



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on September 5, 2016

Published in the issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 32, No. 17

Libertarian Party Candidates

Most election years, so-called third-party candidates merit scarcely a condescending nod from the establishment media.

This isn't one of those years. Thanks to the complexion of the two major-party tickets, once-ignored third-party candidates are drawing the interest of unusually large numbers of Americans tired of voting for the lesser of two evils.

One candidate who is already a household name is former New Mexico governor Gary Johnson (right), who is the Libertarian Party's candidate for president. His vice-presidential running mate, former Massachusetts governor William Weld (left), is also something of a political heavyweight.



Gary Johnson is no stranger to the political stage, having first run successfully for governor of New Mexico in 1994. Johnson, who had built a multimillion-dollar construction firm that was one of New Mexico's largest, was advised by Republican Party leaders to run for the state legislature. The ambitious Johnson ran for governor instead, and won election as a Republican in a state where registered Democrats held a three-to-one advantage at the polls.

From the beginning of his tenure as governor, Johnson pursued policies that often made his fellow Republicans as uncomfortable as the Democrats. Johnson was (and remains) opposed to the federal war on drugs, for example (calling it an "expensive bust"), and worked tirelessly for legalizing marijuana and decriminalizing other drugs. As governor, his veto pen was active, vetoing 750 bills during his two terms in office — more than all of New Mexico's previous governors combined. Roughly one-third of the bills vetoed by Johnson were sponsored by his fellow Republicans, and only two were ever overridden. His policies made him wildly popular with New Mexicans. Johnson cut taxes and spending, and fulfilled a campaign pledge to cut the annual rate of government spending increase in New Mexico, which at the time of his election was running about 10 percent a year. He proposed a range of tax cuts in his first budget, and one of them — a gas tax cut — actually passed the legislature. He also fired 1,200 state employees.

At the same time, Johnson increased state spending on education and roads. Yet overall, his record speaks for itself: By the time his second and final term as New Mexico governor ended, the state was running a billion-dollar surplus — but with a better road system and two new prisons into the balance.

Because of state-mandated term limits, Johnson was prohibited from running for a third term as New Mexico's governor. Four years later, Johnson threw his hat in the presidential ring, becoming the Libertarian Party's presidential candidate for the first time. His campaign received just under one percent of the total popular vote, for a total of more than 1,200,000 votes nationwide.



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Former Republican William Weld, Johnson's running mate, defied steep odds in 1990 when he ran to replace retiring Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. The former U.S. attorney for the state of Massachusetts defeated Democratic candidate and Boston University president John Silber by a narrow margin, but won reelection in 1994 with 71 percent of the vote, the largest gubernatorial electoral margin in Massachusetts history. Weld's rather liberal views endeared him to the Massachusetts voting public. Weld broke ranks with much of the rest of the GOP in supporting the legalization of marijuana, same-sex "marriage," abortion "rights," and a wide range of gun control measures (Weld has since supposedly disavowed his gun control proposals).

Weld's political career foundered, however, when he decided to resign the governorship in 1997 to devote all his energy to his nomination by President Bill Clinton as ambassador to Mexico. But then-Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Jesse Helms steadfastly refused to give the Weld nomination a Senate hearing. Disappointed, Weld finally withdrew his name from consideration and returned to practicing law. He has never been far from the corridors of political power, however, as his membership in the Council on Foreign Relations attests.

On January 6, 2016, Gary Johnson announced his second campaign for the president of the United States, and on May 29 he became the Libertarian Party's presidential candidate for the second straight time, with Weld his running mate completing the first all-governor presidential ticket for any party since 1948. His platform is a mixture of "fiscally conservative" and "socially tolerant" positions, in Johnson's own words.

Johnson continues to be a strong advocate for the legalization of marijuana, believing that "legalizing and regulating marijuana will save lives and make our communities safer by eliminating crime and creating an industry that can legitimately participate in America's economy." He also continues to believe that abortion, while morally objectionable, should be a woman's personal choice. According to his campaign's website:

Gary Johnson believes in the sanctity of the life of the unborn.... However, Gov. Johnson recognizes that the right of a woman to choose is the law of the land, and has been for several decades. That right must be respected and despite his personal aversion to abortion, he believes that such a very personal and individual decision is best left to women and families, not the government. He feels that each woman must be allowed to make decisions about her own health and well-being.

Regarding another combustible social issue, so-called same-sex "marriage," both Johnson and Weld are strong supporters of "marriage equality." Weld, the Johnson-Weld campaign website proudly notes, "actually appointed the judge who wrote the opinion that established marriage equality as a matter of constitutional right."

And Johnson has begun supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, telling a young protester recently, "We've all had our heads in the sand and let's wake up. Discrimination does exist, has existed, and for me personally, um, slap, slap, wake up."

In keeping with his tax-cutting pedigree, Johnson deplors our "tax code that is more than 70,000 pages long, enforced by a government agency with almost 100,000 employees ... a nightmare for the average American." In fine fiscally conservative form, the Johnson-Weld ticket pledges "[to eliminate] special interest tax loopholes, to get rid of the double-taxation on small businesses, and ultimately, the replacement of all income and payroll taxes with a single consumption tax that determines your tax



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burden by how much you spend, not how much you earn.”

Along with tax cuts, Johnson and Weld promise to cut government spending massively and to submit balanced budgets to Congress. In fact, Johnson promises that his first major act as president will be to submit a balanced budget with “no gimmicks, no imaginary cuts in the distant future,” and “real reductions to bring spending in line with revenues, without tax increases.”

On foreign policy, Johnson and Weld declare: “No Nation Building. No Policing the World. More Security Here at Home.” Echoing Ron Paul’s concerns, Johnson and Weld dare to question the decades-long policy of blanket American interventionism:

Looking back over the past couple of decades, it is difficult to see how the wars we have waged, the interventions we have conducted, the lives sacrificed, and the trillions of tax dollars we have spent on the other side of the globe have made us safer. If anything, our meddling in the affairs of other nations has made us less safe.

Many senior military and foreign policy analysts have concluded that the rise of ISIS can actually be traced back to instability created by our meddling in the affairs of others. Overall, the Johnson-Weld ticket, with its mixture of fiscal restraint and social latitudinarianism, is in fairly close alignment with Libertarian platforms past. Time will tell how well it plays in Peoria.

Photo of Gary Johnson (right) with William Weld: AP Images



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