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How Gary Johnson Should Talk To Voters

Here's the speech Libertarian candidate for president Gary Johnson should give to voters eagerly looking for a plausible alternative.

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My fellow Americans, like most of you, I'm not satisfied with the presidential choice the so-called major parties have given us. The Republican Party, which is supposed to represent conservatives, has nominated someone who's not conservative in any sense of that word. The Democratic Party, which is supposed to represent liberals, has nominated someone who opposes civil liberties and essentially repudiates the successful parts of her husband's presidency.

Look, I was once a Republican, but I don't recognize a party that embraces crony capitalism and wants to close America off from international commerce, that runs on fear rather than freedom. I also worked with plenty of Democrats when I was governor of New Mexico—I had to: they controlled the legislature—but I don't recognize a party that shuts down dissent and believes that economic growth is less important than government control.

The Other Options Are Terrible

The Party of Lincoln and the Party of Jefferson have become shells of their former selves. Just look at whom they've nominated.

Donald Trump mocks large swaths of Americans and prides in his own policy ignorance. He claims to be a politically incorrect destroyer of postmodern shibboleths, but he's really a boor—and a bore. As a businessman myself, I can tell you he's not even good at that: good businessmen work on trust and honor, not deception and litigation. Perhaps Trump's biggest fraud is his claim to be the voice of the working man; my heart goes out to those who feel betrayed by both public- and private-sector elites but now pin their hopes on this charlatan.

Hillary Clinton is no better. She stands for nothing but her own power and is willing to take any position, make any lie to achieve it. While secretary of State, she focused on helping the Clinton Foundation more than her country. Her entire campaign rests, as it did eight years ago, on perceived entitlement. Perhaps her biggest lie relates to her "damn emails"; even after the FBI director detailed her recklessness with our national security—which I'm sure is a boon to Mr. Trump's Russian friends—she maintains she did nothing wrong.

These people are the least popular major-party nominees in modern history. The strongest argument Trump makes is that he's not Clinton—and vice-versa. If either party had nominated any other contender, it would be winning in a landslide. Instead, we have a race to the absolute depths of hell. Come on, America, we are better than this!

But There's Still Hope

Fortunately, there's a way out. There are options beyond voting red team or blue team; the only wasted vote is one cast for someone you don't believe in. After all, the only thing of consequence any one vote affects is that voter's conscience.

During my time in office, I eliminated New Mexico's budget deficit and reduced the bureaucracy small businesses face when they try to create jobs. I vetoed more bills than the other 49 governors combined—750 in total, a third of which were introduced by Republican legislators and only two of which were overridden. I reduced overall spending while increasing education spending by a third. It actually wasn't that hard: I just asked first whether government needed to be involved in something in the first place, and second whether the benefit of a law outweighed its cost.

Now, I'm not saying you should vote for me simply as a matter of competence—or even basic fitness for public office (by which I don't mean triathlons or the Seven Summits, although I'm hoping that stuff gets me the outdoorsy vote). While there seems to be a low bar for those qualities this election, I'm also not Michael Dukakis: ideas matter and the ability to implement bad policies isn't very helpful.

Here's what I have in mind. To be honest, America is doing pretty well: someone who we might consider poor today has a higher standard of living than the richest Rockefellers a century ago. But we can do better.

We Can Do a Lot Better

We can reduce the federal spending that crowds out private investment. We can lower tax rates that force businesses to move overseas. We can reform our health-care sector so we no longer have a system that combines the worst of capitalism with the worst of socialism—Obamacare took us in the wrong direction, but the status quo was unacceptable, too. We can improve Social Security and Medicare, so those who rely on these programs can continue to do so while we do better by younger generations. Perhaps most importantly, we can scrap the regulations that hold back everyone from Uber and Airbnb to local food trucks and raw-milk cooperatives.

We can also demilitarize our society. Police need to be able to do their jobs, and they're more effective when they respect civil rights and treat people as fellow citizens, not enemy insurgents. That also means taking a different approach regarding our failed drug war, which has had such harmful effects on everything from race relations and gun crime to foreign policy. On my first day in the Oval Office, I will direct the attorney general to “declassify” marijuana, removing it from the list of controlled substances.

Speaking of wars, we need to rethink our role as the world's police, which includes implementing a proactive diplomacy based on America's interests rather than fecklessly reacting to world events. Strategy should drive budgets and operations, not the other way around. And remember that President Reagan—who's considered to be rather hawkish—only used military force three times, while Nobel Peace Prize-winning President Obama seems to use the armed forces more than any other agency he can command with his pen and phone.

On immigration too, we need to have America's interests and values in mind. If you brainstormed a process for how foreigners enter the country, how long they can stay, and what they can do while here, it would be hard to come up with something worse than our current hodge-podge of often contradictory rules. This immigration non-policy serves nobody's interest—not big business or small, not the rich or the poor, not the economy or national security, and certainly not the average taxpayer—except perhaps bureaucrats and lawyers.

The solution is straightforward: Expand the ways to be here legally but crack down on those who ignore them. If you commit a crime, or go too long without a job, you lose your visa. But give people a chance to earn an honest living. As long as we screen for criminal records, terrorism, and public health, America should stand for the idea of letting people in who seek a better life, in an orderly way: a funnel, not a necessarily leaky wall.

We All Need to Respect Each Other

Similarly, in a pluralistic country with more than 300 million people, we have to allow for lots of “play in the joints” regarding religious, political, and other differences. The freedom of speech, the freedom of political advocacy, the freedom of religion—fundamentally, the freedom of conscience—are so important that the country could scarcely survive or be worth living in if the government picked winners and losers among them.

That means, yes, tolerating people who do things you may not like. You can disagree with the idea of a gay couple getting married, but if you work in the state marriage bureau, you still have to do your job. Similarly, you can boycott a Muslim wedding vendor who refuses to create a custom cake for a lesbian couple or otherwise participate in their ceremony, but the state should not shut that down.

Finally, on the most divisive issue of abortion, I've said many times that I'm pro-choice, but let me also emphasize that I believe in federalism and the Constitution. You may disagree with me on this or other issues, but I understand the difference between law and policy. To that end, I will appoint judges who follow our Constitution's original public meaning—I've previously misspoken in talking about “original intent.”

And I should emphasize that while Bill Weld, who is an accomplished lawyer among other great qualifications, will be an integral part of my policy team, I will be picking Supreme Court justices, and they will be in the mold of Alex Kozinski and Janice Rogers Brown, not Merrick Garland (who's never met an administrative or law-enforcement agency to which he didn't defer).

So, whether you're a Bernie Bro or a Never Trumper, a liberal, conservative, or moderate—or even a libertarian—if you want a president who's honest, capable, and will protect your liberty and secure this nation's prosperity, I ask for your vote. Together, we will make America better, stronger, freer, and more equal.

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