

# United Liberty

## Club for Growth on Gary Johnson

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Just like in 2008, the [Club for Growth](#) is putting together a [series of white papers on candidates running for the Republican Party's presidential nomination](#). We've already covered their reports on the records of [Newt Gingrich](#), [Tim Pawlenty](#), [Herman Cain](#), [Mitt Romney](#), [Jon Huntsman](#) and [Ron Paul](#). Next up is [Gary Johnson](#), who served two terms as Governor of New Mexico (1995-2003).

The Club for Growth notes that during his eight years of service in New Mexico, Gary Johnson received at "B" on each of the Cato Institute's biannual *Fiscal Policy Report Card on America's Governors* ([1996](#), [1998](#), [2000](#) and [2002](#)). However, these scores don't do him justice.

Johnson's record on taxes is described by the Club as "excellent," noting that he pushed back against all forms of tax hikes:

In his first term, Governor Johnson proposed reducing the top rate of the state personal income tax from 8.5% to 8%, along with other tax cuts, but was rebuffed by the Legislature. He signed a repeal of a 1993 6-cent-a-gallon tax hike. In 1997, Governor Johnson again proposed to cut the top rate, this time to 8.3%. The legislature proposed to cut it to 8.2%, but offset some of the revenue losses from this and other tax cuts with a cigarette tax increase. According to Cato, Johnson signed the income tax cut, and "vetoed the cigarette tax hike."

Unlike some of the other Republican candidates for President this year and in past election cycles, Gary Johnson never raised the cigarette tax. While the tax on cigarettes has little relevance to economic growth, the fact that he held the line on such taxes demonstrates how strongly he opposes tax hikes. In 1999, he vetoed a 12-cent-a-pack cigarette tax hike — "not because he liked smoking, he says, but because he opposes all tax hikes." New Mexico's cigarette tax rate stayed the same from 1995 to 2003.

However, they do point out that Johnson vetoed one tax cut, which would have lowered rates from 8.2% to 7.7%, because "[h]is proposal would have cut the income tax by \$72 million while the legislature wanted just a \$32 million cut and a \$30.5 million one-time rebate." According to the Club's white paper, Johnson now regrets that veto.

Johnson earns the title of “one of the most anti-spending governors in New Mexico history.” The Club notes that he vetoed 742 bills during his eight years office and sought to privatize transportation projects.

On federal spending, Johnson opposed TARP and the stimulus and wants the federal budget slashed by 43%, including cuts to “the big four - Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security and defense.”

Johnson’s record on regulation is impressive. The white paper notes that he vetoed legislation to increase the minimum wage, which is often a barrier to employment, and deregulated New Mexico’s electric industry; allowing energy consumers choice in the marketplace. Johnson also opposed cap-and-trade and Net Neutrality.

The Club also points out Johnson’s support for school choice, enacting tort reform and opposing barriers to political speech.

Outside of his lone tax cut veto, the only other mark on Johnson’s record are conflicting statements regarding free trade. The Club notes:

On trade, Johnson “generally supports NAFTA and other free-trade agreements,” In a June 9 segment on John Stossel’s program on Fox Business, Johnson “debated” Obama impersonator Reggie Brown and said he wanted “no tariffs, no restrictions” on trade. He did sound a little squishy on trade in a March 2011 interview when he said that “So much of the legislation that we pass isn’t really free market at all. It’s touted as free market, when the reality ends up to be very corporate. The reality ends up to be corporatism...I was always looking at business legislation from the standpoint of having it affect everyone equally as opposed to big business being further advantaged...so many of these treaties, NAFTA being one...the criticism of NAFTA should be rooted in the fact that big business became even bigger business.”

This isn’t all too different from statements made by Ron Paul, who is often of the same mind as Johnson. They both support free trade in principle; however, trade agreements that lower tariffs (ie. lower taxes on Americans) and free (or at least more free) exchange of goods end up getting tossed aside due.

Here is he Club for Growth’s bottomline on Johnson:

With few exceptions, Governor Johnson’s tenure as New Mexico’s Governor and his public record since that time has revealed a generally pro-growth attitude. We are slightly concerned that, like fellow libertarian Congressman Ron Paul, that he may harbor anti-free trade sentiments. Governor Johnson deserves special praise for his consistent use of his veto-pen as Governor. We believe that Governor Johnson would most likely be a pro-growth President if elected.