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2,000 libertarians meet in the USA to discuss: 'Are We Entering a Brave New World?'

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The theme of this year's FreedomFest, which took place last week in Las Vegas, was: "Are We Entering a Brave New World?"

"Although written in the early 1930s, the storyline of Aldous Huxley's book 'Brave New World' fits the modern-day world in many ways", said the economist and initiator of FreedomFest Mark Skousen. "There is constantly pressure to conform, to achieve stability and security at the expense of freedom and independence. Everyone must be happy or else! In the novel, the people of the world have become fully indoctrinated from birth, regimented and sedated with the drug soma. Those who oppose this 'Brave New World' are shipped off to Iceland or another far away outpost." Huxley described it as "a place where you meet the most interesting set of men and women to be found anywhere in the world. All the people, who for one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community life. All the people who aren't satisfied with orthodoxy, who've got independent ideas of their own. Everyone, in a word, who's anyone." Skousen: "Where is this bastion of intellectuals and free thinkers today? At FreedomFest!"

The central theme of the world's largest libertarian event, which brought together over 2,000 participants, was the erosion of economic and intellectual freedoms. At 120 degrees Fahrenheit, the outside temperature was unbearable even for a heat lover like me, prompting one speaker to remind us what we would be without air conditioning – the event couldn't have taken place at all.

There were many distinguished speakers, including Steve Forbes, editor-in-chief of Forbes magazine, and Harvard scientist Steven Pinker, who spoke on “Human Rationality and Academic Freedom.” Academic freedom is under threat due to massive politicization, said Pinker, even more so than in the McCarthy era. The following attacks on academic freedom were registered between 2014 and 2022:

- 877 attempts to punish scholars for constitutionally protected speech
- 114 incidents of censorship
- 156 firings (44 of them tenured professors)

The number of unreported cases is likely significantly higher. The politicization of science has resulted in a notable shift towards the left, as demonstrated by Pinker through the example of his own university. The political orientation of the Harvard Faculty 2022:

- 37.43 percent identified as “very liberal” (where “liberal” is synonymous with left-wing in the United States)
- 45.03 percent identified as “liberal”
- 16.08 percent identified as “moderate”
- 1.46 percent identified as “conservative” or “very conservative”

Pinker reminded us of the foundations of academic freedom, namely the principles: “No one is infallible or omniscient. Intellectual progress is driven by conjecture and refutation: Some people propose ideas, others probe whether they are sound: In the long run, the better ideas prevail.” Any institution that disables this cycle is doomed to error, explained Pinker. Moreover, this undermines public trust in science: “Why should I trust the consensus, when it comes from a clique that allows no dissent?”

Justin Amash then made the point that fundamental rules necessary for the proper functioning of institutions are being increasingly violated in the United States.

Amash served as the

U.S. representative

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_House_of_Representatives)

for Michigan's 3rd congressional district from 2011 to 2021, left the GOP and became

an independent (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_politician) on July 4, 2019. In April 2020, he joined the Libertarian Party ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libertarian_Party_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libertarian_Party_(United_States))), leaving Congress in January 2021 as the only Libertarian to serve in Congress. He garnered national attention when he became the first Republican congressman to call for the impeachment of Donald Trump (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_impeachment_of_Donald_Trump), a position he maintained after leaving the party.

Amash criticized the lack of respect for Congress: "We sometimes received bills with up to 5,000 pages and were supposed to read them in one day. I refused to vote on any bill if I couldn't read it before the vote. In extreme cases, we were only given a few hours." Voters, Amash stressed, should not only consider a candidate's policies, they should also weigh up whether they are committed to upholding the fundamental processes outlined in the constitution.

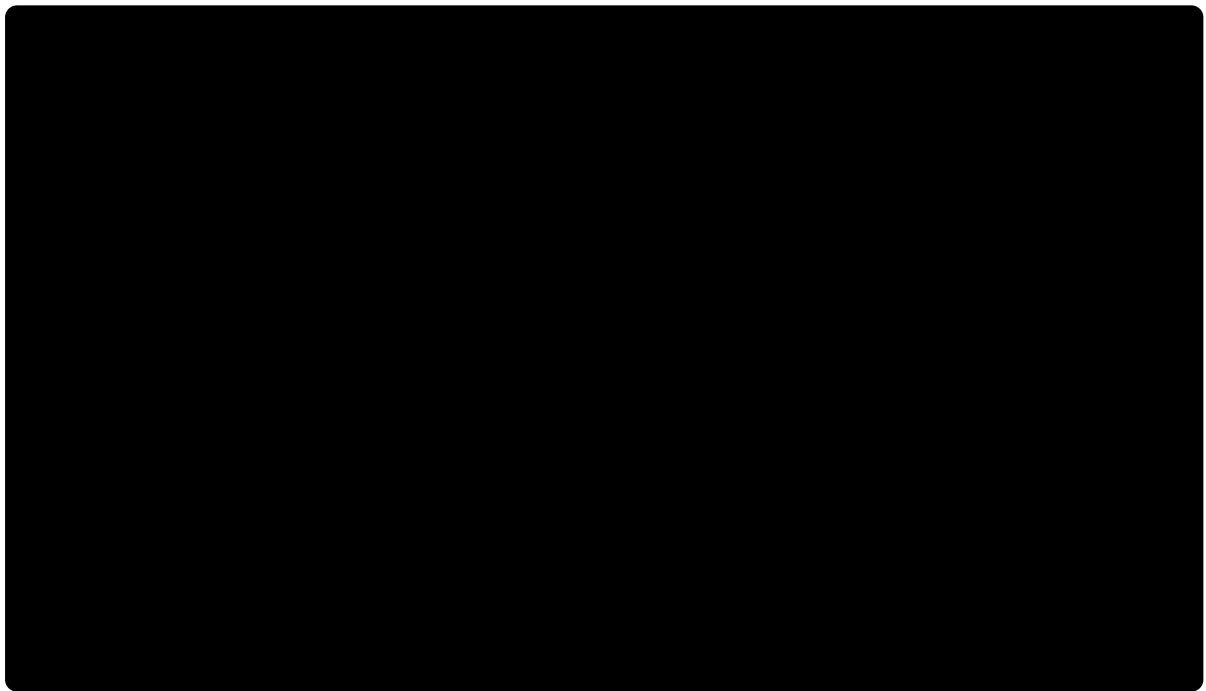
It is not only academic and political freedom, but above all economic freedom in the United States is under threat from ever greater state interference in the economy, rampant bureaucracy, and an almost insane orgy of debt. Steve Forbes spoke of "modern socialism," which differs from classic socialism in that companies are no longer formally nationalized, but the state increasingly determines what is produced, leading to a hollowing out of private property rights.

Whole Foods founder John Mackey presented his new book *The Whole Story: Adventures in Love, Life, and Capitalism*. "It is all fun and games until bureaucrats get involved," is how he characterizes his entrepreneurial experiences.

Representatives of minor parties and independent candidates were also given the opportunity to speak at FreedomFest, including Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Green Party representative Jill Stein, Chase Oliver from the Libertarian Party and Randall Terry from the religious Constitution Party. Their presidential debates were far less heated than the Biden-Trump showdown that could be seen on television at the end of June. I would not vote for any of these small parties or candidates, however, if only

because of their pacifism and isolationism. Pacifism is very prevalent among libertarians in the United States, and accordingly many representatives refused to support Ukraine. "How can you be pro-freedom and not support Ukraine in its fight for freedom against Russian imperialism?" I asked Steve Forbes, who said he felt the same way I did. But at FreedomFest, it was apparent that speakers promoting pacifist beliefs received a lot of applause.

Mark Skousen has successfully curated an event where you can meet many great and interesting people, such as George Gilder, Grover Norquist (Americans for Tax Reform), Nick Gillespie (Reason), John Fund (National Review), Michael Shellenberger, Gale Pooley (Cato Institute), Marian Tupy, as well as libertarian activists Ken and Li Schoolland, and many more besides. This was my third time at FreedomFest and I will definitely be back next time.



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