



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 3, 2011

## Conservative Conference in Ohio Boasts High Attendance

Columbus, Ohio hosted the first We the People Convention this weekend, attracting nearly one thousand pro-liberty, anti-Obama and anti-establishment guests. The event boasted an array of prominent speakers, including Republican hopeful Herman Cain, former Democratic strategist Dick Morris, and John Birch Society President John McManus. According to the event's website, the event's purpose was to "educate and train citizens about the political process and to encourage involvement in that process at the grassroots level." For two days, from July 1 to July 2, the convention hosted educational breakout sessions that included a wide range of conservative speakers.



As [noted](#) by Ohio's *The Daily Record*, the event marked one of the first time conservatives and constitutionalists gathered statewide in one place.

The convention was organized by Ohio businessman Tom Zawitsowski, who said "This event is for citizens who are concerned about Ohio and our country and want to learn what they can personally do to make things better." He adds, "This event is an educational event. That's the core function of it." Emphasizing what is of prime importance, Zawitsowski explained that social issues will be avoided. "Our movement is about conservatism — fiscal conservatism," he said.

And they were. Still, avoiding social issues seemed to have little impact on the selection of activities taking place at the event. Guests were provided a number of [options](#) while at the convention, with 45 workshops from which to choose, including "So you want to run for office" to "History of Taxation in America" to "2010 Health Care Reform-Repeal." The panels were categorized into eight sections including state, local, and national issues, as well as leadership candidates and advocates. There was virtually a category to meet every guest's needs.

The event kicked off on Friday morning with a riveting welcome presentation and a variety of breakout sessions. It continued on Friday afternoon with a luncheon wherein [Jenny Beth Martin](#) of the Tea Party Patriots energized the audience on the need to serve as activists for fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government and free markets. Martin was unafraid to target Republicans that she asserts have been too willing to compromise with Democrats, most notably those who worked on negotiations last December with President Obama and Democrats, a move she dubbed "the wrong move."

"The Republicans didn't live up to their promises, and I didn't hold them accountable," said Martin, who emphasized the dangers of blind loyalty to a political party.

"Just because they have an 'R' next to their name doesn't give them a free ride," Martin declared to loud applause.



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Martin was particularly tough on House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio, particularly for his inability to live up to the promise of cutting \$100 billion from the budget. She even compared Boehner's budget maneuvers to those employed by former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi during the healthcare debate.

"What does Speaker Boehner do? He goes into a back room with Reid and President Obama and makes some more deals," Martin said.

Likewise, Martin told audiences about petitions being circulated throughout Ohio that have garnered 425 thousand signatures. The petition would give Ohioans the chance to vote on whether they want to buy into the new health care law. If the signatures are accepted by the Ohio Secretary of State, it will put the issue on the November General Election ballot, explained Martin.

Both Marin and Zawistowski also discussed a separate ballot referendum backed by union groups to repeal Senate Bill 5, the controversial new law changing collective bargaining for public employees.

Guests had a number of choices for how to spend their day. One workshop, entitled "Business Recovery in Ohio: The Path to Invigorate Ohio," was led by Ohio University conservative economist Richard Vedder, who told attendees "Ohio needs to clean house." At the workshop, Vedder articulated an interest in a constitutional convention that would modernize Ohio's constitution. A bill on the subject has been introduced by House Speaker William Batchelder has already been approved in Ohio's House and Senate and sent to Governor John Kasich.

JBS President John McManus presided over a number of panels, including one on the viability of the Federal Reserve. Regarding the Federal Reserve, McManus asserts, "It has presided over the loss of more than 95 percent of the value of the U.S. currency. A huge percentage of the wealth of the people has been confiscated through the inflationary practices carried out by the Fed."

Moderated by Linda Bowyer, Associate Professor of Finance at the University of Toledo, the panel also featured Mike Sullivan, founder of Wealth Coach Financial Services, Inc., and Bob Wagner, portfolio manager who taught finance at Ohio Wesleyan and Microeconomics at Ohio State University.

McManus also spoke at a panel discussion on the internationalist policy group, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the devastating impact it has had on liberty. On Saturday, McManus sat on a panel that "exposed the Neocon agenda," where he detailed the negative impact that neoconservatives have had on the conservative movement and how they have helped move conservatism away from principles of limited government.

Much of the focus at the convention was how to utilize grassroots activism. Zawistowski told a session of 50 people gathered to learn about [setting up](#) a Tea Party group, "We are not some wacko outsiders- we are just like you."

Zawistowski, who organized the *We the People* convention, also runs a Tea Party group that boasts 2,100 members.

According to Zawistowski, the most important element of creating a Tea Party group is to make a presence within the community. "Make yourself part of the community," said Zawistowski. "Your goal is getting your community to trust you."

Glenn Newman, founder of the Marietta 9-12 Project in 2009, said that the convention is a good indicator of the maturation of the Tea Party movement.

"We are becoming networked, and we don't feel alone," he said.



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Other notable speakers included Warren Edstrom, co-founder of Voices for America, who focused on precinct organization, *Wall Street Journal* columnist John Fund, the Heritage Foundation's Matthew Spalding, who gave a history lesson on the Founding Fathers, and Anita MonCrief, whistleblower for ACORN/Project Vote. MonCrief appeared as an expert on combating voter fraud.

The keynote address at the event was delivered by GOP presidential hopeful [Herman Cain](#), a self-proclaimed fiscal conservative. Cain spoke on his presidential run, and asserted that he does not have a "segmentation strategy," hoping instead to appeal to the broader electorate.

"If you tell people the truth and you share realistic ideas about how you're going to solve problems, it transcends one voter segment against another segment," he said.

Most attendees spoke favorably about Cain and his address, though one admitted that she was disappointed to learn Cain had canceled on a panel discussion on the role of the Federal Reserve.

In addition to speakers of all backgrounds, a number of special interest groups gathered at the convention, including the Heritage Foundation, School Choice Ohio, The John Birch Society, Buckeye Firearms Association, and the Libertarian Party of Ohio, among dozens of others.

Overall, the event proved to be largely successful and may prove to be the shot of adrenaline that the attending conservative needed to further engage in grassroots activism and lead the next conservative revolution.

As noted by Spalding, "American history is made up of turning points. This is a turning point."



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