

United Liberty

Libertarian Republicans For Huntsman?

Doug Mataconis 12/5/2011

The choices for libertarian oriented Republicans in this year's Republican field are, admittedly, better than they have in the past. Not only is Ron Paul doing much better than he did four years ago, getting more press attention, and [seemingly surging into second place in Iowa](#), but we've also got Gary Johnson, former two-term Governor of New Mexico.

There's been much to lament about Johnson's campaign, of course, not the least being the near disaster caused due to [a campaign miscommunication that almost kept Johnson off the New Hampshire ballot](#), as well as [staff problems inside the campaign](#). At the same time, though, Johnson has largely been ignored by the media, and kept out of nearly all the debates due to low poll numbers (although, as Johnson has noted himself, it's hard to do well in the polls when they don't even include your name on the list of prospective candidates).

The possibility that Johnson could [run for the Libertarian Party nomination for President](#) next year is also encouraging. It's not perfect, of course, and libertarian Republicans have had to sit back and watch a bunch of incompetents like Michele Bachmann and Herman Cain rise in the polls and get far more media attention than either their qualifications or their accomplishments would seem to warrant while a two-term Governor is ignored. Nonetheless, it's better than we've had it in the past, and hopefully a sign that libertarian-leaning candidates are gaining wider acceptance in the Republican Party as a whole.

There's not much to like in the Republican field beyond Johnson and Paul, of course, but there's one candidate out there that comes pretty close. His name is Jon Huntsman, former two-term Governor of Utah, and Republican Liberty Caucus Vice-Chair Eduardo J. Lopez-Reyes argues that [pro-liberty Republicans ought to give him a look](#):

Without question, Paul and Johnson represent the most libertarian GOP factions, but Huntsman's record and views may be best aligned with President Ronald Reagan's, who stated that "the very heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism." Sorens suggested labeling Huntsman's philosophy a "no-label libertarianism." In fact, like Reagan's, Huntsman's views might be best described as "middle-America libertarianism."

While definitely not libertarianism in the Johnson and Paul mold, Huntsman's libertarianism still aims to return power back to the states, embrace a realist foreign policy paradigm, and tap into the "heart and soul" of Americans whose main concern is getting our nation back on its feet through job-creation, fairer trade policies, and innovative thinking.

The truth is in the numbers. While Huntsman was governor, Utah led nationally in job-creation amidst a recession, was rated best-managed by the Pew Center, and was recognized by the Cato Institute for sound fiscal policy.

Huntsman's domestic policy is informed by knowledge of the challenges that arise from a blurring line between foreign and domestic affairs. Having served abroad in many capacities, his foreign policy experience is unparalleled and groomed to navigate these gray areas to our nation's advantage.

To those of us who prefer the GOP focusing on fiscal issues, a truly conservative foreign policy and states rights, Huntsman's views and record are promising. He believes the Federal Reserve should be audited, supports the 10th Amendment on issues such as medical marijuana and has a solid record on Second Amendment rights. Perhaps one of the most significant differences between Huntsman and all other candidates excepting Johnson and Paul is his desire to bring our foreign policy out of the Cold War and into the 21st century. Huntsman favors reducing our troop presence abroad, where a surgical and strategic intelligence approach could replace the gargantuan investment made overseas since World War II and escalated after 9/11. Nothing could be fairer to the American people, our troops and their families.

Huntsman, of course, is by no means a pure libertarian, and he's far from perfect. When he was Governor of Utah, for example, he was one of several Republican Governors who spoke out in favor of the 2009 stimulus package. Of course, so did Rick Perry in his capacity as head of the Republican Governor's Association, and most of the GOP Governors who spoke out against the stimulus ended up taking the money anyway. Although I opposed the stimulus, one could argue that such Governor's were acting in the best interests of their state in taking money that Congress had already authorized.

One particular aspect of Huntsman's record as Governor, though, should be of interest to libertarians. While he was Governor, Huntsman shepherded through the legislature a health care reform package that relied primarily on free market mechanisms to increase the availability of health care insurance to low-income families, and to bring costs under control. It hasn't been perfect, but it's been more successful at bringing costs under control than RomneyCare has, largely because it relies on the market. Best of all, there are no mandates imposed on Utah residents under the program.

In fact, the stimulus seems to be one of Huntsman's few egregious flaws from a libertarian perspective. He has come out in support of civil unions for gays and lesbians, a position that Gary Johnson held until just about a week ago when he announced his support for same-sex marriage. He has, as noted above, provided a stark contrast with most of the other Republican candidates on foreign policy, not only in [opposing the bombastic interventionism that has replaced serious thought in some corners of the GOP](#), but also in calling for [an immediate end](#) to our involvement in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Huntsman has proposed a tax plan that has earned wide praise from the [Wall Street Journal](#), as well as conservatives like [Rameesh Ponnuru](#), and economics writers like [James Pethokoukis](#). And, just this past week he put forward [a plan to end the concept of banks that are "Too Big To Fail,"](#) and the bailouts that come with them. That last plan involves use of the antitrust laws that libertarians are likely to find anathema, but it's worth noting that our current financial system is

structured the way it is largely because of the incestuous relationship between the banks and the government, as well as the implicit promise that those banks will be bailed out if they happen to make bad decisions. At some point, we either have to change that structure so that bailouts aren't necessary, or we have to accept the fact that we effectively have a socialized banking system. I know which option I prefer.

Like I said, Jon Huntsman is no Gary Johnson or Ron Paul, and some libertarians will reject him for that reason alone. That's certainly your right, but I would suggest that Huntsman at least represents a strand of conservatism that is sorely lacking in the GOP today, and which is far more amendable to libertarian ideas than the theocratic nanny state conservatism of Michele Bachmann, Rick Santorum, or Rick Perry and the big government conservatism of Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich. Like other politicians like Mitch Daniels, he represents a wing of the Republican Party that libertarians could potentially find themselves at home in.

Of course, Governor Huntsman isn't doing any better in the polls than Gary Johnson at the moment, although he has benefited from receiving far more media attention over the past several months. At this point, Huntsman's cash strapped campaign is rolling all its dice on a surprise showing in New Hampshire, where he's spent nearly all his time since announcing his candidacy. While [recent polls](#) in the Granite State so suggest that Huntsman is moving into double digit territory, he's still far behind Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich, and Ron Paul. The odds that he'll come away as the surprise of the night on January 10th are pretty low. Nonetheless, I'd recommend giving Huntsman a look, and hoping that there are more Republicans like him out there.