



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 7, 2012

Gary Johnson: Libertarian “Governor Veto”

The man known as “Governor Veto” will take his case for smaller, less intrusive, constitutional government to the voters as the U.S. Libertarian Party nominee for President of the United States. At their [Las Vegas convention](#), the Libertarians chose former New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson on Saturday as the party’s standard-bearer. Johnson earned his nickname during his eight years (1995-2003) at the Santa Fe State House, where he vetoed more than 750 bills passed by the Legislature. Johnson himself brought up the “Governor Veto” label at the convention, pointing to it as evidence of his strength of character.



The former chief executive won 70 percent of the votes cast by the 632 delegates, handily defeating runner up Lee Wrights, an Air Force veteran with no previous political experience. The two men were the finalists from among a field of candidates that numbered six when the convention opened on Thursday.

Johnson announced he would seek the Libertarian Party nod months ago, after dropping out of a crowded field of candidates for the Republican nomination. He was unable to gain much traction as a GOP candidate and despite his status as a former two-term governor, his low ranking in the polls kept him out of all but one of the televised debates. His most memorable moment in that campaign came during his one debate appearance, when he convulsed both the audience and his fellow candidates with laughter by claiming his neighbor’s dog had created “more shovel-ready jobs” than President Obama had.

Otherwise his low-key style and comparative lack of media exposure have kept him mostly out of the spotlight, despite a record that might be expected to have great appeal to conservative Republicans. According to his [campaign website](#), he pushed through 14 tax cuts during his two terms as governor and left office with his state one of only four in the nation with a balanced budget.

But if Johnson’s record and campaign did not sufficiently impress Republican primary and caucus voters, they were more than enough to carry the day with the Libertarians, whose party motto is “minimum government, maximum freedom.” The ex-governor proposes to cut federal spending by roughly \$1 trillion in order to balance the budget within a year. As a Republican candidate, he advocated a 43 percent reduction of the federal budget, the elimination of the Internal Revenue Service and the abolition of all existing taxes on individuals and businesses, to be replaced with a national sales tax, called the Fair Tax.

Johnson, 59, is a self-made entrepreneur who started a door-to-door handyman business that he grew over 20 years into a construction company with more than 1,000 employees. He faces a stiff challenge to getting his record as either a businessman or as governor before the voting public, however, since neither he nor the Libertarian Party will be able to raise anywhere near the amount of money for



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advertising that the Democrats and Republicans are raising for President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, the apparent GOP nominee. Nor does he have much chance of getting into televised debates with the major party candidates. Since Presidential debates began with the Nixon-Kennedy contest in 1960, Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot has been the only third-party or independent candidate permitted on stage in debate with the major party contenders. Perot debated with President George H.W. Bush and Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton in 1992. In 1980, independent candidate John Anderson, a Republican congressman from Illinois, had a one-on-one debate with Republican candidate Ronald Reagan, but was excluded from the one debate between Reagan and President Jimmy Carter.

As the Libertarian Party candidate, Johnson is also running against history, since the party's largest share of the presidential vote has been the 1.1 percent, or 921,128 votes, garnered by candidate Ed Clark in 1980. Four years ago, former Georgia Congressman Bob Barr received only 526,686 votes, or 0.4 percent, as the Libertarian candidate for President.

The Libertarians are hoping this year to gain votes in the general election from supporters of Texas Congressman Ron Paul, who remains a candidate for the Republican nomination, despite Romney's huge and, many believe, insurmountable lead in the delegate count. Paul received 432,179 votes, or 0.47 percent as the Libertarian Party candidate for President in 1988. A champion of limited federal government under a strict interpretation of powers delegated by the Constitution of the United States, Paul is the Republican candidate most similar to Johnson in political principles and positions.

Photo: Former New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson speaks to a crowd of Tea Party supporters at the Hyatt Regency, May 5, 2011 in Greenville, S.C.: AP Images



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