
**Episode 895: Ron Paulian State Legislator: How He Won, What He's Done, What He Saw at Two GOP Conventions, and More**

**Guest: Eric Brakey**

**WOODS:** I got to know about you back in 2012, I guess? When did you get elected to the legislature in Maine?

**BRAKEY:** Well, I got elected in 2014, two years after I —

**WOODS:** That's what it was, okay, okay. But was there any reason I would have heard about you before that?

**BRAKEY:** Well, before that in 2012, I worked on the Ron Paul campaign in the state of Maine. I was —

**WOODS:** That's right, okay, and the convention and all that, okay. I think that's where I actually got to know you first, or know of you, and then now you're in the state legislature. We'll talk about your activities there, obviously, in just a minute. I'm curious about — Am I allowed to ask how old a guy you are?

**BRAKEY:** [laughing] I'm 28 years old now, and I'll be constitutionally eligible to run for U.S. Senate by the time I'm on the ballot.

**WOODS:** Okay, so you're going to run for U.S. Senate. We'll get to that in a minute. All right, so you got elected — Now, I don't know; I assume it's a two-house legislature?

**BRAKEY:** That's right, House and Senate.

**WOODS:** And you're in the House? Or in the Senate?

**BRAKEY:** I'm in the Senate.

**WOODS:** Okay, you're in the Senate. Oh yeah, that's right. Oh yeah, that's right. Okay, I'm sorry, you'd think I would know this, but as I told you, I have not been feeling well, and I keep flying to different places. And now I am ready. I am ready to talk to you. I've got it all put together in my mind here. Now here we go.

All right, I'm interested in what you've been up to and how you've been able to do what you're doing. I'm interested in your interaction with other people in the state

legislature, but also, frankly, if I may ask this, your relationship with other people in the Republican Party. And even if that's been ugly, I would think if you're going to run for Senate, you probably don't want to give me the real answer [laughing], but which one of those do you want to start with?

**BRAKEY:** You know, either one. I think there's a lot to explore in both places.

**WOODS:** All right, so let's start with the GOP. I mean, you represent a different kind of Republican, obviously. You are the kind of Republican who basically, other than Ron Paul, really did not exist before 2007. So there's a sense in which the Republican Party, when faced with somebody like you, is inclined to sort of pump its fist in the air, but halfway up and have an awkward smile: "Hey, we won..." [laughing] And, I'm wondering if that's the reception you got.

**BRAKEY:** Well, thankfully in the state legislature, foreign policy doesn't come up too often as a policy point —

**WOODS:** Right.

**BRAKEY:** — so we've been able to have a bit of a truce on a lot of things related to that. But you know, as I've been in the state Senate, I was the lead cosponsor for a lot of Second Amendment, like constitutional carry, which earned me a lot of goodwill in the party. I spearheaded a lot of the efforts on welfare reform as the Chairman for the Health and Human Services Committee, which has earned me a lot of support in the party. And in some ways, leading on Second Amendment issues and welfare reform issues has bought me enough goodwill where people just kind of roll their eyes a little bit when I'm working on medical marijuana and marijuana legalization. They'll say, All right, I disagree with him on that, but he's protecting our Second Amendment and he's working for welfare reform. So it's kind of — it's a package deal. You've got to take the whole libertarian bag.

**WOODS:** So are you doing what Dr. Paul would do in that you would actively and on purpose be working with Democrats on some things because they're the only ones who are interested in them?

**BRAKEY:** Yeah, you know, it's odd. When I first got here to the state Senate in 2015, I immediately went and started working with Republicans on welfare reform and Second Amendment issues and worked with Democrats on civil liberties and medical marijuana. And so many people thought that was strange and weird, and I think that's what we're supposed to be doing. You're supposed to be trying to find these areas of common ground. So I really did look at Ron Paul as a role model and a trailblazer in that way. He very much stood exactly for what he believed in. He never flinched away from that. And yet that doesn't mean that just because you disagree with someone 95% of the time, it doesn't mean when you've got that 5% of common ground, it doesn't mean that you can't work together.

**WOODS:** Give me a couple of examples of legislative victories you've been involved with.

**BRAKEY:** Well, I already mentioned constitutional carry, which allows all law-abiding adults over the age of 21 to carry a concealed handgun in the state of Maine without the need for a government permit.

**WOODS:** Yeah, now let me jump in there, because isn't Maine — I mean, I know that they've elected, you know, very, very, very, slightly right-of-center Republicans in the past to represent them, but I grew up in Massachusetts and I never thought of Maine as being particularly conservative, or even as being made up of people who were interested in or not appalled by constitutional carry. So what am I missing?

**BRAKEY:** Well, Maine historically has been — we're a very rural state. We've got a very strong sportsman tradition.

**WOODS:** Ah, like Vermont in that way. So that's why Bernie has to be pro-gun.

**BRAKEY:** Well, you know, it's funny; in the debate for constitutional carry, the anti-gun folks were telling us over and over again, This is going to make us like the Wild West. People are going to be shooting them out in the streets. And I thought, I guess Vermont is to the west of us [laughing]. They've had this law on the books for 200 years, and I don't see any shootouts happening over there. So it's kind of funny when the far left is protesting a potential law that's been on the books in Vermont for 200 years; it's kind of hard for them to have a leg to stand on.

**WOODS:** Right, right. Well, now, obviously you haven't won everything. What was maybe the biggest heartbreak, the thing you really, really wanted to see passed and you just can't even understand why anybody could possibly be against it [laughing]?

**BRAKEY:** Well, there've been a few things. I remember there was a — not something I wanted to see passed, but it was something I wanted to see set on fire and burned to the ground, this corporate welfare bill that came to us, which creates what could be a state-level import-export bank where we're taking taxpayer money and we're loaning it out to big corporations in hopes that they'll come here and create jobs. Of course, you know, we have banks and credit unions and we've got private lending institutions whose job in the free market is to make these kinds of loans, to assess risk. But we decided no, we're going to put taxpayer money on the hook for these loans that the private financial institutions thought were too risky.

I argued on the floor against that in the Senate. I said this is corporate welfare; I thought I made a pretty compelling case. And then the vote was 34 to 1, you know? And I go to some of my colleagues in the Senate and I ask, "Why did you vote for this bill? It's terrible?" And they said, "Yeah, you made some good points, but it's called like an Act to Create Jobs, and I don't want people to think I'm opposed to creating jobs." And that's sometimes the kind of frustrating, people can't see beyond the — they think that people back home can't see beyond the title of the bill, and there's so much that goes into just perception rather than actually good policy, and it's a very frustrating system.

**WOODS:** I think the question a lot of people are going to want to ask is: how did you get elected in the first place?

**BRAKEY:** Well, you know, I think the liberty movement we actually have a very big competitive advantage over a lot of other politicians, which is that we actually believe in something. And believe it or not, voters are really craving that right now. That's why so many people — despite his beliefs being wrong, that's why so many people are attracted to Bernie Sanders right now, because he states what he believes. And so many people were attracted to Ron Paul, and so many people are attracted to Donald Trump. Whether you agree or disagree with what they put out there, at least they put something out that isn't this mealy-mouthed, trying to offend no one so you put out the most moderate, inoffensive policy position possible. I think that people are getting really sick of that, and I think that as a candidate, folks in the liberty movement, as we run as candidates, we have that advantage.

Lead on what you believe, but also know how to frame your message, know who you're talking to. Sometimes even the words that we pick, if you want to talk about decentralizing government, you can go to the right and you can talk about states' rights; you can go to the left and you can talk about local control. It's the same thing, but sometimes you've got to know your audience.

**WOODS:** What part of Maine do you represent?

**BRAKEY:** I represent central Maine. It's the towns of Auburn, New Gloucester, Poland, Mechanic Falls — actually, in the past, it's been a historically left-leaning district. Republicans haven't done very well here in the past, but with kind of a more libertarian message winning over a lot of independents and including some folks on the left, I've been able to win by pretty healthy margins.

**WOODS:** Was it an open seat when you ran?

**BRAKEY:** No, actually, I challenged a Democrat who'd been in office in the area in the state Senate and in other various offices for about 40 years. People actually told me I was stupid to run against him [laughing]. The party establishment tried to find other candidates to primary challenge me, because they thought I couldn't win. And I got in, I ran and won by 20 points.

**WOODS:** Whoa, now that is highly, highly unusual. What do you attribute that to? And I know it's you're a wonderful candidate with great ideas, but there's got to be something else going on here. Was the guy under indictment? How does that happen?

**BRAKEY:** Well, he had some negatives and we certainly highlighted his negatives, but a lot of it was — the real competitive advantage that we had was the liberty movement. I was able to, right out the gate, I was 24 years old when I announced. I was barely constitutionally eligible to even run for state Senate. I'd never been on the ballot, never run for anything before, no one knew who I was. But after the 2012 Ron Paul campaign, I had built a whole network across the state of like-minded liberty activists, people who were not just willing to volunteer, but also to donate and chip in. And in fact, because of the help and support of the liberty movement, we broke state fundraising records multiple times during that first campaign, and that gave me the ability to really get our message out with direct mail and everything else needed.

But then also, on top of that, I went and I knocked on 8,000 doors, went directly talking to voters one on one, and that's something that, thankfully here in Maine where we have small legislative seats, you can still connect with almost every single voter in your district. So it takes hard work, it takes people willing to contribute financially, and it also takes a winning message, and I think the liberty movement, we really have the benefit of those things if we know how to apply them.

**WOODS:** I want to shift gears and ask you about something that is still interesting to me and I rather suspect a lot of my listeners even years later, and that's the 2012 GOP convention and the campaign and Ron Paul and so on and so forth. Tell me about some of your experiences at the convention and what you witnessed there. Because I wasn't there. I was in Tampa, but I wasn't at the convention. And I've heard some horror stories. I don't know what to think.

**BRAKEY:** You know, it's sometimes — you know when they say, "Don't kick a guy while they're down?" The Mitt Romney campaign certainly didn't seem to believe in that. They'd won and they just kept kick, over and over again. So I guess short synopsis on that, so as folks may remember, Ron Paul, while we didn't win nationwide outright any of the beauty contest preference polls, we were much more organized in a lot of these state caucuses and we went on, we won the delegates at the caucuses and at the convention. And here in Maine, we won pretty much every single delegate at the state convention for Ron Paul. I was proud to be serving as the state director for the campaign at that point in time.

Now, that left a lot of Mitt Romney supporters and the Mitt Romney campaign pretty upset, especially since Maine is a next-door neighbor to Massachusetts, which is Mitt Romney's home state. So when it came to the convention, some folks filed a challenge against our delegation, seeking to have our delegates thrown out and replaced with Mitt Romney supporters. It was so blatantly corrupt that our governor at the time, who was a Mitt Romney delegate — he was the only Mitt Romney delegate we put on our slate because a lot of our folks really liked the governor — he threatened to boycott the convention if they unseated our delegates. In fact, he ended up doing that when they decided to throw out half of our delegates and replace them with hand-selected Mitt Romney-supporting delegates. Now, I was a delegate and I was one of the delegates who was kind of ousted and kicked out.

And this was at the same time that they were pushing these rules changes to give the National Republican Committee a lot more control over the whole presidential process, because they didn't want to see a repeat of things like they happened in Maine. So kind of the outrage at the time about what the RNC and the Mitt Romney campaign were doing to Maine and other states and this power grab through the rules led many states at the convention to protest, to riot on the floor. I remember, I think on the second day there was a huge walkout from the convention and protest of many different state delegations from Maine and Texas and Oklahoma and many states across the country. And I think the whole chant there was, "As Maine goes, so goes the nation." And you know, the media kind of sparsely covered it here and there. The RNC certainly didn't like it distracting from their coronation ceremony they wanted to have for Mitt Romney. But that's what happened there, and I think we learned some lessons in the liberty movement for next time and we'll keep moving forward.

**WOODS:** Well, speaking of next time, you were also apparently at the convention in 2016, and you had something to do with the Platform Committee?

**BRAKEY:** Yeah, I was on the Platform Committee for Maine. Usually I think these Platform Committee exercises, they can be kind of boring to watch. But I got some things on the platform I was very proud of. We protected the Audit the Fed plank in the platform. I got in the platform a call for an audit of the Pentagon and for the abolishment of the IRS and support of right to try, nullifying certain federal laws from the FDA. But what was really eye raising at times was I sponsored planks into the platform to support medical marijuana. I don't think that debate has ever happened on the Republican National Committee, and of course it got voted down.

But also, more importantly, I sponsored planks against some of the neocon foreign policy — you know, what was interesting is if you read the platform, it kind of states up front — in some ways, they're adopting the rhetoric that we've been espousing. It says right up front that we do not believe in nation building. But then later on in that same section, it goes on to say how we're going to help Syria transition to a democratic country [laughing]. It's like, well, wait a minute, you state the principle up front that we're not going to do nation building, and then you go on to say all the ways that we're going to do nation building.

**WOODS:** Wow, no kidding. All right. So now I want to actually talk to you about what you're up to at the moment, particularly your announcement that you're interested in or planning to run for U.S. Senate. You're running against I guess Senator King?

**BRAKEY:** Yeah, Senator Angus King, the fake Independent from Maine.

**WOODS:** Okay, what do you mean by fake Independent?

**BRAKEY:** So Senator Angus King, he was elected in 2012. He ran as a registered Independent and claimed he was going to be an "independent voice in Washington, D.C." But they won; he got there; he's been caucusing with the Democrats ever since. He has a more partisan Democrat voting record than many registered Democrats in the U.S. Senate.

And you know, I'll say one thing that really disappoints me about him. You know, the big issue in our movement has been Audit the Fed and monetary policy and really an eventual end to the Fed and free market monetary policy. We've made a lot of advancements with our own delegation here in Maine on that. Every single member of the Maine delegation, Republican, Democrat, has voted for Audit the Fed, except for Angus King. Angus King has come out and said, Oh, well, we need to protect their independence. We shouldn't have this whole process politicized. And what he really means is we, the people of America, shouldn't have the right to see what's going on at the Federal Reserve. So he's the last holdout in terms of opposing transparency at the Fed. I'm hoping we'll extract him and make a change there.

**WOODS:** How about that? He says he's going to be an independent, and he winds up being with the Democrats. That seems to be a general rule, because it reminds me of the moniker they've given to John McCain. He's the great maverick, right? John

McCain's the great maverick. But what does that actually mean? It meant that occasionally, he would bolt from the Republicans and vote with the Democrats. He would vote with Teddy Kennedy on crazy left-wing things that the media wanted him to do. So I'm supposed to be impressed by this guy? He bravely breaks with people the media hates in order to go stand with people the media loves. Wow. How impressed I am with this guy. Ugh.

**BRAKEY:** The double standard is really interesting. It seems like on the left, folks will occasionally manage to be for small government when it comes to personal liberty and privacy rights. On the right, people will occasionally manage to be for small government when it comes to economic freedoms. But if you're a moderate, that means that you are for big government on everything. And that's moderate somehow.

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**BRAKEY:** That's what we're told. And that's what it means to be a maverick John McCain; that's what it means to be Independent Senator Angus King. It means you're for big government every single — check every single box, you're for big government.

**WOODS:** Now, listen, it's one thing to have an upset victor in the state Senate, but the U.S. Senate is — you know the odds you're up against. So tell me about those odds and what your battle plan is.

**BRAKEY:** Well, I'll say this. Maine has been, over almost the last decade, really in the midst of a political realignment. We're the only state in New England that has Republican congressmen, in our second district. Our second district went for Donald Trump. We actually gave one electoral vote — because we're one of the few states that will split its electoral votes, we gave one to Donald Trump. And we're a state that — this last election cycle, we had several referendums on the ballot, actually. We had a referendum to expand gun control and we had a referendum to legalize marijuana. And wouldn't you know it, the same people came out and voted to legalize marijuana and reject gun control. And so those are issues that we typically associate with the right or the left. You know, the right opposes gun control, the left wants to legalize marijuana. But the same people came out and voted for both of those things.

There's very much a "leave me alone," libertarian bent to the state of Maine, and it's more and more. We can see it. I think that in many ways, our representation in Washington is the complete opposite of that. And part of that's because of the kind of candidates who step forward to run. I think that when we put someone up who is principled, who can articulate a message of "get the government out of my wallet, get the government out of my bedroom," I think that that can be a winning message here in Maine, especially when we shine a light on the voting records of Senator Angus King and how he's been voting opposite that while he's been there.

**WOODS:** It's just such an overwhelming — see, the problem for me would be, because I have workaholic tendencies, I would say, Oh my gosh, I've got this major, major battle I'm in against Angus King, and I would feel — I would second guess all the relaxation I ever did. I would say, you know what, instead of sitting by the pool reading a book, I

should be writing an article against Angus King. I should be going door to door. I should be canvassing. And I would kill myself. So how do you not do that?

**BRAKEY:** Well, thankfully I know there is so much help coming in to the campaign. That gives me a lot of — first of all, it encourages me to work all the harder knowing how many people are invested in what we're trying to do. But it really does help spread the workload around. We have so many resumes coming in from the liberty movement across the country, people who want to leave good, paying jobs with benefits to come work for a little bit of money just to try to be a part of this campaign and help advance the liberty movement. From other people we're getting contributions and offers to come up and work for free and volunteer. It's really encouraging. It's really promising. But you're right, it is a very, very big endeavor.

And thankfully, I will say in the state of Maine, we are a small state, population-wise. This is a really great opportunity for the liberty movement, because it doesn't take a lot to have an impact in a small state like Maine. You try to win a U.S. Senate seat in California or Texas or New York, one of these really big states, you might as well be spitting into the ocean. But you put hard work and energy and financial support into a small state like Maine, you can have a much bigger impact. In fact, that's what liberal progressives have been doing in our state for generations. They've made our state kind of a Petri dish for all of the liberal ideology. You'll see a liberal policy proposal roll out here first and then you see it roll out across the country. This is a great opportunity for the conservative movement and the liberty movement to really push back against that and make an impact here. One U.S. Senate seat in Maine counts as much as a U.S. Senate seat in New York or California or Texas, but we can have a much bigger impact in a small state like Maine.

**WOODS:** Has anyone else announced for the seat yet?

**BRAKEY:** Not yet. We'll see how things go. I think a lot of people are getting into the race to run for governor because that's going to be an open seat. I figured I would — I figured the best role I could play for the liberty movement right now was to take on this challenge for the U.S. Senate.

**WOODS:** How's he been on foreign policy? How did he feel about the Syria action, for example?

**BRAKEY:** Oh, he's been terrible.

**WOODS:** Really?

**BRAKEY:** Yeah, I mean, he's — it's the same old, same old moderate — John McCain-style moderate, or — I'm trying to think of the best words for it. So he's been very anti-Trump, which, you know, I have my own disagreements with the president. But then when Donald Trump goes to do a military strike in Syria that's unconstitutional and against all his campaign promises, suddenly he's out in support of it and says that this was smart. It's very discouraging and it seems like — I don't know. Any time someone says — or what's the rule that you — was it Woods' Law? Whenever a politician promises good things, they're inevitably going to forget that they ever promised that.

**WOODS:** Oh, let me just — just for the record, it's Horton's Law, and it's that when a politician makes some good promises and some bad promises, he'll forget the good ones and keep all the bad ones. So don't do that. Let me say this — let's get this on the record right now. If you actually were to win and go to Washington as a U.S. Senator, I want to make certain that you are not going to get there and say, You know, now that I'm here and I can see the whole bird's eye view of everything, I realize that I had naive views when I was but a lad. If you do that, we're coming to smack you in the face. You got that?

**BRAKEY:** If that ever happens, do me a favor and get me out of there. At that point, what's the point of being there? You might as well send someone else up to waste their life up there.

**WOODS:** All right, all right. Because I thought the public sent an America First guy into the White House. We saw how that turned out. So you know, come on [laughing]. Somebody's got to get up there and say this has not done us any good. What possible metric are you looking at by which you say, Boy, this has sure been a great strategy. Let's keep doing this." Who? What? Why? How? Ugh, I'm preaching to the choir here, but I'm just afraid that maybe — it's not meant to offend you in particular, but it just seems like a lot of people in the choir, when they graduate to this higher choir, it's like they change religions.

**BRAKEY:** I've noticed that, too, and it's very frustrating. And it seems like — you know, I've seen that on the state level too. Obviously on the state level we don't deal with foreign policy so much, but it seems like we elect so many people to office who don't have a political compass. They ran for office because someone told them, You're well known, you're well known in the community, people like you, you could get elected. And so they say, Okay, great, I'll run and I'll get elected. And they do, and invariably they get there, but they don't know the proper role of government. They don't know the Constitution. They don't know what government should or shouldn't be doing, and so the political currents just pull them along. And the political currents are what leadership and special interests suggest we should be doing, and since they don't know better, they go along with it. And that's how we see the status quo just continue on its merry way, despite the fact that we can all see the results. We can all see that regime change in Iraq and in Libya has led to disaster. We can see that, and yet we can't learn the lesson, we can't buy with Syria, and we can't learn to just leave well enough alone and mind our own business.

**WOODS:** Well, tell people how they can find — obviously I'll link at TomWoods.com/895 to anything you want me to link to, but how do people find out what you're up to?

**BRAKEY:** You can go to BrakeyforSenate.com. You can find out more there, see our announcement video. You can follow me on Facebook at Eric Brakey for U.S. Senate. And yeah, just follow what's going on. This campaign's going to be going on over the course of the next year and a half, and it's hopefully going to be an exciting opportunity for the liberty movement.

**WOODS:** Let me ask one other thing. This is an off-year election, which I would think maybe slightly helps you, because —

**BRAKEY:** Well —

**WOODS:** Or what's your analysis of that? I think it slightly helps you.

**BRAKEY:** Well, it'll actually — so it'll be in 2018, so you mean off-year in terms of non-presidential year?

**WOODS:** Non-presidential, yeah.

**BRAKEY:** Yeah. You know, historically in the state of Maine, we've tended to lean more to the right on non-presidential years and more to the left on presidential years, so I would give — I would imagine that would give a Republican challenger a slight advantage.

**WOODS:** But I think also somebody who has at least a core of a following that's ideological who would just want to get out there and vote for you, they're going to be much more likely to be paying attention to politics in an off year. So I think on balance, there's a slight advantage to you.

**BRAKEY:** Yeah, I certainly think so. You know, the liberty message can turn people out to vote who don't typically come out to vote. Where you might get a lot of people just coming out to vote on a presidential year because of who the presidential races are and they're voting straight party ticket down the ballot, we're not going to see those people coming out in a non-presidential year. But we can see — the liberty message can pull out a lot of Independents and people who don't typically vote to come on board and help us out, so I'm certainly counting on that.

**WOODS:** Now, the population of Maine is something like 1.3 million. At least that was the latest figure; it might be slightly higher. But it's somewhere around there. Obviously not all those people are even registered to vote, so I don't even know what the size of the vote is. First of all, you presumably have to get through a primary. Let's assume you get through that. Then have you thought through how many people do I actually need — forget about how many people live in Maine. How many people do I need to win this thing?

**BRAKEY:** Well, I don't have those numbers right in front of me, but I will say Maine is unique in that we historically, at least the last few cycles, we've had among the highest voter turnout in the country.

**WOODS:** Really?

**BRAKEY:** I think a large part of that is because we skew a lot older in terms of our population. We're one of the oldest states in the country, and I think the older you are, the more likely you are to vote. But these last few cycles in particular, the more right-leaning — we've seen historically high voter turnout, and each time — you know, I've been standing there at the polls for my own race, shaking hands with people, seeing all the folks turn out, and it seems like always the folks watching the polls on the left say, "Yeah, this is really high voter turnout; this is really good for us," and then the Republican Party has won.

So something is happening in Maine where we're not just seeing really high voter turnout, but we're seeing people who typically haven't voted who would vote on the right but just have felt so disenfranchised that they're coming out. I think a large part of that is because we've had so many initiatives from anti-gun folks trying to put gun control measures on the ballot or anti-sportsman measures on the ballot. And I'm sure they're not done anytime soon. But we have people coming out on the right who don't typically vote, and I think a lot of these people are the "leave me alone" type. That's why they don't typically vote. They just want to be left alone, and I think the liberty message is particularly appealing to those sorts of folks.

**WOODS:** All right, well, best of luck to you. The links you mentioned will be up at TomWoods.com/895, and thanks for chatting.

**BRAKEY:** Thank you, Tom.