



Gary Johnson disappoints: LP candidate doesn't understand libertarianism

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Yesterday, June 2nd, Robert Wenzel, publisher of the '[Economic Policy Journal](#)', [interviewed](#) former New Mexico Governor and Libertarian Party Presidential candidate Gary Johnson on his podcast radio show. Governor Johnson's interview performance and knowledge of libertarian philosophy and economics was lackluster. Indeed, Wenzel's interview comes across as the opposite of a gotcha interview, in which Wenzel acts as a sort of mentor, guiding Governor Johnson towards the kinds of answers which libertarians influenced by the [Rothbardian](#) variety of Austrian economics are most likely to find acceptable. Governor Johnson on the other hand, comes across as a kind of impetuous teenager, unwilling to accept outside guidance.

When asked to identify the libertarian thinker who most influenced his thinking, Johnson identified the late Milton Friedman, citing Friedman's support of school choice, drug legalization, as well as an erroneous assertion that Friedman proposed the abolition of income tax withholding as a way to may make taxation less popular. Readers should not that Friedman was the author of the [contemporary American withholding tax](#). Friedman is also known for accepting larger portions of Keynesian monetary theory, a point that [Paul Krugman cites](#) in his critique of free market economics.

Johnson went on to cite the [Cato Institute Handbook](#), and the [various publications](#) of the [Reason Foundation](#) as influential on his knowledge, asserting that he had "gotten to know all the people in both organizations" and that he "seeks there guidance all the time". It is noteworthy that despite his professed familiarity, Governor Johnson does not name a single author or scholar of either think tank by name. Johnson also made passing references to [Ludwig von Mises](#) and [Murray Rothbard](#), only to retract the statement that he was familiar with either scholar when Wenzel asked Johnson to comment on specific works associated with either writer.

Johnson's understanding of economic or fiscal policy seems little better. When Wenzel shifted the conversation to Austrian Business Cycle Theory and the Great Depression,

Johnson seemed to lack a basic understanding of boom-bust cycles, instead describing the process in terms resembling a vulgarized version of [Keynsian aggregate demand](#).

Johnson seemed ill prepared for an interview with a highly sympathetic audience. Johnson's inability to articulate the fundamentals of the philosophical, economic, and political foundations for modern libertarianism seems representative of a political party that has put the miniscule possibility of success above any matter of principle. More telling is the response that Johnson has received in various corners of the libertarian blogosphere. Both Robert Wenzel and [Charles Burris](#) of lewrockwell.com have asserted that barring a Republican nomination for Ron Paul, Gary Johnson might be the most libertarian candidate of this political cycle. Johnson's nomination seems to foretell a shift within the libertarian movement towards apolitical efforts such as education and entrepreneurship.