

Gary Johnson Makes Even a Protect Vote Hard for Republicans

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In an election year in which voters are routinely being told that they have to choose between two deeply unpopular, unfit presidential nominees, one would think that an unconventional candidate like Libertarian Gary Johnson might actually find some decent traction.

Johnson and his party, after all, have carved out a diverse political platform that seems to offer something meaningful to just about every type of voter.

People on the political right like that Johnson's a small-government, fiscally conservative candidate — the only one who will be on the ballot in all 50 states this November. As our national debt approaches \$20 trillion, he's the only entrant in this race who seems to think it's an extremely serious problem that must be dealt with. His free-trade stance is also attractive. The GOP essentially forfeited these policy positions when the party made Donald Trump its nominee. Johnson fills that void.

On social issues, Johnson is pretty liberal. His candidacy lends itself to discouraged Democrats and millennials who may have trouble getting behind Hillary, her lack of character, and what they believe is a contrived *social-justice* mantle. Johnson offers an alternative.

Johnson is big on civil liberties, which is an important issue to many people from both sides of the aisle, as well as independents. His non-interventionist views on foreign policy, for better or for worse, are also popular among the electorate.

Perhaps above all, however, he's positioned to serve as a dignified recourse to what the two-party system has left us with this year. He's a candidate that conscientious Americans feel they can support (even in the form of a protest vote), and still respect themselves afterwards. Johnson comes across as a decent, honest, and acceptably competent individual. That alone places him well above Trump and Clinton, who have lowered the bars of decency, honesty, and competency to a couple of miles below sea-level.

This contrast provides someone like me with sufficient cause to commit my vote to Johnson in November. What drives me nuts, however, is that he doesn't seem to actually want my vote, or

the votes of other disaffected Republicans who could potentially give him his biggest electoral boost.

The sell-job really shouldn't be all that difficult. Both Johnson and his running-mate, Bill Weld, are former Republican governors. They understand why a number of Republican voters feel completely unrepresented right now. They understand that these people aren't searching for ideological purity, but rather someone who shares (and intends to act on) some of their key concerns. Johnson and Weld should also understand that Hillary Clinton is more likely to unite the Democrats than Donald Trump is to unite the GOP. This leaves the Libertarian ticket with an obvious opening.

Instead of sealing the deal with traditionally Republican voters, however, Johnson and Weld appear to be focusing their outreach efforts almost exclusively on the hard-left...seemingly at the *expense* of the political right.

For example, the one issue that gives even the most hardened anti-Trump Republicans pause is *Supreme Court nominees*. Hillary Clinton, as president, would undoubtedly try to tilt the court further left. Donald Trump *says* he would do just the opposite, but his demonstrated disinterest in the Constitution, his reflexive liberalism, and his inherent dishonesty make his word on this important matter virtually worthless. Still, many desperate conservatives are willing to swallow their pride and vote for Trump based almost entirely on this one specific point, hoping that their gamble pays off.

You'd think that this situation would have Libertarian candidates salivating. Libertarians, after all, are known for their dedication to limited government and the sanctity of the U.S. Constitution. A guarantee from them of conservative justices would hold real credibility. Instead, Bill Weld said in an interview last week that a Johnson/Weld administration would nominate *liberal* judges like Stephen Breyer and Merrick Garland.

Huh?

As Ilya Shapiro of the CATO Institute wrote, Breyer and Garland are, "the jurists most deferential to the government *on everything*, whether environmental regulation or civil liberties."

Why on earth would *Libertarian* candidates toss aside perhaps their most compelling argument of the election?

Additionally, Shapiro pointed out in his piece that Johnson also said, in a recent interview with the Washington Examiner, that he views religious freedom as a "black hole." Johnson voiced opposition to religious exemptions from government mandates, and even strangely tied Mormonism to religiously-motivated gun violence.

Huh?

Not only is this an un-Libertarian (and decidedly liberal) stance, but it needlessly turns off religious, traditionally Republican voters who haven't been able to make a moral argument for supporting Trump. Specifically, it hurts Johnson in states like Utah, where he's been polling remarkably well.

Johnson has even boasted about a political survey he took that revealed that he agrees with former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders 73 percent of the time.

Huh?

I understand the political value in presenting oneself as a social liberal in the year 2016, but a disciple of limited government enthusiastically identifying with a proud socialist is an awfully odd maneuver. It makes Johnson appear needlessly extreme to a conservative demographic that is willing to overlook a lot (out of desperation), but possibly not three quarters of the social gauntlet.

There was also Johnson's statement last week that he would, as president, consider pardoning Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning — a very unpopular position that resonates primarily with liberals.

I'd write "Huh?" again, but Johnson's actually been sharing this particular view for quite some time.

Of course, beggars can't be choosers in this election. Estranged Republicans can't expect someone from a different party (even one as similar as the Libertarian Party) to focus entirely on them.

I just have trouble understanding why *any* ticket would be so resistant to a natural constituency that could potentially help them more than any other. Perhaps it's just another political debacle best chalked up to this ever-bizarre circus known as *Election 2016*.