

Gary Johnson optimistic about Libertarian nomination prospects, praises Weld

Richard Sincere

May 27, 2016

Former New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson was the Libertarian Party's presidential nominee in 2012 and he is looking to repeat that in 2016. In an exclusive interview today with the Charlottesville Libertarian Examiner at the Libertarian National Convention in Orlando, Johnson praised his proposed running mate, former Massachusetts Governor William Weld, and talked about his appeal to both conservatives and liberals, and raised the prospect of being invited to the presidential debates this fall.

Asked about his expectations for the convention this weekend, Johnson stated flatly: "I hope to be the Libertarian nominee for president, and I hope the Libertarian Party chooses Bill Weld as the vice presidential candidate. I really believe that we have an opportunity here to actually get elected."

He explained that he and Weld came together based on a common bond forged in the 1990s, when both were serving as governors of their respective states.

'Smartest guy in the room'

"I connected with Bill Weld when I first became governor" of New Mexico, he said, explaining that they met at his first meeting of the National Governors Association.

At that time, he said, Weld had the reputation of being the smartest guy in the room. When he got to the NGA meeting, Johnson said, "Yeah, he was the smartest guy in the room but along with being the smartest guy in the room, he was classy, and classy was based on humility."

Becoming ticket-mates for the Libertarian presidential campaign "didn't involve a sales pitch on my part," Johnson said, adding that Weld "was really enthusiastic. The intention here is to actually be a team. He doesn't want a staff as Vice President of the United States because staffs divide people. I think that speaks volumes about what the two of us can accomplish."

Noting that the libertarian Cato Institute had rated both him and Weld highly on their "report cards" of the nation's governors, Johnson said "That's what we are carrying forward: I mean, genuine libertarian representation, fiscally conservative, socially liberal. These have been our careers, both of us."

Remembering their years as governors of New Mexico and Massachusetts, he added that “for me, I always tried to emulate Bill Weld. Bill Weld was on a pedestal for me.”

It was, Johnson said, “Beyond my wildest dreams, [that] Bill Weld be a part of this ticket, running for President of the United States. I just hope we emerge from the weekend with this intact,” with the vote of the convention’s delegates approving the two as a ticket.

Asked what voters he and Weld will be aiming at in the general election campaign against Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Hillary Clinton, Johnson said that “by ‘aiming at,’ I think there will be enough attention given to us that, given the message, and given the experience, this is going to be more of a phenomenon of people just understanding what it is that we represent, and I think that it has absolutely broad-based appeal.”

Siding with Bernie

He pointed out that, when he takes the quiz at ISideWith.com, aside from the other candidates for the Libertarian nomination, he is closest to Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

“I side with Bernie 73 percent of the time,” Johnson said, pointing out that “those same Bernie Sanders supporters are going to find the reverse being true. They’re going to find themselves philosophically siding with me more than they do Hillary Clinton.” He conceded, however, that “when it comes to Bernie, look, we agree on so much but when it comes to economics we get to a ‘T’ in the road: he goes one way, I go the other.”

In response to attacks from *National Review* and other conservative outlets that have expressed fear that a vote for Gary Johnson is a vote for Hillary Clinton, Johnson acknowledged that it is a myth that Libertarians draw more votes away from Republican candidates than from Democrats.

“I think it’s an equal draw from both sides. I describe libertarian as being the best of both worlds. In the three national polls where my name has appeared, they have actually done an analysis and determined that I draw more from Hillary. At the end of the day,” he said, “I think it ends up being 50/50.”

A debate invitation?

Public opinion polls are fundamental as to whether Johnson and Weld get into the televised presidential and vice-presidential debates in the weeks before the November election. The Commission on Presidential Debates has set a 15 percent threshold in survey support for issuing invitations to participate in the forums.

“Rick,” Johnson said, “I don’t think there’s any question that we will be at 15 percent if we’re in the polls. That’s really the key, is being in the polls.”

What’s additionally significant to being in the polls, he said, “is that the Libertarian nominees, president and vice president, are going to be the only [third-party] candidates on the ballot in all fifty states,” which gives them more than a theoretical chance of winning electoral votes, or even the election