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[Home](#) > Ex-New Mexico governor in race

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Johnson shows a libertarian bent

In a bid to capture the hearts of libertarian-minded Republicans, former New Mexico governor Gary Johnson said he is running for president in an announcement outside the State House yesterday morning.

Speaking to a small group of mostly reporters and campaign staff, Johnson touted his chops as a fiscal conservative while governing New Mexico from 1995 to 2003. During that time, he said he vetoed more legislation than all the other governors in the country combined.

"It wasn't just saying 'no,' " he said. "It was really looking at what we were spending our money on and what we were getting for the money that we were spending."

Johnson has been known for his support of marijuana legalization. His view on drug policy is "just an extension" of his core belief that government should view all its responsibilities as a cost-benefit analysis, he said.

"I'm outraged over the fact that this country is bankrupt," he said. "My entire life I've watched government spend more money than it takes in, and I've just always thought that there would be a day of reckoning. . . . I think that day of reckoning is here."

Johnson said the health care reform law passed last year by a Democratic Congress should be repealed because "we simply can't afford it." But he said Republicans would have more credibility in opposing the law if they also offered up a repeal of the prescription health care benefit passed when they were in control.

"The point is, both parties can share in where we've gotten to right now," he said. "I think we're on the verge of a financial collapse in this country . . . because quite simply we can't repay \$14 trillion in debt when we're racking up \$1.65 trillion in debt going forward. It's not going to happen."

Johnson said "we should make it as easy as possible for immigrants who want to come into this country to get a work visa" in order for them to be taxed on their earnings. That should also apply to the 11 million illegal immigrants already in the country, he said.

"Let business determine whether or not there's a need for the labor," he said.

Building a fence across 2,000 miles of border or putting the National Guard "arm in arm" would

be a waste of money, he said. Meanwhile, by legalizing marijuana, an estimated 75 percent of the violence on the Mexican border would go away, he said.

Johnson said he would have been opposed to the war in Iraq "at the get-go" because he felt the United States had the military surveillance capability to see Iraq roll out any weapons of mass destruction.

Afghanistan was "totally warranted. . . . We were attacked, we attacked back," he said. But after being in Afghanistan about six months, U.S. troops had effectively taken out Al Qaida, he said. Like Iraq, the United States should not have lingered to build highways and buildings there, he said.

"A strong national defense is way different than what we're currently engaged in, which in my opinion is just nation building, all across the world, when we have our own nation to build," Johnson said.

Johnson also said he opposed "A through Z" the United States role in the intervention in Libya.

"Where is it in the Constitution that says because we don't like a foreign leader we should go in and topple that foreign leader?" he asked. "Aren't there five other countries in the Middle East right now that qualify for the same military intervention that we have implemented in Libya?"

Steve Epstein, who once ran as a Libertarian candidate for the Massachusetts statehouse, came up from Georgetown, Mass., to see Johnson kick off his campaign. Epstein met Johnson at a Cato Institute reception in 1998.

"Gary is a Republican who truly understands that individual liberty is an important aspect of what should be a good Republican platform," Epstein said. "Other Republicans seem to be too busy telling you how to live your life."

Emily Sandblade, a self-employed software engineer from Derry, said she supports Johnson because "we need fiscal responsibility at the federal level in this country," and she feels he "has principles and, I think, the strength of will to hold the line on spending."

Sandblade said she sees no reason not to legalize marijuana.

"It's at the point where anybody who wants to get drugs can get them and it's very clear that the War on Drugs has failed," she said.

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