



## The Libertarians' Night to Shine

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June 24, 2016

One drawback for Libertarian Party candidates actually getting the news media attention – along with the prospect of actually winning a decent percentage of the vote – is having to address tough questions.

Gary Johnson and William Weld, respectively the party's nominees for president and vice president, did that quite well at that in the CNN Libertarian Town Hall Wednesday night, fielding questions on abortion, gun control, drugs and religion.

For a party that has been at best a gadfly on the political scene since the early 1970s, more than an hour of primetime was unfathomable. Things at least appear to be different this year. Not just because the two major party nominees are loathed by most of the public. Rather, Johnson and Weld are qualified to be president. That couldn't be said even of Bob Barr in 2008 or Ed Clark in 1980, probably the two most notable nominees before Johnson in 2012, when he won 1 million votes.

Even 2012 Republican nominee Mitt Romney is pondering supporting the two. One can't help but wonder if Glenn Beck, Erick Erickson and others might enlist at some point.

Johnson, former Republican governor of New Mexico, and Weld, former GOP governor of Massachusetts, were heralded as two of the most fiscally conservative governors in the country by both the Wall Street Journal and the Cato Institute. It's a more than defensible position to say both have a better record to run on than Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump.

If Johnson, who is polling now at about 10 percent, will be on the debate stage with Trump and Clinton if he can reach 15 percent.

With their big night CNN, Johnson and Weld didn't turn in a flawless performance.

Johnson was a little awkward when asked about his religious beliefs, saying he believes in God and prays but doesn't go to church. On the same note, plenty if not most Americans have justifiable skepticism regarding Trump and Clinton's professions of faith. But, Johnson proved it's not just the devout that want school choice – which he tirelessly advocated in New Mexico and touted Wednesday.

Johnson is actually similar to Trump in that he was a success in the private sector, defeating the GOP establishment in his state to win the gubernatorial nomination, then vetoing more than 700 spending bills. Weld was elected overwhelmingly as a Republican to a second term in Massachusetts, one of the heaviest Democratic states in the nation, held the line on spending, and led to a succession of Republican governors.

Watching the forum, it was evident that Johnson really was a libertarian, while Weld was essentially just a socially liberal Republican.

Johnson and Weld both made mistakes when they treated Clinton so kindly, only criticizing Trump. Maybe the realistic goal is to draw more votes from #NeverTrump Republicans. But those same frustrated voters might have felt taken aback by Johnson and Weld actually complimenting Clinton. They didn't need to call her Crooked Hillary to have a substantive criticism of her policies. It's also a bad strategy for trying to win over disenchanted Bernie Sanders supporters.

In what is probably a pipe dream, some libertarians believe the two could actually win enough electoral votes to send the election to the House of Representative, where the Republican majority would view Johnson as a safer bet to run the country than Trump.

To be clear, this is NOT an endorsement. Much of the Libertarian foreign policy is completely unworkable, while their social policy can be baffling. But this is to say two very successful two-term governors is a serious ticket by any measure. In fact, Clinton and Trump would have to make very strong VP choices for either to be the most qualified ticket in the race.