



Libertarian Candidate
Gary Johnson

Libertarian nominee Gary Johnson isn't exactly a household name, but it looks like he's going to be on the ballot in nearly all states. That made me curious about his environmental positions.

I have to admit that Johnson's views were better than I expected. You can't really call Johnson an environmentalist, but he looks quite good compared with Ron Paul and others.

Ron Paul, as you may recall from an earlier post ([here](#)), wanted to abolish all pollution regulation. In place of regulations, he wanted victims of pollution to bring suit for damages. It was clear by 1850 or so that this approach was a failure.

In contrast, Johnson stands behind pollution regulation. His [website](#) says:

When it comes to the environment, the Federal government's responsibility is no different than in other aspects of our lives. It is simply to protect us from those who would do us harm and damage our property. There are bad actors who would pollute our water supplies and our air if allowed to do so, and we must have laws and regulations to protect innocent Americans from the harm those bad actors would do. However, common sense must prevail, and the costs of all regulations must be weighed against the benefits.

Cass Sunstein, among others, would agree with all of that. In fact, Johnson's position actually seems more environment-friendly than Romney's. Johnson is willing to regulate pollution if the regulation passes cost-benefit analysis. Romney would require the cost-benefit analysis but then add other hurdles such as a regulatory budget. (Of course, I haven't compared their positions outside of the environmental area, so I'm not expressing any view on their overall records.)

Johnson's views on specific issues sound conservative but not extreme. He has called for a much larger state role on environmental matters such as toxic cleanup and water quality. ([here](#)) There are certainly respectable scholars — and not necessarily conservative ones — who would support those positions.

In terms of climate change, I'd give Johnson credit for forthrightly recognizing the problem, but his solution seems unrealistic. According to [NPR](#), he has said:

You know, I'm accepting that global warming is man-caused. That said, I am opposed to cap and trade. I think that free-market approach. Hey, we're all demanding less carbon emission. I think we're going to get it. I think coal generation is not going to be a thing of the future because of our increased natural gas supplies. And so, we're going to see a lot of natural gas electrical generation come online.

It seems to me that it would more consistent with Johnson's views on pollution to call for regulation of carbon, or at least for the kinds of investment in clean energy research advocated by Jonathan Adler. But at least Johnson is clear on the science, unlike any of the major contenders for the Republican nomination.