of the neocons, and they start foaming at the mouth and talking about atom bombs and stuff. I think it's crazy. I think libertarians will have a good public relations — not that public relations is my primary thing — but I think that we will have good public relations, because we will be associated not with all the lousy things of Trump, but with the thing of stopping World War III.

Now, yes, he's got no principles. Well, that's not true. He's got some sort of instincts, and he's a businessman. He's not going to be as bad as Bernie Sanders on policy. And look, he says he can make a deal with Putin. He can be friends with Putin. And Putin likes him. They have an odd-couple relationship. No neocon comes anywhere close. You can't tell me that any of the other candidates is good on that, and with regard to Snowden, even Rand Paul wanted Snowden in jail. So when Trump is bad — and yes, he's very, very bad. But the other guys are just as bad. And when he's good, he's way better than those other guys, both on a libertarian point of view and from the point of view of promoting liberty.

WOODS: All right, I'm going to ask Bob a question now.

WENZEL: Okay.

WOODS: All right, now, here we go. Now, I think we can all agree that elections generally don't accomplish a whole lot, or there aren't gigantic changes. It's just one wing of the establishment ruling as opposed to another. So in other words, to say that Trump won't accomplish much or he'll do some bad things isn't in and of itself an answer, because they'll all do that, and this is what we've come to expect. But — But, wouldn't you concede that in this election there is a finite but nevertheless important

thing that could be accomplished with Donald Trump, and it would be the following: it would be that Trump is crushing the neoconservatives, who are revealing their true colors in droves by saying they would vote for Hillary. Good, I'm glad they admit that they basically would vote for Hillary.

Here's a guy who went to South Carolina, of all states in the union imaginable, in the South Carolina presidential debate, he said these SOB's lied us into war. They lied us into war. And all the experts said, oh, he's going to lose South Carolina. He ran away with South Carolina. *National Review* magazine runs this full-blown issue against Trump, and they wind up black and blue everywhere. He crushed and — basically said, this magazine is ridiculous and no one cares what it thinks. And basically they have been revealed as a magazine nobody cares about. Every single primary and caucus Trump wins, when he has repeatedly said things the Israel lobby does not want him to say, means that in the future it becomes possible to say those things that have not been possible to say in 40 years about foreign policy. No, he's not Ron Paul. No, he's not even close. But these are the biggest challenges to the neocon establishment we have ever seen. How can you not at least be cheering for that?

WENZEL: Well, actually, Tom, I'm going to agree with you. I think the most important thing the Trump campaign has done is expose the neocons, expose the establishment. It's obvious how much they hate him, how much they do not want him in power, how they will do almost anything to make sure he does not become president. I think it exposes the establishment and the elite without question. So that's great. I have no problem with that.

My problem is what would happen if Trump became president, and I just don't see any difference between him and any of the others. So my view is, hey, this is great that he's exposing this stuff. It's something that libertarians can talk about in the future. But at the same time, I don't want to label libertarians as being pro-Trump because of that, because there's a lot more to Trump than just the fact that he's exposing the elitists and the neocons. And what is possible wars against ISIS, extreme surveillance, extreme tracking, his tariff policy, his trade policy, his protectionist policy. There's extreme, extreme problems with Trump.

So yeah, there's something good about the campaign, but I don't see the necessary tie-in between what he's exposing and therefore libertarians should be advocating him as president. We really have to sit this out and just explain how all these guys are terrible.

WOODS: All right, before we close with a closing statement, I want to know, is there anything that either of you have said the other one wants to answer? Like for example, the way either of you answered this most recent question that I've asked. Is there anything either of you would like to say, then now's the time, Walter.

BLOCK: Well, I certainly agree with the two of you, both Tom and Bob, that Trump deserves great credit from the libertarian point of view for exposing and enraging the

neocons, who are pure evil, warmongers and imperialists. And Bob and I agree that Trump deserves credit on that ground.

WOODS: Okay, Bob, is there anything you want to — I want to make sure everybody gets equal time, so do you want to jump in?

WENZEL: Yeah, it's just, I think one of the things with regard to Trump, in him saying that past wars were wrong, the attacks in Iraq and stuff like that, you know, I critiqued Rand Paul for his positions on past wars, and that's what I see with Trump here. I mean, he's against past wars, but he's talking about putting troops to fight ISIS in the Middle East and how he wants to reformulate NATO is scary to me.

WOODS: All right, I'm going to give each of you whatever time you want to make a wrap-up, final wrap-up statement, and then we'll call it a day, so, Walter, the floor is yours.

BLOCK: Since I went first shouldn't I go last?

WOODS: Oh, well, I mean — eh, I think the usual Oxford style is that the first guy always goes first.

BLOCK: Oh, okay.

WOODS: And I'm copying the Oxford style.

BLOCK: Okay.

WOODS: So go ahead. If you want to do it differently, get your own podcast.

BLOCK: (laughing) What do I know about debating format? You know, I want to talk about getting the message out. Libertarians for Trump is sort of like Tenants Against Rent Control or Unionists Against the Minimum Wage or Crony Capitalists Against Bailouts or something like that. It's going to attract attention for libertarians, and libertarians will get a lot of positive publicity from a lot of people, because we are very distinct from the right wing. A lot of people associate us with the right wing; they think we're some sort of branch of conservatives, and this is a good way to distinguish ourselves, because conservatives are warmongers to a greater degree than are liberals.

Another thing that we forgot to mention about Trump, since we're talking about Trump, and that is political correctness. He is magnificent on political correctness. None of the other people dare say anything like that, and I'm the only one of the three that is on a university, so I have a special appreciation for nonpolitical correctness, because political correctness is enveloping us. We have, what do you call it? Warnings, whistleblowing warnings and safe spaces and microaggressions, all that stuff. Trump is like a breath of fresh air, and I think it's unfair to say he has no principles. He's got some sort of inchoate principles. He's learning stuff. Look, even what's his name, Gary

Johnson came out and said that the Jewish baker must bake a cake for Nazis or — what was it? The baker or the florist had to pay \$130,000 to this gay couple that they discriminated against? So even Gary Johnson is misunderstanding libertarianism, so I think it's harsh to insist that Trump be a libertarian. He's not a libertarian.

And also, what can we expect when Trump comes in? Well, the president doesn't have much power on economics. He's got to get the Congress to go along. But he's got power in one thing, and that is foreign policy. And yes, he's been uncertain on NATO. At one time, he said get rid of NATO, and then he said let's reformulate NATO. I agree with Bob there, but Bob has to admit that he's the only one that ever said get rid of NATO, and NATO is horrendous. I mean, the whole point of NATO was during the Cold War, and when the Cold War was over in '92 — I mean, even Buckley said that the only reason we have to reduce our liberties is to get the commies, and when the commies were got and they lost in '91 or '89 or whatever it was that the Berlin Wall fell, we still have NATO, and NATO keeps creeping closer to Russia. And Russia has been invaded in the last century three times by Germany or the U.S., and the Russian foreign policy is to have a cordon sanitaire around it, and NATO is breaking it.

And bless Donald Trump. He once said — several times he said let's get out of NATO, and he says let's pull our troops out of Germany and Korea and, you know, what do we have troops there for? And he says that those countries have got trains that have got 200 miles an hour and we don't. Why? Because we're paying for that stuff. Well, there's some sort of principles in there. So again, I insist that it's a matter of comparatives. And Tom, based on the question that you asked Bob, I thought it was magnificent, I'll have to ask you, do you want to join LFT? Do you want to join Libertarians for Trump? Because I thought the way you put it was really magnificent.

WOODS: Well of course, if I were to join, Walter, how could I be a neutral moderator here (laughing)?

BLOCK: Well, I'm just saying that you asked such a great question of Bob —

WOODS: That's very kind.

BLOCK: — that I'm going to draft you into — what is this freedom crap? You don't have to volunteer; I'm going to draft you into Libertarians — I'm kidding, of course.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because then — (laughing) well, anyway, we'll talk about that later. All right, Bob, your turn.

WENZEL: Sure. First of all, I'm not objecting to the idea of comparisons between the candidates. My view is simply that I don't think we can tell to any degree of certainty at all which one of these characters would be better, which would could be worse. Trump seems to be able to rally crowds. That to me is always dangerous. I want a leader that people are bored about, he can't rally anyone anywhere. That just seems to me extremely, extremely dangerous, and I look at what's going on is his ideas now with regard to NATO seem to be going in a direction that would expand, be much

worse than the current NATO. I mean, we have troops out there, so they sleep in barracks and they eat at a cafeteria, and they're for the most part not shooting anyone. I guess they are in Afghanistan a little bit, but they're not shooting in Europe. And he would turn that into a surveillance state. How else are you going to fight these terrorists from a government perspective? So I think that's extremely, extremely dangerous. By the way, with regard to Putin, he did back away a little bit on Putin in his *Washington Post* interview. I know it's tough to keep up with Donald, because he does jump around, but he's sort of hinting that he is a strong man, so that's a change in Donald's position there.

As far as political correctness, I agree he's great as far as political correctness is concerned, but on my value scale, much more important is oppression and government surveillance and government watching. And I can see that expanding under Trump, especially given the people he appears to be surrounding himself with: Jeff Sessions, Chris Christie, Rudy Giuliani. These are all government-obsessed people, control people, and I think it's dangerous. So yeah, political correctness is great, but if I had to rank things I would look for in a president, it would be someone that was clear about pulling troops out of the rest of the world, who is clear about not wanting to fight ISIS or anyone else anywhere, who was clear on free markets, and you know, political correctness would come in third or fourth. But on the top things, I don't see any clear reason that he's better, and I see him having the potential to be a lot worse. And having libertarianism linked with him, I just think it's dangerous.

BLOCK: Let me ask Bob just one quick question, and I'm sure you can give me a one-word answer. Bob, suppose I held a gun to your head, and I said you had to pick a Republican candidate for president, and it's got to be either Kasich, Cruz, or Trump. Who would you pick?

WENZEL: Uh, given — I can't answer that with one word, because it would not explain why I would give my position, because my position is that it is unclear how bad any of them would be. Kasich is a severe warmonger when he talks, but I don't think Trump is much better. The fact that Kasich bores people to death and can't draw crowds anywhere, I would choose Kasich versus Trump, who seems to have an ability to gain huge mass of the population, and that's always a warning sign to me when it's not in the direction of liberty.

BLOCK: Okay, so you gave a one-word answer: Kasich. Thanks, I'm glad you acknowledged that.

WOODS: All right, well listen, we're going to call it a day. I'm going to ask each of these gentlemen off the air or just when we're all done, if you wouldn't mind emailing me a link or two to something you've written on the subject, because I'd like to have something written that I can link people to on the show notes page if they'd like to — I mean, Bob, I could just link them to your whole site basically —

WENZEL: (laughing) Yeah.

WOODS: — but if there's one particular thing that you're especially happy with, then make sure and email it to me, and I'll put it up. And the show notes page will be TomWoods.com/636. Gentlemen, thanks for your time today. We really appreciate it.

WENZEL: Thank you, Tom. Walter, always a pleasure.

BLOCK: Thank you, Tom. Bob, always a pleasure.