GOP Continues Crusade to Keep Libertarians Off the Ballot

In August, the Republican Party establishment [violated its own rules by disenfranchising Ron Paul supporters](#) and squelching dissenting voices now and in the future in order to assure the nomination of Mitt Romney for president.

As Election Day draws near, the same coterie of kingmakers has set their sights on the ballots in all 50 states, filing legal challenges to the presence of third-party candidates that might siphon off voters in the tight race for the White House.

One candidate targeted for ballot exclusion is former New Mexico Governor [Gary Johnson, the Libertarian Party's candidate for president.](#)

Although registering "only a blip in the polls," Johnson's name recognition and national prominence is rising and his name will appear on the ballot in every state except Michigan and Oklahoma.

This crescendo must worry the Republican Party, although Reince Priebus, the national Republican Party chairman, is quoted in a *New York Times* article calling Johnson a "nonfactor." The *Times* also quotes Danny Diaz, a spokesman for the Romney campaign, saying that their campaign's sole focus was on defeating President Obama and that "voters understand the stakes are high, and if they want to change the trajectory of this country, they'll vote for Romney."

Despite this official disregard of Johnson, the lawsuits continue being filed. Recently, Johnson and the party he represents scored a significant courtroom victory when a judge in Pennsylvania ruled that four Libertarian Party candidates — [including Johnson](#) — may remain on the ballot in Pennsylvania. This put an end to an attempt by the Keystone State's Republican Party to block the country's largest third party from keeping spots on the November ballot.

Perhaps the urgency to keep conservatives and libertarians from having the option of choosing someone other than Mitt Romney comes from the fact that if opinion polls are a reliable indication, [every vote will count in November.](#)

For example, the results of [a recent Real Clear Politics poll](#) show that with regard to the electoral college count, Romney trails President Obama by 201 to 146 electoral votes. Such a narrow margin leaves little room for the Romney camp to disregard third-party politicians that appeal to the more libertarian wing that traditionally votes for the GOP in presidential elections.

A [*New York Times* article from October 14](#) reported on Republican machinations around the country to prevent Johnson or others from siphoning voters from the Romney tally.

Jim Rutenberg of the *Times* writes:

> The fear of Mr. Johnson's tipping the outcome in an important state may explain why an aide to Mr. Romney ran what was effectively a surveillance operation into Mr. Johnson's efforts over the

summer to qualify for the ballot at the Iowa State Fair, providing witnesses to testify in a lawsuit to block him that ultimately fizzled.

Libertarians suspect it is why Republican state officials in Michigan blocked Mr. Johnson from the ballot after he filed proper paperwork three minutes after his filing deadline.

And it is why Republicans in Pennsylvania hired a private detective to investigate his ballot drive in Philadelphia, appearing at the homes of paid canvassers and, in some cases, flashing an F.B.I. badge — he was a retired agent — while asking to review the petitions they gathered at $1 a signature, according to testimony in the case and interviews.

The challenge in Pennsylvania, brought by state Republican Party officials who suspected that Democrats were secretly helping the effort to get Mr. Johnson on the ballot, was shot down in court last week, bringing to 48 the number of states where Mr. Johnson will compete on Nov. 6.

Gary Johnson isn't the only thorn in Mitt Romney's side, however. Virgil Goode is running for president under the banner of the Constitution Party, and he will be on the ballot in Virginia and 28 other states.

Whereas the Libertarian Party fought to keep their place on the ballot in Pennsylvania, on August 21, the Constitution Party withdrew their petition to get on the ballot in Pennsylvania. According to a story published online by *Philadelphia Weekly*, "the decision came after multiple warnings of the court costs by attorneys for the Republican Party, who have challenged the Constitution and Libertarian parties' ballot petitions."

Goode's running mate on the Constitution Party's presidential ticket is Pennsylvania attorney James Clymer.

"The challenge represented a monolithic establishment party which is intent on denying people the opportunity to vote for anyone who might criticize it from a limited government, non-interventionist perspective," Clymer told *Philadelphia Weekly*. "It used its almost limitless resources to take advantage of laws designed by Republicans and Democrats to make sure no other party has a place at the election table and court decisions that have supported raising the hurdles a third party has to jump over to get to a general election," he added.

Republicans are determined to win the White House, and throwing up roadblocks is just part of the game plan.

Robert Gleason, the chairman of the Pennsylvania Republican Party, made just that point in a statement quoted in the *New York Times* piece. "'This election will be close — if you remember, Bush lost by only something like 143,000 votes in 2004,' said Mr. Gleason, noting that his party has managed to disqualify tens of thousands of Libertarian signatures. 'So we play the game hard here.'"

For his part, Johnson is ready for the rumble and paints the two-party scheme as nothing more than "a debate between Coke and Pepsi."

"Take the issue of Medicare," he is quoted in the *New York Times*. "Both parties are arguing over who is going to spend more money on Medicare when we should be having a raging debate in this country over how we're going to cut Medicare."

Johnson's commitment to a smaller government has attracted many former supporters of Ron Paul to his camp. Paul, the iconic 12-term congressman from Texas, is the figurehead of a revolution that continues growing in numbers. While Paul has indicated he will not run for president as a third-party candidate, he consistently refuses to endorse Mitt Romney, telling CNBC that there is essentially no

difference between the two major parties. "I've been in this business a long time and believe me, there is essentially no difference from one administration to another, no matter what the platforms [say]. The foreign policy stays the same, the monetary policy stays the same, there's no proposal for any real cuts and both parties support it," Paul said.

Precisely because of this plain spoken, principle-above-party philosophy, it is no wonder that in an interview with Fox Business channel, Paul promoted the prospects of third-party options, including an oblique reference to Libertarian Party presidential candidate Gary Johnson. "There are other people who are technically capable of winning because they're on a lot of ballots," Paul said.

"Like Gary Johnson, for example," the interviewer asked.

"Yeah," Paul replied, stopping short of an express endorsement.

In 1988, Ron Paul was the name at the top of the Libertarian Party presidential ticket. In that election, Paul's name appeared on the ballot in 46 states. He finished third in the popular vote count with 432,179 votes (0.5%).

But 1988 is an eon in political chronology and Gary Johnson has a long way to go and a short time to get there. He needs to get the word out and start poaching libertarians, independents, and conservatives off the Romney reservation.

To make this run, Johnson has the help of Roger Stone, described as a "longtime Republican operative." Stone is determined to convince Republicans to abandon the party's pre-determined candidate and side with a man who has the conservative bona fides they would prefer in a president.

How is the plan going? According to the *New York Times*:

> *The Miami Herald* and *The Tampa Bay Times* have measured [Johnson's] support at about 1 percent — far more than the 537-vote margin that was ultimately deemed to have separated Mr. Bush from Mr. Gore in 2000.

Regardless of the upward trajectory of his support nationwide, Johnson did not appear Tuesday night at the second presidential debate. Given the tight-fisted control of those who financially support both major parties, there is little chance that anyone courageous enough to openly challenge that hegemony ever will.

Finally, in his commentary on the first televised presidential debate, Johnson's remarks reveal why many Ron Paul backers may pull the lever for the Libertarian Party in November. Said Johnson of the debate:

> We didn't see a debate tonight. We saw two slightly differing versions of defending the Republican and Democrat status quo that has given us war after war after war, a $16 trillion debt, and a government that is the answer to everything. Nowhere was there a real plan for reducing government, balancing the budget any time in the foreseeable future, or a path that will actually put Americans back to work.

That sort of frankness will keep Johnson out of the debates, keep the GOP on his case, and keep his poll numbers rising.

Photo of Gary Johnson: AP Images

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