



Episode 698: A Libertarian Look at the Republican Convention 2016

Guest: Murray Sabrin

WOODS: I told you before we went on that I have not watched any of the convention for reasons that I think everybody can understand, but that's why you're here. I need somebody who knows what's going on and who's had some experience in the Republican Party, as you have in New Jersey, and you know some of those people in New Jersey, and I know you know more about Chris Christie than a lot of people do. So I thought — and plus, you've been writing a lot on it on your website. Tell people the website.

SABRIN: MurraySabrin.com.

WOODS: Okay, couldn't be easier. MurraySabrin.com. So let's start — I mean, this thing about Trump's wife and the alleged plagiarism — well, not alleged. I mean, it clearly is plagiarism in some of that speech. I am inclined to accept the James Carville version of events. That doesn't happen by accident, a national speech like that and it's taken from such a high-profile source, the passages in question? This is clearly — it seems to me — I can't even imagine an innocent explanation. This is clearly an attempt at sabotage. That's my view.

SABRIN: It's clear to me also, because as I was switching the channels the other night, I turned on MSNBC, and there is Rachel Maddow infuriated that Melania's speech was similar to Michelle Obama's speech eight years ago. And I wrote on my blog yesterday, that is incredible fact checking; it must have been lightning speed that somebody said, hey, this sounds familiar from eight years ago. I can't remember what I had for dinner last night, and people are remembering what Michelle Obama said eight years ago?

WOODS: Yeah.

SABRIN: And she got the material up there, and this was the big kerfuffle about what's going on. This shows you the lack of substance on the other side, that they're worried about Melania's speech. I mean, it was well delivered. I mean, it takes a lot of poise to get up there in front of thousands of people, with tens of millions of people in the live audience listening to you. And reading off a teleprompter is not the easiest thing, but they make it look easy, because as you know, giving speeches can be quite daunting, but reading off a teleprompter is not normally the way people speak.

WOODS: Oh, that's right; that's right. But as you say, with the Rachel Maddow thing, it's like somebody was tipped off. Be prepared for this, because this is going to happen.

SABRIN: Oh, there's no question about it. I mean, you and I have been around this a long time. These things don't happen by accident. There's very little coincidence that happens in politics. I mean, accidents are what happen when people go through a red light. Things in politics are pretty much planned out.

WOODS: I wonder why Trump is saying no one's going to be fired. Are you kidding me? You're Trump. That's your whole job, right, on *The Apprentice*. You fired people every single week. Is it just that it's just such an embarrassing situation that he'd rather just forget about it?

SABRIN: Well, he would hope that the news cycle would be a 24-hour news cycle, but they're going to pounce on this like a dog running after a car. And the media have nothing to talk about, because I saw Chris Christie lay out the indictment and former Attorney General Mukasey lay out the indictment against Hillary Clinton. Andrew Napolitano has been laying out the case against Hillary Clinton; other people — I mean, the evidence is so overwhelming that what she did was intentional, deliberate, a way of getting around a server of the State Department and having her own private server, which, to me, smacks of the typical Clinton approach to things in life; namely, we can do what we want and the hell with everyone else.

WOODS: Let's talk about Mike Pence, even though as you and I are recording this the Pence speech has not yet been delivered. By the time people are listening to it it will have been. So we can't comment on the speech, but we can comment on the man. What does Pence bring to Trump that he would choose this guy, when Pence seems to be, let's say, not fully onboard on some of the major Trump positions, and even Bill Kristol likes Pence?

SABRIN: Well, this is I think Trump's way of reaching out to the establishment people in the party, and saying, listen, I'm not this crazy guy that you make me out to be, but I want to work with people who have political experience. Mike Pence is a sitting governor. He's been in Congress for, what, six terms? And so he's well respected within the Republican establishment, so that gives him cover and gives him somebody who can work with Congress as his liaison to Congress to get legislation passed. So from a practical point of view, it's a very simple explanation. As I blogged on my website the other day — or actually, I put it on Facebook, that if Chris Christie didn't have Bridgegate around him he would have been I think the VP choice, because I think Trump really likes him.

But getting back to Pence, I mean, he's your typical George Bush Republican. He voted with Bush on all of these spending programs, the war in Iraq and all these other things that are antithetical to libertarians around the country. So for Trump it's a safe choice. It's him demonstrating to the establishment, yeah, I want to work with you

guys, and here's a guy who's been there who knows what's going on in Washington, and therefore I'm bringing him on to the ticket.

WOODS: Now, Murray, even though I've read some of what you've written on this stuff, I'm not fully aware of your full nuanced position on Trump, and I didn't even ask you before bringing you on. I thought I would just ask you when you get on here. But I'll tell you, as somebody who for a while held out hope about Trump — I mean, look; I don't hold out hope for any politician, with very, very, very few exceptions. You and Ron Paul, pretty much. Other than that, I have no hope.

But the fact that a high-profile guy made the comments about the Iraq War being a case of being lied into the war and he did that in a heavily pro-military state, South Carolina, I thought that was a good sign. And the fact that he criticized Bill Kristol precisely on the grounds that he constantly wants to go to war with somebody, that's a criticism Bill Kristol has never received from anybody in the GOP, so that was an amazing thing. So I thought, well, you know, maybe on the margins he might shake things up and might be interesting.

But then I look at — you know, there have been so many other things that have come out, things that he's said. And then this convention, where we're going to showcase Rudy Giuliani and we're going to be hawkish to the nth degree, it makes me think, eh, man, I guess I was snowed. What's your thought?

SABRIN: Well, this is the interesting thing. You don't remember, because you weren't born yet — I don't think you were born yet. 1964, when Lyndon Johnson was the peace candidate against Barry Goldwater in that titanic battle that Goldwater got swamped. And what did Johnson do right after he got elected? He got us into Vietnam. So maybe this is the case of Trump sounding hawkish but really he's going to be "the peace candidate" if he gets elected. So again, whenever politicians say one thing, invariably the other thing happens when they get into office. I mean, we saw this with FDR in 1940. He said we're not going to go to war in Europe. Wilson said this in 1916. He ran as the peace candidate when Europe was convulsive with World War I.

So again, the only thing we can hope for as libertarians is that Trump is sounding hawkish — and this is the Machiavellian, cynical part of me and I'm sure of most libertarians. They're saying things to get elected, but who knows what they really believe in until they get into office?

WOODS: That's true. On the other hand, I always keep in mind Horton's law, named after my friend Scott Horton. Horton's law is that when politicians make promises, you can be absolutely sure that all the bad things they promise will be kept —

SABRIN: Mm hmm.

WOODS: — but the good things they promise will be forgotten the day after they're inaugurated. That's my fear.

SABRIN: Oh, there's no question about it. I mean, this is the type of presidential election that, it's pretty depressing for people who have been working all their lives for freedom and liberty and peace and free enterprise and civil liberties. This is a pretty dismal choice that we have, and even Gary Johnson has flubbed it. I mean, he really would have a chance — in fact, they were mentioning him on CNN the other night, that if he gets 15% in the polls, he's going to be in the debates.

WOODS: Yeah, now, see, here's the thing. I'm critical of Gary Johnson, and I've talked about that on the show, and then I did a roundtable discussion with people of differing views on the subject. And in that roundtable discussion I said, look, even though I think Gary Johnson is an intellectual lightweight, I think he's totally unimpressive when he's on TV — I'm just not moved by this guy at all. He shows no intellectual curiosity. His attitude seems to be that government solutions, you know, don't always work as well as — ugh, I'm already asleep in the middle of the sentence. But on the other hand, as you just said, Murray, he's on the verge of potentially being at 15% in a poll. That's way better than any Libertarian candidate has ever done. Doesn't that count for something in our eyes?

SABRIN: Well, I think so, because it's an incredible achievement to be in the presidential debate as a third party candidate. The last time we had that was Ross Perot in '92 and I guess in '96. But certainly in '92 he caused quite a stir in the three-way debate with Bush I and Clinton. But I heard Gary speak. To give Gary some credit, I heard him speak several years ago at the Republican Liberty Caucus. These are libertarians within the Republican Party. And I was very impressed with his speech. It was solid; it was Ron Paulesque-type. I said to him after the speech, I said, you gave a speech just as good as Ron Paul has given in the past. And I thought he would emerge as a Ron Paul-type leader within the liberty movement. But somehow he comes across as sort of your goofy next door neighbor on TV interviews, and that's really disappointing, because he has an opportunity to move the liberty movement forward.

And I just want to get back to this for a second, because I was thinking about this driving in this morning to my office so we can do this interview. This shows you a problem in politics that a lot of businesses have: the idea of succession, especially in privately held companies. Who's going to take over the business when the founder passes away? Well, Ron Paul has left the political scene. Who has taken up that void? And a lot of us thought that Rand would do it, but he just flubbed it.

Rand could have been the nominee this year if he had said what Ron had said four years ago and eight years ago, because the time was ripe, and I think what happened is a lot of the political consultants, the insiders just did not understand the mood of the public, especially within the Republican Party — and also in the Democratic Party. Look how well Sanders did. No one thought he was going to get anywhere near what he did. And it shows you that there's a lot of disgust, contempt, frustration with the Washington establishment on both sides of the aisle, and that's why Trump has emerged and Sanders did so well. But I was hoping that Rand would really step forward

and carry the banner, and that was to me one of the great disappointments of this political season.

WOODS: Let me play devil's advocate on Rand for a minute. Maybe it's the case that this was actually not the moment, that the time was not right, because you have ISIS; you've got heads being chopped up; these are high-profile things that are happening, and it seems like this is at even a worse time than Ron had in 2008, much worse to be trying to talk about nonintervention.

SABRIN: Well, this is the interesting thing. It's how you frame the argument, and I think we can frame the argument in terms of what's going on in the Mideast, saying our intervention in the Mideast is causing blowback that always occurs when we intervene and we expect a result that doesn't occur, and what happens is you incite people to lash out against our policy in the Mideast. And by nuancing it in such a way that it's our actions — for every action there's a reaction, and Ron Paul did this masterfully against Giuliani, as we know, in that great confrontation in 2008, and using the CIA's own analysis of what happened in the Mideast.

So I think you could say this year that the Mideast is a disaster because we upset the apple cart thinking that it was going to bring democracy and Western-style government to the Mideast, when people there are not interested in that; they're interested in their own Sharia law and what have you, and the best course of action for us is to mind our own business, just as other countries are minding their own business in the Mideast, and therefore let's invoke George Washington's insight that we should have peace and commerce with all people throughout the world. That's how you get peaceful relations.

WOODS: Do you think there have been any highlights to the convention so far?

SABRIN: Well, I'll tell you I was very impressed with — not very impressed, but I think the fact that Trump kids get up there — "kids" — Don, Jr. is 38, but what's her name? Tiffany, 22 years old. No one has heard her speak. I certainly haven't heard her speak, and she used a teleprompter flawlessly. I mean, she didn't miss a beat. For a 22-year-old to do that is an incredible achievement. I mean, the substance was okay; I mean, talking about her father in a very personal way, that was fine. I think the CNN people ate it up. But I was incredibly impressed. I told my wife she is really good at getting up in front of an audience.

The highlight was I think Chris Christie laid out the argument, Mukasey laid out the argument against Hillary Clinton. Ryan at the last part of his talk was I think pretty good. The question is, what does he really believe in, because he's been in the forefront of supporting a lot of the big government Republican policies in the past. I'm trying to think who else did a pretty — oh, the woman last night, the soap opera star did a wonderful job as a small business owner laying out the case for government intervention. As well as anyone I've heard, so she was really impressive. And I'm just trying to think if there was somebody else who sounded pretty good.

But again, it wasn't as choreographed as well as it could have been. But Ben Carson was pretty decent in terms of talking about government overstepping its boundaries. So again, you have people who have these short snippets of good sound bites that should rally the Republican base, because after all, if the Republican base is so anti-Hillary — you have Republicans in New Jersey who said on their Facebook page they're going to vote for Hillary. These are longstanding Republicans, which is mind-boggling when you think about it, because she's the antithesis of what Republicans want in Washington, and for any longtime Republican to say they're going to vote for Hillary because they don't like Donald is I think a demonstration of why our politics is so screwed up.

WOODS: I think it'll be interesting to see what happens — let's suppose Hillary does win. What happens to Bill Kristol after that? Do people turn against him and say, you stupid schmuck, it's because of you that we have Hillary? Do these people suffer any pain, or does it just go back to the old GOP? Or what do you think happens?

SABRIN: That's an interesting question. I haven't given too much thought about it, but these are the people who should just shut up for a time, because we've heard them for years and year and year promoting this big government Republicanism that's driven us into debt, that's driven us to be the policemen of the world, and they should just go away quietly. But this is how they make their living, by being pundits and being wrong on just about everything, whether it's the invasion of Iraq, whether it's the intervention in other parts of the Mideast. And these are very dangerous people, because they gin up the public for war.

And I think the best thing that could happen is that if Hillary wins and things really break down in terms of civil liberties and spending and more monetary inflation and more intervention, that all these people will hopefully do a mea culpa. If not, I think it gives us the opportunity to say, listen, we've tried this big government on both sides of the aisle. It's been a terrible failure. It's time to dismantle the welfare-warfare state. This doesn't have to be done overnight — it can't be done overnight, as much as we'd like to have it done overnight, but let's start doing it.

And that's one of the things I'll be working on in my writings and my blog, and you'll be doing it, and Lew Rockwell will be doing it, and other people will be doing it. So I think we have the intellectual ammunition to be ready, no matter who's inaugurated in January, to be ready for the next four years, to point out that this whole experiment in progressive, left-wing ideology has been a total catastrophe for the country.

WOODS: I'm reading *Target Liberty* this morning; TargetLiberty.com, I read every day. It's Bob Wenzel's site, sister site to EconomicPolicyJournal.com. I imagine you read it also.

SABRIN: Sure.

WOODS: And Bob's been a big, big, big Trump critic. I mean, just a relentless critic. But he did say about the convention the second night, he said that the speaker who

made him sit up and take notice was Donald Trump, Jr. He said that there was certainly a free market streak in the guy. But then it turned out that now there are accusations that a portion of his speech was plagiarized, and then the story turns out to be that actually it's not plagiarized; it's that the speechwriter, F.H. Buckley — who's actually been a guest on this show because he's good on presidential power — F.H. Buckley is his speechwriter, just recycled some of his own sentences into the speech. So it's not really plagiarism; it's just laziness. That was kind of a disaster. But what did you think about Donald Trump, Jr.?

SABRIN: I really thought he hit some high points in terms of talking about the market, but then there were also some statist things he said about taking care of people. I mean, this is what I'll be working on is — we take care of people through the nonprofit sector, as opposed to government. Now, if Trump had said that, that, listen, I've been a philanthropist a good portion of my life because I have the means to do it, and, let me tell you, folks, philanthropy really works; it really is the best way to handle issues at the local level of people who are in need — and if he just says that and says the big government welfare state does not work; it's costly; it's bureaucratic; it's inefficient, he would I think be applauded by libertarians who understand that the welfare state has been a disaster because of the dependency, that so many people are on food stamps and other government programs, Medicaid and so on and so forth. But Donald Trump, Jr., I posted on Facebook I think he's going to be running for the U.S. Senate from New York.

WOODS: Ah, that's interesting. I hadn't thought of that, but obviously if Trump keeps being popular it could be like a Ron and Rand situation that people suddenly develop political careers out of it. Do you have a prediction — I hate to put you on the spot with stuff like this, because who can know?

SABRIN: Yeah.

WOODS: But I remember a few months ago the Democrats basically laughing, saying, oh, we'd love to go up against Trump because we'll just crush him. And yet they're not laughing anymore.

SABRIN: No.

WOODS: They say they've got a real fight on their hands, even though demographically Trump, like any Republican, has overwhelming odds to overcome.

SABRIN: Mm hmm.

WOODS: How do you think it shakes out?

SABRIN: Well, there's a new poll released today showing that it's basically a dead heat. And remember, this is a national poll of voters, which means, because the heavy populations in California and New York skew the results, that means that Trump is winning in other parts of the country. So it seems to me that if Hillary Clinton doesn't

have a big lead now — and of course that doesn't mean anything, because in 1980 I think Jimmy Carter had a huge lead against Reagan in the summer of 1980 and lost even with — he had a fairly strong third party candidate of John Anderson.

But it seems to me that Trump is doing exceedingly well. This is an example of "be careful what you wish for," by thinking that Donald Trump is going to implode every time he opens his mouth. It hasn't happened. It hasn't happened during the Republican primary; it's not happening during the convention. And Hillary Clinton is a weak candidate. The fact that Bernie Sanders did so well when she was the overwhelming favorite indicates to me that she is not connecting with voters. She has a real problem with white male voters. And I think women voters, once the women come out there and say, Hillary Clinton basically protected her husband against all his transgressions — that's a killer for people to say I'm with Hillary, because even though she protected her husband, I'm still with her. This is the double standard that people see with Hillary Clinton that I think is very harmful to her credibility, and we know that's got a tremendous credibility problem with the American people already.

So as time goes on, I think Trump will get stronger. And in politics, like in the stock market, there's contrary opinion. No one thought Trump would win. He won. Everyone thought that Hillary was going to win big in November, and it could be the opposite happens. It could be Trump could win big in November for the simple reason that as Hillary goes through this process and the polls are even or show Trump a little bit ahead, she's going to get very frustrated, and God knows what she's going to say or what the Clinton people will do. So again, it's a pretty open-ended situation, but I think Trump is so far doing better than most people expect, and if he has a message that's resonating with especially the blue collar workers, which gave Reagan the election in 1980, I think he's going to win fairly easily.

WOODS: You know, I'm thinking that one thing that speaks to his good position right now is the huge disparity in money spent on both sides. Trump has spent much, much, much less than Clinton — I mean, Clinton has spent, as of — I only have the numbers in front of me from a couple of months ago, but as of a couple of months ago, 55 million for Trump, 174 million for Clinton. And he's got a ton of money, and he could spend it at any time, and he could spend it all in the last week or the last two weeks. And you know he's going to do something to them that's going to surprise them, and they've got their own dirty tricks, but everybody knows Donald Trump's a womanizer and this and that, Trump University. I think that's all pretty much out in the open. But you don't know what he's going to pull.

And secondly, as Michael Malice pointed out on this show, in the debates you don't know what could happen, because if she goes on one of her coughing fits during the debate, then it's over, because then he says, look, you may love your grandma, but you don't want to give her the nuclear codes. I guess I trust my grandma with the nuclear codes, but the point is that she's not fit to lead the country. I mean, he could just pummel and pound her. He could pound her about the emails. She can't rehearse for this the way she could for a debate with Romney.

SABRIN: I think she is such a weak candidate. And here's the other interesting thing. My brother told me that there's a medical team that travels with her, because she's not in the best of health, even though they claim she's in the best of health. And these coughing fits, they are serious stuff, and like you said, if she has one of these during the debates, I think people will say, do I really want someone who's got a really major health problem to be in the White House and making these decisions. And she doesn't look well. I mean, I've seen her on TV, and she doesn't look well. The fact that she hasn't had a press conference since the end of last year speaks volumes about her people wanting to protect her from hard questions. She was on Charlie Rose the other day, and he was pounding her on the emails, and she was very defensive. She had a look on her face saying, Charlie, get off these topics, because she didn't want to answer these questions.

WOODS: Yeah, so it's not by any means locked up by Hillary the way we were being told. And you know, at this point I really don't know what to think. I mean, I wish we had — I wish there was a really good option out there, and as it turns out, there almost never is. I mean, I know Gary Johnson's out there. I get that. But I wish we just had somebody who wouldn't say things like, "We have to take the best of the two parties and work from there." At a time like this when the two parties are so degraded and awful, can't we just say they're both terrible? Is that too much to ask of the Libertarian? "They're both terrible, and I have a great alternative." I wish — I just wish the guy would say that.

SABRIN: That's a simple message, Tom. I mean, he could say, listen, the reason we're in \$19 trillion of debt, we have troops all over the world, we have a \$210 trillion unfunded liability, we have money printing going on, we're getting zero interest on our savings, it's all because of the two parties in America, and the Libertarian Party offers the original American vision for the country; the Founders' vision of freedom and free enterprise and limited government and peace with the rest of the world; civil liberties; your home is your castle; the government shouldn't intrude; they shouldn't listen in to your phone calls, read your emails unless they have a warrant signed by a judge saying there could be some nefarious activities going on.

That's a simple message to say, Tom, in a campaign where the people don't want to hear dissertations on economic policy. Just give them the sound bites that politicians are noted for, and don't try to finesse this thing. Just say we've tried the two-party system for 150 years, and look where we are, folks. The Libertarian Party stands for the principles that built this country: free enterprise and limited government and peace and commerce with the rest of the world. That's all you have to say.

WOODS: Yeah, indeed, indeed. All right, Murray, I want to urge people to check out MurraySabrin.com, because you've been doing a lot of posting over there. And I like reading what you have to say. You've been around a while in the party in New Jersey. You know the people; you know the methods; you know what they're up to. So you're a very important guy to be listening to, and I appreciate our time today. Thanks so much.

SABRIN: Thank you, Tom; I appreciate it.