

12 Ways Gary Johnson Is A Hardcore Right-Wing Radical

Adele Stan

September 22, 2016

A recent NBC News/Quinnipiac poll reveals that more than a quarter of young voters—many who had supported the presidential bid of Sen. Bernie Sanders—plan to cast their presidential ballots for Libertarian Party candidate Gary Johnson. Democrats are increasingly nervous that Johnson's candidacy could pull more voters from Hillary Clinton than from her Republican rival, Donald Trump, especially in key states like Colorado and Wisconsin. While Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein draws mostly progressive voters, Johnson's support hails from the breadth of the political spectrum, making it more difficult to suss out. However, because he is on the ballot in all 50 states (Stein is not), most pollsters consider his campaign to be a greater threat to Clinton's chances in some swing states. And because the U.S. uses the electoral college system to determine the outcome of presidential elections, that could matter on November 8, no matter Clinton's overall support among the general population.

Johnson's former adviser, Roger Stone, is now advising the Trump campaign, and has talked in the past of how to use a third-party candidate to split an opponent's vote.

Former New Mexico governor Gary Johnson has emphasized his support for marijuana legalization and touts an anti-war stance in an attempt to lure progressives to his cause. But progressives are likely less aware of his links to the radical right and the Koch brothers, as well as his billionaire-coddling tax policies. AlterNet found that the largest corporate donor to his campaign is a California polluter, and that the pro-Johnson political action committee, Purple PAC, is primarily financed by a member of the radical right involved with efforts to privatize public education.

Here we examine a few of Johnson's alarming stances and ties.

1. Opposes federal guarantees for student loans. In June, Johnson told Julia Glum of the International Business Times that the reason college tuition is so high is that federal government-guaranteed loans eliminate competition for students. At the crux of Johnson's argument is that if you don't have the money up front to attend college, you shouldn't have the opportunity to attend college.

2. Opposes virtually all forms of gun control. Even more trigger-happy than most of the Republicans in Congress—who wouldn't even pass loophole-closing gun legislation in the wake of the Orlando and Sandy Hook mass shootings—Johnson has bought into the National Rifle Association's "good-guy-with-a-gun" trope, which argues that levels of gun violence would decrease if everybody had a gun.

3. Opposes the minimum wage. "I do not support the federal minimum wage," Johnson told CNN in June. In July, he told the *Washington Examiner*, if given the chance, "I would sign legislation to abolish it. I don't think it should be established and I, having been in business, having employed a thousand people myself, the minimum wage was never an issue." But if you think he's all for a state-level minimum wage, consider this: In 1999, during his first term as New Mexico governor, Johnson vetoed a bill that would have raised his state's minimum wage from \$4.25 an hour to \$5.65.

4. Opposes equal-pay laws. According to the website ISideWith.com, Johnson answered the following when asked whether he supports requiring employers to pay men and women the same for performing the same job: "No, there are too many other variables such as education, experience, and tenure that determine a fair salary."

5. Opposes collective bargaining for public employees. When it comes to his stance toward labor unions, Johnson is on par with Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker. Like the Koch-linked Walker, Johnson opposes allowing public employees to collectively bargain. In May 1999, Johnson vetoed a bill that would have renewed the contracts of the state's public employees, as well as one that would have renewed the state's collective bargaining law that covered state employees.

6. Proposes cuts to Social Security and removing Medicare and Medicaid from federal control. Johnson says he believes in "devolving" Medicare and Medicaid programs to the states, and raising the retirement age for collecting Social Security. Given his druthers, Johnson would also means-test eligibility for Social Security.

7. Supports private prisons. Johnson touts the discredited notion that private prisons are more cost-effective than public facilities while adhering to state and federal standards. When Johnson came into office in New Mexico, the state was housing some 700 prisoners outside its borders because the Department of Justice had found New Mexico's facilities to be inadequate for the number of prisoners held by the state. Johnson brought in private contractors to build two new prisons. But in April 1999, one of the prisons run by Wackenhut Corrections Corporation erupted into violence when prison administrators refused to provide Native American prisoners the firewood needed to practice their spiritual traditions, as mandated by law. That same month, Johnson vetoed a bill that would have provided enhanced oversight of New Mexico's privately run prisons.

8. Gave a sole-bidder contract to Koch Industries. In 1998, Gov. Johnson announced that Koch Materials, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Koch Industries, was contracted by the state for a \$323 million highway project that involved the widening of N.M. Highway 44 to four lanes. A

loophole in the controversial \$62 million (on top of the construction costs) warranty provision of the contract, as well as the relegation of payment to federal highway funds (after Johnson vetoed the use of a gas tax for such projects) ultimately cost the taxpayers of New Mexico some \$20 million a year in federal highway funds over the course of the next five gubernatorial administrations. After winning the contract, Koch Industries donated the maximum allowable \$5,000 to Johnson's re-election campaign.

9. May have Koch backing for 2016 effort. The Daily Caller, a right-wing website, breathlessly reported in May an anonymous Johnson campaign staffer's assertion that David Koch had pledged "tens of millions of dollars" to bankroll Johnson's 2016 campaign. (David Koch was the Libertarian Party's 1980 vice-presidential nominee.) According to reporter Drew Johnson, "[a] Koch spokesman declined to comment on record." But after his article was published at the Daily Caller, Drew Johnson wrote, the unnamed spokesman said Koch had not pledged his support to any presidential candidate. So, who knows? You don't have to pledge your support in order to pass money to a PAC.

10. Uses dirty tricksters. In his 2012 presidential campaign on the Libertarian Party ticket, the Johnson campaign employed several unsavory operatives, as documented by independent reporter Mark Ames. They included Maureen Otis, a right-wing vote-caging specialist affiliated with the anti-immigrant Minutemen Civil Defense Force militia group; Jim Lacy, also involved with the Minutemen; and birther propagandist Floyd Brown, who also created the infamous racist Willie Horton ad that many credit with having won George H.W. Bush the presidency. Then there's Roger Stone, now an adviser to the Trump campaign.

11. Accepted \$1 million in PAC money from anti-education right-wing donor. Since September 8, an entity called Purple PAC has purchased \$550,000 in airtime and online advertising on behalf of Johnson. Founded by former Cato Institute president Ed Crane, Purple PAC has few donors, and is primarily bankrolled by Jeffrey Yass, an options trader whose pet cause is the privatization of public education. In the 2016 election cycle, Yass, who has donated \$1 million to Purple PAC, sits on the Cato board with David Koch. Yass is also known for his work with Students First PAC, a group formed by the right-wing Betsy DeVos, a member of the Koch network and the religious right. The PAC shared its name with the Students First initiative of Michelle Rhee, the former chancellor of the Washington, D.C. public schools who is a star proponent of education privatization.

12. Top corporate contributor slapped with \$1.5 million pollution fine. The top corporate contributor to the Johnson campaign (as opposed to PACs) is Morning Star Packing Company, an agribusiness tomato grower and processor of tomato products. Morning Star is also the top donor to Alternative PAC, which is behind a purported "matching service" between liberal and conservative voters inclined toward Johnson in order to falsely assure such voters they won't be skewing the election toward either Clinton or Trump should they cast a vote for Johnson. In March, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board in California slapped the company with a \$1.5 million fine for illegally enlarging wastewater ponds, polluting groundwater with excess salts, nitrates and organic waste.