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## Libertarian ‘dream ticket’ in peril as Weld bombs in Orlando

**Party activists could reject the two-term Massachusetts governor as ‘Republican-lite’.**

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ORLANDO, Fla. — It was supposed to be a stroke of genius: Gary Johnson, the 2012 Libertarian nominee for president and the party’s leading contender in 2016, announced that William Weld, the two-term former Republican governor of Massachusetts, would serve as his running mate.

The idea was clear and appealing. The pair would comprise a powerful two-governor ticket just as the leading Democratic and Republican contenders, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, rate as historically unpopular. The hope was they could emerge as a true third-party alternative.

But here in the corridors of the Rosen Centre Hotel and Resort at the Libertarian National Convention in Orlando, it could all fall apart as anti-authoritarian Libertarian Party activists, loath to be defined as “Republican-lite,” are increasingly and loudly critical of Weld, who joined their party only weeks ago.

Johnson seems to sense his dream ticket could be in trouble. The former two-term governor of New Mexico was booed at a convention forum on Thursday for calling Weld “the original libertarian.”

“A big hurdle for us is surviving this weekend and being the nominees,” Johnson told POLITICO in an interview on Friday. “Anything is possible. Bill is the first one that recognizes that.”

Asked if he his reception was worrisome, Weld told POLITICO, “I wouldn’t use the word worrisome, but I would say the convention is highly unpredictable. And having two former Republican governors who were successful in blue states — who knows — that could turn out to be a negative in the minds of delegates. Stranger things have happened.”

While Johnson and Weld are trying to run as a ticket — they are handing out joint buttons and paraphernalia — the Libertarian Party convention actually picks their presidential and vice-presidential nominees separately. Delegates could select Johnson and then reject Weld.

And Weld did little to help himself at a Friday night vice-presidential debate in which he got a chilly reception from the hardcore audience of Libertarian true-believers. Asked who did more

damage to America — President Obama or President George W. Bush — Weld gave a classic politician answer. “I’d rate it a tie,” he said. He used the word “miasma” in his closing statement.

At one point, Weld said he would stay in the United Nations — an idea anathema to many in the crowd — and said that when people think of Libertarians they often think of “unattractive people” in their neighborhoods.

Weld advocated cutting taxes. One of his opponents yelled, “Taxation is theft!”

“He just didn’t make the case,” Will Tyler White, a delegate from Michigan, said of Weld.

“He showed that he was Republican-lite,” complained Jim Fulner, another Michigan delegate. “He didn’t mention a single Libertarian idea.”

A Texas delegate named Gary Johnson (no relation to the candidate), who sported a Johnson-Weld button, was concerned. “He just doesn’t seem to know the right thing to say in a Libertarian convention,” Johnson said.

“I realize the idea is he bring credibility on the national stage but it’s disappointing because he lacks the Libertarian pedigree,” Richard Schwarz, a delegate from Pennsylvania, said after the debate. “He was uninspiring and kind of dry ... I don’t think he’s going to win.”

Fulner went one step further. “Johnson may not win because of his endorsement of Weld,” he predicted. (Fulner is openly backing one of Johnson’s opponents.)

Johnson, as the 2012 standard-bearer, is still widely viewed as the heavy favorite at Sunday’s Libertarian nominating contest. But with nearly 1,000 delegates that pride themselves on their fierce independence, no one truly knows what will happen.

“The Libertarian Party is fully capable of rejecting a two-term governor with money for a party activist from Peoria,” said David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, the libertarian-leaning think tank, “and they’re fully capable of doing so to show that they’re not under the thumb of the man they just nominated.”

Sparks flew at a Thursday forum in which one of Johnson’s top challengers, Austin Petersen, who recently scored the endorsement of longtime Republican operative Mary Matalin, [challenged Johnson on his Weld pick](#): “In 2012, he didn’t endorse Ron Paul, he didn’t endorse you, he endorsed Mitt Romney. In 2016, he endorsed John Kasich. Why didn’t your VP pick endorse you?”

At Friday’s debate, one of Weld’s rivals for the vice presidential slot, Larry Sharpe, used his closing statement to appeal to the crowd’s anti-government instincts.

“Do you have to have government experience to be in government?” Sharpe asked.

“NO!” cheered the crowd.

“Do you believe that one Republican governor is no enough?” Sharpe went on. “One is enough and something else would help.”

Sharpe was the final candidate to speak. Weld never got a chance at a rebuttal.