

An Opportunity for #NeverTrump Republicans to Save Face

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Let's face it: the #NeverTrump movement is an admission of embarrassment on the part of veteran Republicans, an acknowledgment that the Southern Strategy was suicidal, a concession that as a result of fifty years of playing to ignorant fears, the GOP base is largely comprised of people who think the term "animal husbandry" refers to bestiality. You can't blame these veteran Republicans for wanting to wash their hands of their creation—and you can't blame them for seeking alternate political routes:

For some Massachusetts Republicans, the return of Bill Weld — the law-and-order Yankee who charmed his way into two terms as governor of a liberal state — is nothing short of face-saving.

Finally, they have a reason to show up on Election Day.

"I think for a lot of Republicans, especially in a state like Massachusetts, it gives us an option," said Virginia Buckingham, a Republican who once worked as Weld's chief of staff, and will vote for him this fall. "We were kind of in a difficult position facing voting for Donald Trump."

Weld's reemergence as a vice presidential candidate on the Libertarian ticket with former New Mexico governor Gary Johnson has been viewed largely as another curiosity in a crazy election cycle in which, it seems, anything might happen...

Although the #NeverTrump movement isn't beating down their door, Johnson and Weld are reaching for voters disenchanted with Trump and presumptive Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. In a Web ad launched last week, Johnson and Weld presented themselves as a "credible alternative to ClinTrump."

I have previously suggested that it is not beyond possibility for the Johnson-Weld ticket to perform strongly enough in national polls to warrant inclusion in the presidential debates. If so, the symbolism will be powerful. Think about it: Clinton, Johnson and Trump—a Democrat demonized for decades by the demagogues who dote on the Donald, an ex-Republican who was regarded as a RINO by the same twits who think Trump is terrific, and the Orange Goblin

himself, the single most unqualified individual to ever secure a major American party's nomination, the single most irrational figure in modern politics, a hero to haters, a Jesus to jerks.

I give Johnson credit for defying both Republican and Libertarian taboos in his July 1 appearance on HBO's *Real Time with Bill Maher* (relevant segment runs from 3:02-5:15):

Other than former Cato Institute fellow Jerry Taylor, I have never heard *anyone* associated with libertarianism acknowledge that human-caused climate change is real. That's progress. If Clinton and Johnson appear on the debate stage next to Trump and affirm that mainstream climate science is legitimate, and Trump reiterates his belief that climate change is a hoax invented by the Chinese government, climate hawks will be able to declare a moral victory, because the optics will not work in Trump's favor.

The Johnson-Weld ticket is an option, and an opportunity, for veteran Republicans to save face. It will be interesting to see how many Republicans avail themselves of this option and this opportunity. Having said that, I hope Republicans who support this ticket at least have the decency to admit that men like Johnson and Weld were effectively forced out of the GOP because they were not blind ideologues, because they understood that some issues are not left or right, because they recognized that we're all Americans first...because they were too nice, too civil, too human for the Trumpublican Party.

Clinton will be able to hold her own in a three-way debate with Johnson and Trump. She will also not hesitate to remind viewers that if the GOP had not gone grotesque, a man like Johnson—flawed but not foul, mistaken but not malicious, incorrect but not insane—would be the Republican nominee, and not a deacon of derangement like the Donald.