

Gatewood: More than the Ky. Fried Candidate

A Kentucky folk hero has passed. For 20 years, Lexington attorney and activist Gatewood Galbraith served as an also-ran in statewide races. Earning a cult following of independent voters while annoying the establishment, Gatewood always made election season interesting.

Since his first quest for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1991, Galbraith served as the poster boy for opposing government intrusion on civil liberties and for his chief goal: legalizing marijuana. One of his early fundraisers, an outdoor music festival, was billed as "Gatewoodstock." His chief endorsement came from Willie Nelson.

A native of the Bluegrass and a fixture around the University of Kentucky campus for years, onlookers could spot Gatewood from afar by his tall, lanky frame, signature hat, and friendly demeanor. I first encountered him outside the Kentucky Theater on Lexington's Main Street when he asked me to sign his petition to get on the ballot. I declined.

Over the following election cycles I watched this man develop a following that made him the champion of Kentucky's so-called freedom fighters from pot-heads to militia groups. He also became the hope for that slice of the electorate that sought an alternative to frustrating partisanship.

He became synonymous with legalization, but expanded his platform to include additional issues like a freeze on college tuition prices and mountaintop removal.

Gatewood would surely reject a label, but he followed libertarian principles. He rambled on at rallies he wanted to "Take the government and the police out of your bedroom and your blood-



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streams and your brains and your bladders your billfolds and your back pockets and put 'em back into a little box where they belong."

He claimed he was Tea Party before Tea Party was cool.

His propensity to grab the spotlight landed him a brief comedy gig, a Lexington radio show, and a trip to jail when he blocked a 4th of July parade. The mayor had put the UN float ahead of the USA float.

In this last quest for the governor's office, he embraced the slogan, "A Perennial Candidate for Perennial Problems." I had the occasion to meet and talk with him last October. One could tell he had weathered more than a few rough campaigns. His autobiography, "The Last Free Man in America," entertainingly recounts his travails across the country, his attempts to pass the state bar exam, and a variety of other risks. The airlines would have charged a fee for the bags under his eyes. But I, like anyone who paid attention to Gatewood, soon found a considerate, intelligent, articulate, and determined man who cared about the commonwealth. He was more than a distraction in Kentucky politics. He challenged the status quo. He provided comic relief to campaigns.

He will be missed, more than every four years. Gatewood was more than the Kentucky Fried Candidate.

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