



Is this the dawn of bake-me-a-cake libertarianism?

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The Libertarian Party just nominated two former governors, New Mexico's Gary Johnson for president and Massachusetts' Bill Weld for vice president, in a year when more voters than ever may look for a third choice.

But Johnson and Weld at times seem to be working hard to push away one particularly homeless voting bloc that could ally with Libertarians this year: social conservatives. From their rhetoric to their policy proposals, the Libertarian nominees seem to be running *against* conservatives more than *for* liberty.

Weld and Johnson held their first post-nomination joint interview on Tuesday, on liberal network MSNBC. "We've never bought into this anti-choice, anti-gay...sense of the Republican Party," Weld said, as his first comment to the national television audience.

The message was clear: *We don't need those backward Christian Right bozos as much we need as you MSNBCers.*

Johnson has sent similar signals, suggesting that his love of liberty is second to his revulsion to religion. In January, for instance, Johnson said he would make it a federal crime for women to wear the Burqa, the full-body covering worn by women in certain strains of Islam. Johnson recanted a day later, while continuing his warnings about the threat of Sharia — Islamic law — in the U.S.

This spring, Johnson pushed aside freedom of conscience. When asked in an Oregon about laws and lawsuits requiring caterers to participate in gay weddings, Johnson took the big-government side — for coerced baking in the name of gay rights. When later asked about this anti-liberty view, Johnson made the standard liberal conflation between selling off-the-shelf cupcakes to a gay customer (which is straight-up discrimination against a person) and refusal to participate in a ceremony (which is a freedom of conscience issue, a freedom of association issue, and often a free speech issue).

The dress-code libertarianism and bake-me-a-cake libertarianism Johnson has embraced isn't libertarianism at all — it's left-wing social engineering enforced at gunpoint. Coming from Johnson and Weld, it reeks of raw identity politics. The only consistent theme is that religious people are bad.

Johnson's quick reversal on his Burqa ban, and his logical fallacies and weird arguments on coerced baking suggest that he doesn't hold libertarianism as a principle — he is really just a social liberal and economic conservative, as he says. This is the heart of Weld's campaigning, too.

Maybe Weld and Johnson haven't been paying attention since they left office, and that's why they conflate "socially liberal" with libertarian. These days, it's not the conservatives trying to use government to enforce their morality. The Obama administration is trying to compel nuns to provide contraception for their staff. The ACLU is suing to force Catholic hospitals to abort babies. Gary Johnson's own state fined a Christian wedding photographer for refusing to participate in a gay wedding.

The "anti-choice" side in America today is usually the cultural Left.

At the very moment when social conservatives would be most open to libertarianism, though, the libertarian nominees are running against conservatives.

This puts Johnson and Weld at odds with the rest of libertarianism. The Cato Institute and the Reason Foundation both filed amicus briefs on behalf of Hobby Lobby, the Christian-owned store that objected to Obama's contraception mandate.

Even on abortion, Johnson and Weld could find common ground with social conservatives. The most libertarian GOP candidates in recent cycles — Rand Paul and Ron Paul — were both pro-lifers who pointed out that libertarianism doesn't preclude protecting babies from homicide. In fact, all the most free-market lawmakers are staunch pro-lifers. For instance, the three senators with the highest 2015 Club for Growth scores are Mike Lee, Ben Sasse and Marco Rubio. You have to go down to No. 48 on the Club's ranking to find a senator who's a legitimate moderate pro-lifer — all the top 47 are strong pro-lifers.

Social conservatives are homeless this election. They are also increasingly the victim of big-government culture wars. It won't come naturally to Johnson and Weld, but they could reach out to social conservatives this election. Such outreach would expand the coalition, and maybe help persuade some social conservatives that the fight today is mostly about limiting government's role in our lives.

Johnson and Weld just need to decide whether they are more dedicated to liberty or to identity politics.