



Super PAC that supported Rand Paul now backing Gary Johnson

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August 30, 2016

A super PAC that originally supported Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul's Republican presidential bid has spent \$1 million on advertising for Libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson.

Purple PAC is among three libertarian-backed super PACs that originally supported Paul. The others, America's Liberty PAC and Concerned American Voters, have sat out the presidential race since Paul ended his bid in February.

In spite of Paul's libertarian leanings and some testy exchanges in debates with former rival Donald Trump, he has said he will support the Republican nominee.

Johnson, a former Republican governor of New Mexico, is running on the Libertarian ticket with Bill Weld, a former Republican governor of Massachusetts.

Purple PAC's co-founder Ed Crane is trying to raise more money to keep airing the pro-Johnson ads up until the time of the presidential debates – the first of which is Sept. 26 – in a bid to boost Johnson's profile.

“Hopefully, we'll get some major contributions,” Crane, a co-founder of the libertarian [Cato Institute](#), said in an interview.

[A Quinnipiac University poll](#) last week had Johnson at 10 percent and Democrat Hillary Clinton at 45 percent, Trump at 38 percent and Green Party candidate Jill Stein at 4 percent.

Super PACs, which do not coordinate directly with campaigns and can raise unlimited funds, usually spend bigger sums as Election Day draws near.

But Purple PAC's spending represents an effort to push Johnson up to the 15 percent polling threshold needed for him to share the debate stage with Clinton and Trump.

Crane called that threshold, set by the bipartisan [Commission on Presidential Debates](#), “arbitrary” and said the panel could allow Johnson to debate Clinton and Trump. Just getting him on the stage would drive up his poll numbers, Crane said.

“They have the ability to approve Gary's participation in the debate,” he said. “And they should.”

Crane said Johnson's support for social tolerance, a "sane" foreign policy and free-market capitalism resonated with a plurality of Americans and would offer voters an alternative to Clinton and Trump.

"He's got to take his gloves off a little bit," Crane said. "It could be very powerful."

Crane said that Paul, the standard-bearer of libertarian causes early in the presidential campaign, should abandon the Republican nominee and back the candidate that aligned with his own views.

"I think he should be supporting Johnson and trying to raise money for Gary," he said.

In Kentucky, Paul will face Democrat Jim Gray, the mayor of Lexington, in November. Holding the Kentucky seat could be crucial for Republicans.

They are defending 24 seats in the U.S. Senate this year, and Democrats have to win only a net of five to regain the majority in the chamber they lost in 2014.

Trump may be exerting negative pressure on Senate Republicans in several states, including Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire.

Stephen Voss, an associate professor of political science at the University of Kentucky, said Paul's re-election campaign was one of the brighter spots on the Republican map.

"This is a pretty tough year for Republican Senate candidates," he said. "Given how red a state this is, if I were looking to back a winner, Rand Paul is one of the better bets."