

# Distractions on the Road to Freedom; or, What Would Harry Browne Do?

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When I joined the Libertarian Party, I did not know just how much in-fighting I would encounter. It really is surprising. I mean, here we are, the smartest people on the whole planet...you'd at least think we'd *agree* with each other! But, of course, we do not. And we'll fight about just anything, no matter how pointless it may be. I have even had arguments with fellow libertarians—no joke—on who makes the better pizza! (I have a lot of difficulty convincing people I'm right on that one, sadly.)

Yes, we argue with one another, and I'll admit it, it can usually be fun. Why? Because we have mutual respect for one another. We know, at the end of the day, that we really are in agreement about a lot. It's only when we let these small disagreements get the best of us, when we let it distract us from our mission to limit the size, scope, and cost of government that there is a problem. In other words, there are distractions on the road to freedom.

Currently, and unfortunately, it seems that many of us really are losing sight of what binds us together. Last night, I listened to Harry Browne's 1996 speech accepting the nomination of the Libertarian Party.<sup>1</sup> It's an amazing speech, and nobody could have delivered it but Mr. Browne.

Indeed, I credit Mr. Browne with turning me into a libertarian. Sure, I always had a bit of a libertarian streak, but after thirteen straight years of government indoctrination, I left high school as a typical "public school intellectual." I knew nothing about American history, I thought *laissez faire* was code-word for exploitation, and—would you believe it—I definitely "knew" teachers were under-paid.<sup>2</sup>

**“We need a party that will champion these issues, and if ours doesn't, whose will?”**

Harry Browne educated me as much as he inspired me. Listening again to his 1996 speech, I am shocked that this man did not win the election in a land-slide. Among other things, he called for getting rid of the FBI, the DEA, the BATF; he called for ending asset forfeiture and the insane war on drugs; he made it clear he would pardon anyone convicted of federal, non-violent victimless "crimes." Does the federal government have authority to be involved in education? In transportation? In healthcare? Absolutely not.

If Mr. Browne were alive today, he would be telling us all that we still need to focus on these areas, to focus on getting Big Government off of our backs. He would tell us how Social Security is nothing more than a Ponzi scheme that hurts our elderly while stealing from our futures. He would tell us how

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<sup>1</sup> [mms://www.harrybrowne.org/harrybrowne/Acceptance 1996, 96-07-06.mp3](mms://www.harrybrowne.org/harrybrowne/Acceptance%201996,96-07-06.mp3)

[ftp://radio.harrybrowne.org/Acceptance 1996, 96-07-06.mp3](ftp://radio.harrybrowne.org/Acceptance%201996,96-07-06.mp3)

<sup>2</sup> I no longer have an opinion either way on the matter, other than, of course, to say that we need a separation of school and state, and everything that entails.

the income tax deprives the average family of ten thousand dollars a year—money that surely they can put to good use, for example helping to get their children into better schools. And, of course, he would tell us that our most important focus would be on ending the unnecessary and evil war in Iraq. Not only must we bring the troops home from Iraq, but from Bosnia, and from South Korea, and Germany, and so on and so on.

These are the issues Mr. Browne would want us to focus on, and I couldn't agree more. There are various issues out there about which libertarians can have reasonable disagreements with one another, but we have far more that unite us than divides us. That's why Mr. Browne would often comment that he himself would be sure to raise the money to rent out some venue at which we could debate to our heart's delight, just as soon as we cut the size of the federal government drastically.

On September 7, 2004, Mr. Browne wrote,

It seems to me that a lot of time is wasted by libertarians who argue whether it's possible to have a society without any government at all.

What's the point?

Right now, we're \$2.3 trillion away from no government, and about \$2.2 trillion away from limited government.

That means that until we trim \$2.2 trillion from the federal budget, the issue of limited government vs. anarchy is moot. I can only presume that both sides would be pleased as punch (and then some) to reduce the federal government by \$2.2 trillion. So that's what we all should be working toward as the first goal.

If we can get the federal government down to \$100 billion, I'll lead a drive to raise the money necessary to rent the New Orleans SuperDome for three months — so we can all get together and argue over how much further the federal government should be reduced.

Those who want no government at all can continue working to reduce the size of government. Those who want limited government can fight to keep the federal government at \$100 billion — or work to reduce it slightly more — or even work to increase it slightly.

But none of it is relevant until we reduce the government dramatically from where it is now.

As to the question of whether a society without government is possible, today we try to answer it with limited knowledge. If we can ever make government very small, we will undoubtedly find that plenty of people — people with more creativity and imagination than we have — will find it profitable to devise ways to do things privately and voluntarily that today seem possible only through government. Until those creative people have an incentive to put their minds to the question, we're contemplating the issue without knowing all the possibilities.

But so what? The question is moot.

In the meantime, there are two things we know for sure:

- Government is force, and we want to reduce the use of force to the absolute minimum.
- Government doesn't work, and so we want to remove as many activities as possible from government.

And no matter which side of the limited government vs. anarchy you're on, when someone asks you what size libertarians think the government should be, you can answer:

“Libertarians want to reduce government to the absolute minimum possible, and we can't really know what size that is until we get there.

“In the meantime, don't you agree that government is way too big, way too powerful, way too intrusive, and way too expensive?

“If so, please help us reduce it to the absolute minimum possible.”

Recently, some of the issues about which libertarians can hold reasonable disagreements with one another have become all too important in the eyes of some of our activists. Perhaps this is in a way good, as a sign that we really are a passionate bunch. But I fear, as Mr. Browne did, that we may let our differences divide us.

I have even heard rumours that the Libertarian National Committee (LNC) may be considering whether or not to pass resolutions on some of these more thorny issues. Which ones, if any, only the LNC can know for sure; but I surely hope the LNC does not make any rash decisions. So, I must beg the question, What Would Harry Browne Do?

Of course, I don't presume to know where Mr. Browne stood on all of these issues. To be frank, I'm not even positive where *I* stand on all of them. But it seems reasonable to me that Mr. Browne would not support any effort that he would believe would distract us on our road to freedom. And why not? With people dying in unnecessary wars and with all the other problems caused by Big Government, we need a party—now more than ever—that will stand up on *these dire issues*.

**Browne: Government is good at one thing, it knows how to break your legs, hand you crutches, and say, “See, if it weren't for the government, you wouldn't be able to walk!”**

As one Libertarian candidate pointed out during a debate that I listened to this weekend on YouTube, if we get the government out of healthcare, healthcare costs would drop down to about one-fifth what they are now.<sup>3</sup> As another pointed out, the Federal Reserve, by pumping out ever more units of currency into the economy, is destroying the value of the dollar. As yet a third candidate mentioned, an unnecessary war is raging and the Democrats refuse to do anything to stop it.

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<sup>3</sup> The end of Part 4 (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=q8IeNF9bNEA>) and beginning of Part 5 (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=XYXCgnmWp4Q>)—unfortunately, the number four stops in mid-sentence. It's very good when we have statistics, such as this, to present to the American people. This spot in the debate reminded me, more than any other, of Harry Browne. Watch the whole debate, starting with Part 1, here (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=SMXcdocBVaM>).

Debating is good, and debating is fun, but let us be careful to maintain our mutual respect, because we need to stick together if we're ever to dramatically slash the cost, size, and scope of government. We need a party that will champion these issues, and if ours doesn't, whose will? What Would Harry Browne Do?

Mr. Browne, you will always be my president.

God bless you, Harry Browne. God bless you.