

LIBERTY PLEDGE

NEWSLETTER

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Gary Johnson: Standing Still on a Downward Escalator

Written by Gary Johnson
From The Huffington Post

When I announced my candidacy for president in the spring of 2011, I did so as a Republican. It made sense at the time. After all, I had served two reasonably successful terms as a Republican governor of New Mexico, a 2-1 Democrat state that also happens to be the most Hispanic state in the Union. On pocketbook issues of taxes, spending and job creation, my credentials were strong.

Though my record on fiscal issues is as conservative as it gets — I vetoed more bills than probably all the other governors combined, cut taxes at every opportunity, and balanced the budget — my positions on Republican litmus-test issues didn't exactly endear me to the powers-that-be in the party of so-called "values."

I didn't proclaim that gay marriage is a threat to society, as we know it. I actually believe a woman should make her own decisions about her body. I don't even support capital punishment, having come to the shocking realization that government makes mistakes — lots of them. On top of all that, I came into the campaign having long advocated an end to the failed prohibition of marijuana. On immigration, I foolishly refused to engage in the rhetorical contest of "who will build the biggest fence" and put the most guns on the border.

On foreign affairs, I even had the audacity to say that we shouldn't be fighting wars we can neither afford nor justify, and that national defense should actually be defense, not offense. We shouldn't be attacking unless we are attacked. I was the skunk at the picnic.

After being excluded from the all-important Republican debates — and even the polls used to determine who was invited to those debates — it became obvious that the nomination picnic didn't have room for such a skunk. With eyes wide open about the challenges of mounting a "third party" campaign, I decided to cease my campaign for the Republican nomination and run instead as a Libertarian. Why?

I felt strongly, and still feel strongly, that a sizable chunk of the American electorate shares my fiscally conservative, socially accepting view of truly smaller government. And I wanted to do everything possible to give voice to that view, knowing that neither the Democrat nor the Republican nominee would do so.

While doing and saying all this, on the key issues of the economy and war, the GOP managed to conduct an entire campaign without demonstrating enough difference with President Obama to compel anyone's vote one way or the other. "Debating" which decade in which we might expect a balanced budget and simply putting a slightly different wrapper on the same foreign policies obviously didn't cut it as real challenges to business-as-usual.

Libertarian Party in the News

Libertarians Should NOT Vote Republican (or Democrat)

Written by Dan Bier and David Bier
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The Skeptical Libertarian

The Wall Street Journal has published an article on what has now become a distinct genre in political journalism: why libertarians should vote Republican. Normally these articles warrant no rebuttal, amounting to little more than hysteria about “Obama-the-Socialist,” but this piece was written by Georgetown Law Professor Randy Barnett, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. He defended the medical marijuana patient in the Supreme Court case *Gonzalez v. Raich* and was the primary architect of the legal challenges to Obamacare.

Randy Barnett is a serious libertarian intellectual, but his argument against voting his principles is unsound. He notes that our first-past-the-post, winner-take-all system directs each party to advocate moderate policies relative to the base of the party. It’s why politicians “rush to the center” after primaries—they know they need voters in the center, not the extreme. But then Barnett states, “To the extent that a third party is successful, it will drain votes from the coalition party to which it is closest and help elect the coalition party that is further removed from its interests.”

But his conclusion—that libertarians should *abandon* the Libertarian Party—simply does not follow from his premises. If it’s true that our system encourages the two parties to ignore the [principled] elements of their bases, why should libertarians want to join that club? Libertarians, by definition, advocate policies that are more [principled] than their nearest counterparts in either major party.

The Libertarian Party *does* drain votes from the party closest to them, and in theory, that is the Republican Party, which supposedly stands for libertarian values: individual liberty, personal responsibility, and limited government. But these facts lead to the exact opposite conclusion: that in order to be taken seriously by the GOP, libertarians must break away in large enough numbers to constitute a substantial electoral threat.

Libertarians should *want* to drain votes from the party that claims to value individual liberty in order to punish them for nominating candidates and pursuing policies that consistently and aggressively violate that principle. If Republicans can simply continue taking the libertarian vote for granted, as they have, the GOP will wind up with candidates like Mitt Romney, John McCain, Bob Dole, and the Bushes.

Consider how Mitt Romney started treating Latino voters after he secured the Republican nomination. He lied, obscured, and outright reversed his previous positions in an effort to regain the Hispanic vote. He promised not to deport them. He fell over himself in a desperate attempt to garner their support. Why? Because he knows they might vote Democrat, or not at all. George W. Bush endorsed an immigration reform plan specifically because it would be good for his party.

If libertarians vote third party in large enough numbers—even one percent of the vote in key states—Republicans may actually start making concessions in our direction as well. This isn’t just hypothetical. Consider Barnett’s article itself, and the dozens of others that have been published in the last few months begging libertarians to vote for Romney. Can you imagine this [level of LP attention] in 1996, 2000, or 2004?

Libertarians are receiving unprecedented attention from Republicans *because* they have publicly broken from the mainstream Republican Party. Before 2004, the socially-tolerant, fiscally conservative vote went to the GOP every election. But their 2004 attempt to punish Bush failed because by voting for Kerry, the GOP never saw who they lost. To consolidate libertarians as a clear electoral threat, it took Ron Paul uniting these voters as a distinct force in 2008 and the Libertarian Party nominating a legitimate candidate in 2012, Gov. Gary Johnson, who came with strong executive experience and a libertarian record on both civil liberties and spending.

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Young Ron Paul Supporters Express Support for Gary Johnson

From Red Alert Politics

Libertarian candidate Gov. Gary Johnson seemed to be the choice of many. They seemed undeterred by suggestions that a vote for anyone other than Romney equals a vote for Obama as they exited the ballroom where Paul had just finished speaking.

“I’m voting for Gary Johnson because he is a better liberty candidate,” an LPAC attendee from VA who declined to give his name said. “I think it’s worth it long-term to continue to break the cycle of voting for people who aren’t pro-liberty.”

Sacramento-Calif.-native Kevin Duewel likewise indicated his excitement about voting for Gary Johnson, saying he was impressed by Johnson’s call during a side event at the Republican National Convention to “vote Libertarian just this once.”

“With all respects to Romney, I don’t see Obama as much worse,” Duewel said, noting that Obama and Romney are two sides of the same coin in his opinion. “For one, I don’t think Romney is going to win anyways.

“The energy in his [Romney’s] campaign alienated the Ron Paul folks, which means that I don’t think he’s going to have momentum or the agility to be able to pull anything off later in this campaign season now that he’s behind in the polls.”

Another attendee from Baltimore, Md., who simply identified himself as Alex said he plans on voting for Gary Johnson because Obama and Romney are, “pretty much the same person” in his view.

“I think Romney is very similar to Obama,” he said. “and I think Romney may even expand the wars even further than Obama; he seems very eager to bomb Iran, go into Syria and takedown the terrorists.

“It’s something that I’m not ready to stand for.”

While attendee Kyle Wagner said “...If Mitt Romney does not win, it’s his problem because he’s not been that attractive of a candidate.”

New and renewing Liberty Pledgers

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Libertarian Party in the News

From The Cover Story on Gary Johnson December 2012 issue of Reason Magazine

The 2012 LP ticket may be the strongest one yet. Two-term New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson and former Orange County, California, Superior Court Judge Jim Gray may not have the money of the Clark campaign, the devoted following of Paul, or the financial chops of Browne, but Johnson has statewide executive experience, something no previous candidate could claim.

Even though Johnson was running for president as a Republican as recently as December 2011, he has a strong libertarian resume as the first sitting governor to come out in favor of legalizing marijuana. (Gray, too, is well known as an early, risk-taking legalizer.) Although he has largely flown under the radar of the national political media, Johnson has been making the rounds on cable news and talk radio for the last three years, and running under a memorable campaign slogan: “Be Libertarian With Me Just This One Time.” The LP convention whisked Johnson and Gray through the party’s nominating process with hardly any fuss.

The country, meanwhile, has only gotten more receptive to libertarian ideas since 2008, a trend made manifest by the populist anti-government Tea Party movement. Ron Paul made a strong showing in the 2012 GOP nominating process, garnering almost twice as much support as he did in the 2008 contest. A bruising round of rules fights at the Republican National Convention left many activists from Paul’s Revolution and the Tea Party searching for more ideologically simpatico places to park their enthusiasm.

Despite the upsurge in skepticism of government, both major parties continue to sell different flavors of deficit spending, foreign interventionism, and entitlement denialism. Johnson campaigns daily against all three. At press time the Libertarian party ticket was on the ballot in 47 states and the District of Columbia, more than in 2008.

While hoping for a 5 percent breakthrough, most Libertarians see Ed Clark’s 1 percent mark as the more realistic goal for Gary Johnson. “Certainly if we pass any of our past presidential vote totals, that will be growth,” says Carla Howell, executive director of the Libertarian National Committee. “Anything above that is gravy.”

Wes Benedict, former executive director of the Libertarian National Committee, says the goal in 2012 is looking “for improvement” over Bob Barr’s 523,000 votes. “I’d like to see us go significantly higher than that,” Benedict said in late August “I think Johnson will get more than 523,000. I would love to see a million, but that’s going to be tough.... Under 600,000 would be disappointing.”

LP Executive Director Howell is also bullish, particularly about the ways politics can reach people that policy wonkery cannot. “I think there’s many good ways to advance liberty,” she says. “Most of them are good, and there’s no reason we can’t do them all. The most important one in my book is campaigns, because that’s what expands the movement; that’s what brings awareness to more people, as opposed to some organizations that preach to the choir of people who are already convinced that we need a much smaller government... I am really looking forward to the years going forward.”

(continued from page 2)

Now Republican partisans are scared and rightly so. What the GOP has done to the brand of limited government is shameful, and it deserves repudiation, not blind support. When libertarians point to the last experiment with unified Republican rule under George Bush, Barnett has nothing to say except to assert that there is no other option. Blanket support is different from supporting *specific* Republicans. Officials, who are generally pro-liberty, like Ron Paul, Justin Amash, and other state and local representatives, deserve to be rewarded for their efforts. But closing your eyes and voting straight-ticket Republican won’t make this country any freer.

Even if Barnett is right that this is the most practical way to influence Republicans, libertarians should object, on moral grounds, to backing their nominee. If you vote for Mitt Romney or Barack Obama this election, you will be voting for a man who supports state-sponsored terrorism, undeclared executive wars, drone strikes on civilians, indefinite detention, secret prisons, warrantless searches, electronic spying, assassination of American citizens, torture, and the prosecution of whistleblowers who expose such depravities to the world. There are crimes you can stomach, but there are others that are so far outside the realm of human decency that a vote for a man who advocated them makes you culpable. If silence gives consent, a vote gives approval.