

[The man who won't win the election tonight, but did win my heart](#)

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Written by [Sam Bowman](#) [2] | Tuesday 6 November 2012



Tonight, we'll find out whether Americans have voted to give Barack Obama four more years in the White House or to give Mitt Romney a go. All signs point to Obama, though apparently a surprise Romney win isn't impossible. If I'm completely honest, I doubt if it would make a difference either way.

The real shame is that by far the best candidate in the race hasn't had a shot since the word go. Indeed, [Gary Johnson](#) [3], a two-time former governor of New Mexico, is probably the best candidate to run for President in many decades. (I like Ron Paul too, but running for the party nomination doesn't count ? he only ran for *president* in 1988.)

What's remarkable is the contrast between the mainstream candidates and Johnson ? where they have tussled over ludicrous non-issues like funding for PBS (0.01% of the Federal budget) and state funding of birth control (which costs about \$10 a month), Johnson has made issues like immigration, the war on drugs, and spending cuts (the trillions of dollars of cuts needed to balance the budget, not the billions that the two mainstream candidates play with) major planks of his candidacy.

Partially because of this, he probably won't do very well. His campaign is hoping for 5% of the national vote but, to my untrained eye, that seems far-fetched. But I think libertarians in Britain and the US still have a lot to learn from Johnson, particularly the attention he's (rightly) given to immigration and drugs policy.

In the US and the UK, immigration would be a [profoundly positive](#) [4] injection of new talent and productive workers to ailing economies, and would in all likelihood create more jobs for native workers too.

Libertarian objections to the drug war are often misunderstood by non-libertarians. In the US, the problem is that drug prohibition destroys the lives of millions of people who have harmed nobody else, and has had such a [disproportionate effect on black people](#) [5] that it seems certain to be one of the biggest causes of poverty and social breakdown in black communities. It's not just because libertarians want to get high: these laws are destroying innocent people's lives.

And Johnson has resisted the temptation to focus on small-fry economic reforms, advocating a full-blown reimagining of the state and its relationship with the people. One [Bloomberg blogger's condemnation](#) [6] of Johnson's economics (cutting state spending and banning bank bailouts) is, inadvertently, a wonderful endorsement of the man. With enemies like this, who needs friends?

Johnson, it seems to me, has a joined-up view of what the state does to us. He sees 'social' issues like immigration and the drug war as being central to the harm that the state inflicts on society and the economy, and is not willing to ignore them in order to focus solely on 'economic issues' like marginal tax

rates, and so on.

He's also an optimistic, sunny guy. (Maybe you have to be to run on the Libertarian Party ticket.) And his time as Governor of New Mexico proves that a libertarian can govern in a way that doesn't send the electorate running for the hills. (Update: In the comments, Tommy gives a nice example of this: "He vetoed 200 of 424 bills in his first six months in office ? a national record of 47% of all legislation ? and used the line-item veto on most remaining bills. In office, Johnson fulfilled his campaign promise to reduce the 10% annual growth of the state budget. In his first budget, Johnson proposed a wide range of tax cuts, including a repeal of the prescription drug tax, a \$47 million income tax cut, and a 6 cents per gallon gasoline tax cut.")

He won't win tonight, and his campaign hasn't had the media breakthrough that he hoped. But libertarians and classical liberals have [taken note](#) [7]. If he inspires a new approach by them, then maybe Gary Johnson, the libertarian who talks about surprising things in a surprising way, will have a much bigger legacy than anyone ever expected.

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