

Gary Johnson on 11 key issues: Where does Libertarian presidential candidate stand?

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Voters are so disenchanted with major-party presidential candidates that many are taking a serious look at Libertarian Party candidate Gary Johnson.

Johnson, 63, was twice elected governor of New Mexico as a Republican, serving from 1995 to 2003. He boasts that he cut taxes 14 times, balanced the state's budget and left office with a billion-dollar surplus. The Libertarian Cato Institute gave him a fiscal policy grade of "B" in 2002.

Johnson ran for president in 2012 as a Republican with a libertarian-flavored platform focused on limited government, non-interventionist foreign policy, tax reform and opposition to the war on drugs. After being "marginalized in a Republican primary that seeks rigidity and ideological purity," Johnson jumped to the Libertarian Party. He and running mate James P. Gray received 1.27 million votes, about 1 percent of votes cast.

In 2016, Johnson's running mate is William Weld, 71, the former two-term Republican governor of Massachusetts.

Libertarians believe in liberty, enterprise and personal responsibility. "Each individual has the right to control his or her own body, action, speech, and property. Government's only role is to help individuals defend themselves from force and fraud," the party's website says.

Johnson calls the Democrats and Republicans "slightly different flavors of the status quo."

Here's where he and Weld stand on 11 key issues:

TAXES

Johnson would eliminate loopholes and deductions for special interests; get rid of "double taxation" on small businesses; and, eventually, replace taxes on income with a tax on consumption. The Libertarian Party platform calls for the abolishment of the Internal Revenue Service.

JOBS/ECONOMY

Johnson and Weld both tout their economic records as governors. They would cut over-regulation that they say is stifling entrepreneurs and small businesses.

CIVIL LIBERTIES

Johnson opposes government surveillance of private communications and financial transactions and favors an unregulated internet. He was an early supporter of gay marriage. Johnson also supports a woman's right to have an abortion. He opposes restricting gun ownership, except with respect to the mentally ill, and thinks Americans would be safer if more people carried guns. "Responsible adults should be free to marry whom they want, arm themselves if they want, and lead their personal lives as they see fit — as long as they aren't harming anyone else in doing so," his website says.

FOREIGN POLICY/MILITARY

The role of the military and foreign policy in a Johnson administration would be to "protect Americans from harm and allow us to exercise our freedoms." Johnson would stop using the military for "nation building" and "policing the world," which he says has created new enemies and kept the country in a state of "perpetual war."

IMMIGRATION

Johnson says his background as the former governor of a border state informs his understanding of immigration policy. He is critical of Trump's plan to build a wall. Johnson would make it easier for immigrants, after a background check, to get a work visa and a Social Security card so they could pay taxes.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Johnson believes "tough on crime" laws have criminalized aspects of our personal lives that should not be the concern of the state. He cites the war on drugs as an example, and calls it a failure. Johnson also is critical of mandatory minimum sentences that prevent judges from using their discretion.

MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION

As president, Johnson would take marijuana off the federal government's list of controlled substances, allowing states to legalize its recreational and medicinal use. He favors taxing and regulating the marijuana business. "We need to treat drug abuse as a health issue, not a crime," he says.

EDUCATION

Johnson would abolish the federal Department of Education and eliminate the Common Core curriculum. He favors school choice and competition to foster innovation.

ENVIRONMENT

The Libertarian candidates would focus the Environmental Protection Agency on its core mission of protecting the environment. He and Weld say the climate "probably" is changing and that humans "probably" have something to do with it, but they question whether government's efforts to combat it are working, or worth the expense.

DEFICIT/BUDGET

Johnson says he would balance the federal budget by cutting military spending and reforming entitlement programs. He hasn't provided specifics on what he would cut; the National Review estimates he would have to cut the budget by 43 percent to balance it.

HEALTH CARE

Johnson says he supports a free-market health care system that lowers cost through competition. Johnson opposes the Affordable Care Act. When asked at the June 22, 2016 town hall on CNN whether he would replace Obamacare or modify it, he was noncommittal. "I'm going to assume that Republican proposals accomplish that. If the proposals don't accomplish that, then I'm not on board," he said.