



Meet Gary Johnson's Koch-Network Money Men: Throwing your vote (and values) away

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Gary Johnson, the Libertarian Party presidential candidate, is currently having a moment with younger voters. Presumably this is because he has emphasized his pro-marijuana stance and stayed away from touting his views on nearly everything else, which, as [AlterNet has reported](#), are very right-wing. Yet look behind the curtain, and you'll find that Johnson's candidacy is fueled by money provided by funders who are driving forces behind things most young voters abhor, like the privatization of public education and the "right" to pollute the environment.

A combination of engaging social media launched by pro-Johnson PACs and the candidate's goofy, likable personality add up to 29 percent of voters between the ages of 18-34 telling pollsters for NBC News that they plan to vote for the third-party candidate. (His "What is Aleppo?" gaffe seems not to have made a dent in his numbers.) Several [respected pollsters](#) and [political scientists](#) have deduced that Johnson's totals cut further into votes that would normally accrue to Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton than to Republican nominee Donald Trump. Young voters comprise a critical constituency in the Democratic coalition, and Clinton has struggled to engage them, even gaining the endorsement of Bernie Sanders, the primary challenger who garnered great enthusiasm among young Democrats.

Johnson's plan, as [reported by Politico's Ben Birnbaum](#), is to siphon enough votes from both major-party candidates to deprive each of the 270-electoral vote majority a candidate needs in order to win the White House. Then the race gets thrown into the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, where the third-party candidate quixotically expects to win. But even if this long-shot scheme had a chance, it's hard to imagine members of the Republican majority in Congress voting to hand the White House to someone other than their party's nominee. That all raises the question, what is Johnson really up to, and whose interests does he represent?

Birnbaum reports that the Johnson campaign has “recently reshuffled its map,” focusing on states “with large numbers of disgruntled Sanders voters,” which he identifies as Iowa, Wisconsin, Oregon and Washington. In addition, the Johnson forces are also making television and radio ad buys, according to *Advertising Age*, in Nevada, Colorado, New Hampshire and Maine—all states identified by FiveThirtyEight’s Harry Enten as more-or-less “must-win” states for Clinton (meaning her chances of winning the general election drop precipitously if she loses any one of them).

While the Johnson airtime buys are tiny compared with Clinton’s, they amount to gauntlets thrown, especially when you factor in the Johnson forces’ clever online strategy. If your target is young voters, television buys probably aren’t a great use of your resources. But creating viral videos probably is, and the pro-Johnson AlternativePAC is doing just that.

Despite the fact that Johnson’s poll numbers—he’s at 8 percent in the Real Clear Politics average—are higher than any previous modern-era third-party candidate at this point in the election cycle, he still has a long climb to make the 15 percent threshold required for inclusion in the presidential debates. So, the campaign’s present focus is on elevating his profile so his poll numbers go up, with the hope of making it onto the debate stage October 9. (On Friday, he stuck out his tongue for the television cameras as a way of demonstrating what he might do if he makes it.)

A Run at Clinton Voters?

According to independent journalist Mark Ames, in Johnson’s 2012 presidential bid, the candidate enjoyed the wisdom of his notorious adviser, Roger Stone, the dirty trickster who is now advising the Trump campaign. Stone is the guy who brought conspiracy theorist Alex Jones into the Trump camp (and convinced Trump to make a December appearance on Jones’ InfoWars radio program), and has formulated and advanced much of Trump’s anti-Clinton rhetoric.

Ames dug up a 2007 interview Stone gave to the *Weekly Standard* in which he shared his formula for winning an election for a less-than-popular major-party candidate: Get a credible third-party candidate to split the opponent’s vote. Stone claims to have been in on just such an operation in 1980 on behalf of third-party candidate John Anderson, whose candidacy help deliver New York State for Ronald Reagan by skimming votes that would have likely otherwise gone to incumbent president Jimmy Carter.

One indication of whose interests Johnson represents is his source of funding. It’s likely we’ll never know the sources of all the money flowing to pro-Johnson efforts (or those of other candidates, for that matter), since the 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United* allows all manner of non-profit groups to run ads and canvass for political candidates without revealing the names of their donors.

But we do know enough to look at who’s behind a couple of pro-Johnson political action committees, and the corporate entities whose employees donate the most money directly to the campaign: Jeffrey Yass of Susquehanna Group International, a financial options-trading firm, and Chris Rufer, president and founder of the Morning Star Packing Company, an agribusiness

tomato-grower and processor of tomato products. And Johnson's past association with Koch Industries, which benefited from a multimillion-dollar no-bid contract for a New Mexico highway given one of its subsidiaries during Johnson's tenure as governor of that state, has led to speculation he will receive support from political groups in the Koch network.

Major Donor Funds Attacks on Public Education

Booking ads for Johnson is Purple PAC, where Yass is so far the largest donor, at \$1 million, which was reportedly used for an August Purple PAC buy for ad time on CNN and Fox. Since September 8, Purple PAC has purchased airtime on Johnson's behalf to the tune of \$800,000, according to Federal Election Commission reports available via OpenSecrets.com. Purple PAC was founded by Ed Crane, former president of the Cato Institute. Both Yass and Crane sit on Cato's board of directors, as does David Koch.