

## Former New Mexico governor Gary Johnson courts Ron Paul's libertarian base

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"You say you want a revolution?" is the unofficial motto for former New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson's new advocacy committee. The slogan, emblazoned across the top of the advocacy committee's website, [OurAmericaInitiative.com](http://OurAmericaInitiative.com)<sup>[1]</sup>, brings to mind the largely online effort to elect Texas congressman Ron Paul president, an initiative that was also dubbed a "revolution."

When Johnson, a Republican, spoke at the offices of the libertarian Reason magazine on Tuesday, there were more not-so-subtle hints that he intended to try to capture Rep. Paul's base. "I'm absolutely a Ron Paul fan," Johnson told the audience, made up mostly of staffers at libertarian-leaning organizations in Washington. That evening he, along with Harvard economist and Johnson adviser Jeffrey Miron, unveiled a three-point economic plan that seemed aimed at the dreams of Tea Partiers. "Slash expenditures" "cut taxes," and "shrink federal involvement in the economy" are the plan's three main planks.

Until recent years, Johnson was an unlikely prospect for the 2012 race. His service as governor, from 1995 to 2003, was his first and only political office. He spent his years out of office focusing more on climbing Mount Everest and competing in triathlons than politics. While governor, he publicly advocated the decriminalization of marijuana, and in a 2001 interview with Reason, Johnson said there were "no politics in his future," because he had "pulled the pin on my political career with my stance on drugs."

But when The Daily Caller asked him what has changed since that interview, Johnson responded that "over time the [marijuana] issue has come to a tipping point," citing a recent Gallup poll that found 44 percent of Americans support legalization.

In 2008, Johnson further enhanced his standing among Ron Paul supporters when he was a speaker at the Rally for the Republic, a convention held when Paul was not invited to speak at the Republican National Convention. There, Johnson declared to a cheering crowd that, "We need to abolish the Federal Reserve."

While the economic plan he presented at Reason did not call for abolishing the Federal Reserve, instead restricting it to "maintaining price stability" instead of bailing out financial firms, the plan was ambitious in other areas. Johnson called for immediate cutbacks in entitlement programs. "It's not 2038 that Social Security is bankrupt," he said. "It's now."

His proposal also advocated tax cuts on savings and investment, a flat tax for "income or consumption," reducing subsidies for agriculture, transportation, and "all other special interests," and eliminating government funding for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Johnson then drew parallels between his plan, heavy on eliminating policies, and his tenure as governor of New Mexico, in which he vetoed 750 bills. He has cited privatizing prisons, eliminating state government jobs and cutting taxes as his major accomplishments in New Mexico, saying that he pursued these policies regardless of their popularity. In both 2000 and 2002, the Cato Institute's Fiscal Policy Report Card on America's Governors rated Johnson as a C due to 3 percent average annual increases in real per capita spending by the state government. In 1996 and 1998, Cato gave Johnson B's.

When asked about his proudest legacy as governor, Johnson said, "We really tackled the issues across the board. What should have been on the table was on the table." He indicated that he would take a similar approach in any future political office. "Whether or not this stuff goes anywhere," he said, referring to his economic plan, "it needs to be put on the table and debated."

Not all of Johnson's stances fit perfectly with the views of Tea Party supporters. "Immigration

is a good thing. We should make that as easy as possible," he said, noting that he is opposed to a border fence. Johnson also said he differs from Ron Paul on how to promote free trade, and that he generally supports NAFTA and other free-trade agreements.

When questioned from the audience about how he plans to legislate his economic plan and overcome the likely opposition, Johnson was less specific. "Regardless of my legislation," he said, "spending has to be stopped."

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