

Can conservative newspapers boost Johnson's appeal?

The Detroit News has backed Libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson in spite of its right-leaning editorial stance. But will it matter?

Joseph Dussault

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“Aleppo moments” aren’t hurting Libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson – at least not when it comes to newspaper endorsements.

On Thursday, The Detroit News backed Johnson in spite of its right-leaning editorial stance. The endorsement comes just one day after the candidate’s latest foreign policy gaffe, in which he failed to name a single world leader he admired. In the paper’s 143-year history, it has never endorsed a non-Republican candidate.

“We recognize the Libertarian candidate is the longest of long shots with an electorate that has been conditioned to believe only Republicans and Democrats can win major offices,” the endorsement reads. “But this is an endorsement of conscience, reflecting our confidence that Johnson would be a competent and capable president and an honorable one.”

In the digital age, newspapers rarely have the built-in cultural influence to sway voters completely. But endorsements can persuade them to peer over the party lines. And in swing states such as Michigan and New Hampshire, that can make a considerable difference.

The Union Leader of Manchester, N.H., another conservative broadsheet, endorsed the former New Mexico governor earlier this month. Both papers cite Johnson’s public service record as proof of his qualifications. The Detroit News goes further, praising the candidate’s emphasis on free-market capitalism and legal pathways to citizenship for immigrants.

And then there’s that darn “Aleppo” thing.

“Our apprehension about Johnson rests with foreign policy,” the paper’s editorial board wrote. “He holds to conventional libertarian non-interventionism. But he understands America’s position in the world, and we are certain that once the weight of leadership is on his shoulders, he will meet that responsibility.”

But as recent endorsements show, foreign policy blunders may not hurt Johnson all that much. In fact, they may help explain why young voters like him.

The Christian Science Monitor's David Iaconangelo reported:

[T]he young ... tend to view foreign policy differently. A 2015 study by the libertarian Cato Institute concluded that Millennials – defined here as those born between 1980 and 1997 – see the world as “significantly less threatening than their elders,” and policies drawn up to deal with foreign threats as less urgent. They're also more supportive of international cooperation, and far less keen on the use of military force, the report found.

Both major candidates are considerably more hawkish than this standard. In comparison, Johnson's floundering on foreign policy questions might seem relatively benign.

Ultimately, the endorsement may reflect more on Donald Trump, for whom Detroit was a major campaigning point, than on Gary Johnson. The Republican candidate visited black church congregations earlier this month in an apparent attempt to soften his image in African-American communities. During Monday night's presidential debate, he blasted Ford Motor Company, which is based in Detroit, for its investments in Mexico.

But if Johnson's latest endorsement is any indication, Detroit residents may not be looking to Trump for answers.