



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 10, 2011

## **GOP Presidential Candidate Gary Johnson**

“I’m a fix-it man.”

Few would dispute Johnson’s assertion. As he pointed out, he “started a one-man fix-it business,” Big J Enterprises, that ultimately became a multimillion-dollar company with over 1,000 employees. Then, as Governor of New Mexico from 1995 to 2003, he slashed state spending and government employment, cut taxes, and privatized some state services. The result: New Mexico, which had previously experienced 10-percent annual growth in the state budget — and corresponding deficits — ended up with a large budget surplus. The man gets results.



Part of his secret to getting results as Governor was a willingness to utter the one word that most politicians seem incapable of saying: “No.” During his tenure he vetoed 750 bills — more than the other 49 Governors combined — and used the line-item veto to, in his words, “save millions of dollars.” Such actions earned him the sobriquet “Governor Veto,” which he wears as a badge of honor. “America,” Johnson quipped in his campaign kickoff speech, “needs a ‘President Veto’ right now”; and that, he says, is why he is running for Chief Executive.

In addition to wielding his gubernatorial veto pen mercilessly, he crusaded — albeit in vain — for school vouchers in the face of fierce opposition from the Democrat-controlled legislature. He made even bigger waves by speaking out against the federal War on Drugs, calling particularly for the decriminalization of marijuana.

Usually described as a libertarian, Johnson comes across as more of a pragmatist than an ideologue. Whereas the other Republican candidate he most resembles, Ron Paul, often argues from first principles and invokes the Constitution, Johnson is more likely to discuss a policy in terms of its cost-benefit ratio. Thus, he supports marijuana legalization not so much as a matter of personal liberty but as a matter of putting a stop to wasteful, counterproductive spending. Likewise, his foreign policy, while nearly as noninterventionist as Paul’s, is predicated less on a belief in minding our own business than on the fact that intervention is expensive.

Still, given the chance, Johnson can take stands on principle, such as opposing the Patriot Act and demanding an end to the torture of prisoners. His principles and his record were strong enough to spark a movement within the Libertarian Party to draft him as its candidate for President in 2000; Johnson declined.

Because Johnson tends to view policy decisions through the prism of costs versus benefits, his positions on fiscal and economic issues are among his strongest. Says his website: “The U.S. is borrowing or printing more than 40 cents of every dollar the government spends today. The math is simple: Federal spending must be cut not by millions or billions, but by trillions. And it must be done today.”

Johnson calls for “restrain[ing] spending across the board”: eliminating stimulus programs, earmarks,



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and subsidies; reforming entitlement programs; repealing ObamaCare and the Medicare prescription drug benefit; ending the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan; and reducing defense spending to what is actually needed to protect the United States.

He also takes a hard line against Federal Reserve monetary manipulation, calling for an audit and congressional oversight of the Fed and for getting the Fed “out of the business of printing money and buying debt through quantitative easing.” However, he stops short of demanding the abolition of the Fed.

On foreign policy Johnson sounds a strong noninterventionist note: “All military activities in Iraq, Afghanistan, and, now, Libya should end, our troops returned home, and the focus of our foreign policy reoriented toward the protection of U.S. citizens and interests.” Here the Constitution even gets a mention as Johnson alludes to its mandate that Congress declare war before the President may deploy troops. He also suggests a rethinking of Cold War-era troop deployments, including NATO, where the United States still shoulders much of the burden for other nations’ defenses. He opposes torture, says “individuals incarcerated unjustly by the U.S. should have the ability to seek compensation through the courts,” and maintains that detainees at Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere “must be given due process via the courts or military tribunals, and must not be held indefinitely without regard to those fundamental processes.”

While this sounds good by and large, there is a sense that Johnson, unable to put numbers to matters of foreign intervention, is somewhat less committed to putting a stop to it than he is to tackling domestic spending. He has stated that he favors keeping the Guantanamo prison camp open and is clearly not opposed to the use of military tribunals. Moreover, he “is open, in principle, to waging humanitarian wars,” according to the *Weekly Standard*. “If there’s a clear genocide somewhere, don’t we really want to positively impact that kind of a situation?” he told the neoconservative magazine. “Isn’t that what we’re all about? Isn’t that what we’ve always been about? But just this notion of nation building — I think the current policy is making us more enemies than more friends.” One recalls the similar note of skepticism with regard to nation-building from another Southwestern Governor in 2000 — and how disastrously interventionist his subsequent presidency turned out to be.

Johnson takes a much firmer stand against government intervention domestically. In addition to opposing the Patriot Act, he also opposes indefinite incarceration of suspects as “enemy combatants,” the Transportation Security Administration’s monopoly on airport security, regulation and taxation of the Internet (including “Net Neutrality”), and the very existence of the U.S. Department of Education.

On immigration the former New Mexico Governor places less of an emphasis on trying to keep illegal immigrants out than on trying to make legal immigration easier and removing incentives for people to try to cross the border illegally. His website argues for streamlining the work visa and legal immigration processes and for giving illegal immigrants a two-year grace period to obtain work visas. He does, however, support a “‘one strike, you’re out’ rule for immigrants who circumvent the streamlined work visa process” and “sanctions on employers” who hire illegals.

As to the War on Drugs itself, Johnson maintains that while marijuana should be legalized, “harder drugs should not be legalized, but their use should be dealt with as a health issue — not a criminal justice issue.” Johnson frequently likens drug prohibition to the alcohol prohibition of the 1920s and points to the many similarities between the two, including crime, violence, and overdose deaths. America came to its senses and repealed Prohibition, he says, and it should do likewise with the War on Drugs. Even here, though, Johnson’s pragmatic side comes through: Unlike many libertarians who



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would call for complete freedom to use any and all drugs, Johnson stumps for “regulating, taxing, and enforcing [marijuana’s] lawful use” and for government treatment of those addicted to harder drugs.

Johnson’s positions on abortion and homosexual unions will surely rankle some conservatives. “I don’t personally have the sense that life begins at conception,” Johnson told the *Weekly Standard*. On the other hand, he clearly limits his support for legal abortion to the period of pregnancy prior to the fetus’ “viability,” and he does think *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned and the issue of abortion returned to the states. Similarly, while he favors “gay unions” at the state and local level, he thinks “government should be out of the marriage business and leave marriage to the churches,” which should not be forced to perform homosexual “marriage” ceremonies.

With endless wars, debt as far as the eye can see, and continual erosions of our God-given liberties, America certainly does need a “fix-it man.”

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