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# Military Times

## Some but not all presidential candidates set to appear at American Legion event

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The major party presidential candidates this week will again be presenting their veterans reform plans in Cincinnati as part of the American Legion's annual convention, providing veteran voters a chance to evaluate their options for the next commander in chief.

But not all of the choices will be there.

Libertarian presidential hopeful Gary Johnson, whose popularity in military circles sits higher than the general population, was not invited to the event, and will be campaigning in the western United States as Republican nominee Donald Trump and Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton address the service organization.

In a statement, Legion officials said the invites to Clinton and Trump continued their organization's tradition of bringing in "candidates from each of the two major parties to address its members every presidential election cycle."

The decision is similar to what the Veterans of Foreign Wars did last month, when Trump and Clinton spoke at their annual convention to outline their priorities on foreign policy and Veterans Affairs improvements.

VFW officials said they extended invitations to "the leading contenders" in the 2016 presidential race.

An NBC poll released Tuesday shows Clinton leading the presidential contest nationally with 41 percent support among likely voters. Trump sits at 37 percent, and Johnson at 11 percent.

Johnson has hovered around that figure for much of the summer, but needs to get closer to 15 percent support nationally to be considered for inclusion in the presidential debates later this fall, according to rules outlined by the independent commission organizing the events.

But a Military Times survey in July found 13 percent of respondents listing Johnson as the write-

in candidate they prefer to take over the White House next year.

In recent days, those supporters have been pressuring organizers of the NBC/Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America presidential event in New York on Sept. 7 to include Johnson alongside Trump and Clinton.

NBC officials have said they are considering inviting Johnson to participate in a separate event "in the near future," with details to be worked out.

In a statement to Military Times over the weekend, Johnson campaign spokesman Joe Hunter said they would be open to an invitation to some type of veterans event.

"Gov. Johnson certainly believes he should be invited, as a credible former governor with significant support among both active and former members of the military," he said.

Johnson has spoken little in recent months about veterans issues but has made a less interventionist foreign policy a centerpiece of his campaign. He has said repeatedly that America needs a strong military but must not "use our military strength to try to solve the world's problems."

Gene Healy, vice president of the libertarian Cato Institute, said the presidential debate stage rules make efforts of third-party challengers almost impossible. Candidates like Johnson can't get enough public support to participate without being shown at other national forums, but they often get overlooked by those event organizers because they can't qualify for the debates.

"But in an environment like today where you have two of the most disliked candidates in the era of polling, if there was a time to consider more alternatives, it would be now," he said.

Getting more publicity for those outsiders not only advances their candidacy but also their ideas, forcing more robust public conversation on things like the federal deficit and personal freedoms, Healy said.

Full details of the Sept. 7 event still have not been finalized.

Clinton is scheduled to speak at the Legion convention Wednesday at noon. Trump is set to deliver his remarks there Thursday at 1 p.m.