



Published on *Sunshine State News* (<http://www.sunshinestateneews.com>)

Established Politicians Going Third Party in 2012 Race

By: [Kevin Derby](#) | Posted: March 17, 2012 3:55 AM

Looking back at American history, some of the most dramatic presidential elections have resulted from former officeholders running as third party candidates -- and that possibility looms in 2012.

A host of politicians are looking to be on the ballot in the presidential election come November -- just not as the Democratic or Republican candidates. While he faces some opposition, former Gov. Gary Johnson of New Mexico, a former candidate for the Republican nomination, is the front-runner to be the Libertarian Party's presidential nominee. Another former governor who sought the Republican nomination -- Buddy Roemer of Louisiana -- also pulled out of the GOP contest to run for the nominations of Americans Elect and the Reform Party. Virgil Goode, who represented parts of Virginia for 12 years in Congress as a Democrat, an independent and a Republican before losing his seat in 2008, appears headed toward being the nominee of the Constitution Party.

Rocky Anderson, who served eight years as mayor of Salt Lake City, including working with Mitt Romney during the 2002 Winter Olympic games there, is also running for the Americans Elect nomination and as the candidate of the Justice Party. Anderson, who gained national attention during his tenure as mayor for calling for the impeachment of then-President George W. Bush, jumped into the contest for the Americans Elect -- a group affiliated with former Democrats like Douglas Schoen and former Republicans like former Gov. Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey -- nomination on Wednesday.

"Americans Elect provides a unique opportunity to third-party candidates," Anderson said in a statement. "It gives the American people the ability to select their choice for president without worrying about the corporate investors backing their campaign. Declared candidates of Americans Elect are selected based on their qualifications rather than the size of their campaign war chest."

And there could be more former officeholders jumping into the race. Former U.S. Rep. Cynthia McKinney of Georgia, who took 0.12 percent of the popular vote in 2009, could emerge once again as the Green Party nominee, though a field of candidates -- including actress Roseanne Barr -- is already in the running.

Then there's former Gov. Jon Huntsman of Utah. Despite backing Mitt Romney after his own bid for the Republican presidential nomination collapsed, Huntsman -- who served as ambassador to China for President Barack Obama and ambassador to Singapore under President George H.W. Bush -- has been vocal about the need for a third party in American life. Buzz is increasing that Huntsman could end up as the Americans Elect nominee -- and this week Richard Winger, one of the nation's leading experts on third parties and ballot access, noted there are rumors that Evan Bayh, the Democrat who served Indiana as governor and a U.S. senator, could end up as his vice presidential pick.

GAME CHANGERS

With the pendulum swinging back and forth between the two major parties -- and with polls showing record low approval ratings of Congress -- third parties are looking to make their moves. When former officeholders have emerged as third-party candidates in American history, it was usually during times of political chaos and confusion.

For example, in the 1832 presidential elections, the second party system started forming in reaction to President Andrew Jackson. While some of the opposition to Jackson rallied behind Henry Clay in what would soon be the Whig Party, William Wirt emerged as the Anti-Mason Party candidate. Wirt, a Virginian who served as U.S. attorney general under James Monroe and John Quincy Adams, and who also wrote a well-regarded biography of Patrick Henry, led a party vehemently opposed to Freemasons -- despite Wirt having been a Mason himself.

With the crisis over slavery brewing, new parties seemed to emerge and quickly fade as the Whigs disintegrated.

Former President Martin Van Buren left the Democrats to run as the Free Soil Party presidential candidate in 1848 with anti-slavery Whig Charles Francis Adams -- the son and grandson of former presidents -- as his vice presidential candidate. New Hampshire U.S. Sen. John Hale was the Free Soil candidate in 1852 but he got trounced by fellow Granite State politician Franklin Pierce. Former Whig President Millard Fillmore teamed up with Andrew Jackson Donelson, the namesake and nephew of the iconic president, to run on the American Party ticket in 1856 but they got trounced by Democrat James Buchanan and John Fremont, the first nominee of the new Republican Party. When Republican Abraham Lincoln sought the presidency in 1860, he had to defeat three officeholders -- Democrats Vice President John Breckinridge and U.S. Sen. Stephen Douglas and Constitutional Union Party nominee John Bell, who served as secretary of War under William Henry Harrison and John Tyler and as a congressman and senator from Tennessee.

Around the State

- [Obama campaign quietly revs up Florida volunteers](#)
- [Senate tries again on redistricting maps](#)
- [Romney would support statehood for Puerto Rico](#)
- [Senate leader proposes new redistricting map and draws new fire](#)
- [Republican divide persists in Illinois](#)
- [Missouri caucuses marked by contention, with no clear victor yet](#)
- [Term-limit message didn't apply to West Palm Beach commissioner Bill Moss](#)

- New Senate district map modifies Manatee boundary
- Eve Samples: Major spill at FPL solar plant gets glossed over
- Obama marks St. Patrick's Day with pint in a pub

There are plenty of examples of former officeholders running on third party lines. Former President Teddy Roosevelt's effort as the Bull Moose candidate beat out incumbent Republican President William Howard Taft in 1912. U.S. Sen. Bob La Follette of Wisconsin took almost 17 percent of the popular vote in the 1924 presidential election. The Populist Party ran former congressmen as their candidate three times -- James Weaver of Iowa in 1892 and Tom Watson of Georgia in 1904 and 1908. U.S. Rep. William Lemke of North Dakota ran as the Union Party, an odd mixture of opponents of Franklin Roosevelt assembled from supporters of the late Huey Long and radio priest Father Charles Coughlin in 1936.

In 1948, Harry Truman faced two challengers who broke away from the Democratic Party -- former Vice President Henry Wallace who ran as the leftist Progressive Party candidate and Gov. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina on the Dixiecrat line. In 1968, Gov. George Wallace of Alabama carried five states and won 46 Electoral College votes as the American Independent candidate.

In recent years, while third party and independent candidates have often done well at the state level -- think Jesse Ventura, Joe Lieberman, Angus King, Lowell Weicker -- the most important third party candidates have not come from the ranks of officeholders. Take for example businessman Ross Perot, conservative commentator Pat Buchanan and consumer advocate Ralph Nader. All of them have run for president in recent years as third party candidates without ever holding office. Two former congressmen from Georgia -- McKinney as the Green Party candidate and Libertarian nominee Bob Barr -- ran for president in 2008 but neither came close to winning 1 percent of the popular vote. Neither did Ron Paul who was the Libertarian presidential candidate in 1988 before rejoining the GOP for his 2008 and 2012 presidential bids.

The last political officeholder who ran for president and carried a substantial portion of the popular vote was John Anderson, a former Republican who represented parts of Illinois in Congress for 20 years. After losing out to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 GOP presidential primaries, Anderson teamed up with former Gov. Pat Lucey of Wisconsin, a Democrat, to run as independents. They garnered almost 7 percent of the popular vote. Anderson, who kicked over a political comeback as the Reform Party candidate during the 2000 election cycle, has been reported to be active in advising Rocky Anderson during the 2012 election cycle.

DISSATISFIED VOTERS

The influx of former officeholders to run as third party candidates in the 2012 presidential election could be a reflection of continuing disillusion with the two major parties which has shaped recent elections.

In the last two decades, American politics have swung back and forth as both Republicans and Democrats scored huge victories -- and then promptly were handed stunning defeats. Bill Clinton beat out Republican George H.W. Bush in 1992 and, with Democrats controlling both chambers of Congress, looked to push his national health-care plan -- which failed. That led to the Republicans winning back the Senate and taking the U.S. House for the first time in four decades in the 1994 election cycle. But Newt Gingrich quickly became one of the most polarizing figures in politics and the GOP majority could not deliver on some of their key

issues -- including adding federal balanced budget and congressional term-limit amendments to the U.S. Constitution -- and Clinton easily handled Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole in the 1996 elections.

Clinton appeared to be riding high, but scandals related to his affair with Monica Lewinsky led to Republicans going after him in 1998. Despite losing seats in the 1998 congressional elections, the Republican majority in the House impeached Clinton but the Senate did not remove him.

Republican George W. Bush won the 2000 presidential election despite losing the popular vote to Democrat Al Gore and, after his handling of international affairs after the 9/11 attacks, led Republicans to congressional wins in the 2002 elections and beat Democrat John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election. There was even talk of a "permanent Republican majority" after the 2004 elections but, just as in classical Greek tragedies, nemesis quickly followed hubris on stage. A stalled economy and concerns about the American military operations in Iraq led to Democrats taking control of Congress in the 2006 elections.

Barack Obama continued the momentum for the Democrats when he defeated Republican candidate John McCain in the 2008 presidential election. But, after pushing his health-care bill, which Obama signed, and with the economy continuing to flounder, Democrats took major hits in the 2010 elections and lost control of the U.S. House.

PRESIDENT GORE?

Will the pendulum swing in a different direction in 2012?

It's hard to imagine the likes of Gary Johnson, Buddy Roemer and Virgil Goode being inaugurated in January 2013. But with Americans fed up with politics as usual, they could make a difference, especially in a close election.

Take Florida, the largest swing state in the nation, where there are still memories of the impact Nader and Buchanan made in the 2000 presidential election.

A poll of likely voters in the Sunshine State from Rasmussen Reports unveiled Thursday found Obama ahead of both of the leading candidates running for the Republican presidential nomination -- Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum -- but enough voters backing other candidates to tip the state one way or the other.

Obama took 46 percent to 43 percent when matched against Romney, who won the Florida Republican primary in a rout over Newt Gingrich at the end of January. Seven percent of those surveyed expressed support for other candidates and 4 percent were undecided.

Despite taking a distant third place in the Republican primary with 13 percent of the vote, Santorum did slightly better in the Sunshine State against Obama than Romney. However, the president led the former U.S. senator from Pennsylvania. Obama took 45 percent in that match-up while Santorum followed on his heels with 43 percent. While 4 percent were undecided in that scenario, 8 percent said they would support other candidates.

The poll of 500 likely Florida voters was taken on March 13 and had a margin of error of +/- 4.5 percent.

While the number of voters open to backing third party candidates in swing states usually drops as the election draws near -- as Anderson found out in 1980 -- in a close race, third party candidates can make the margin of difference.

Just ask Al Gore.

Reach Kevin Derby at kderby@sunshinestatenews.com or at (850) 727-0859.

Tags: [Abraham Lincoln](#), [Al Gore](#), [Americans Elect](#), [Andrew Jackson](#), [Angus King](#), [Bob Barr](#), [Buddy Roemer](#), [Christine Todd Whitman](#), [Constiution Party](#), [Cythina McKinney](#), [Evan Bayh](#), [Florida](#), [Gary Johnson](#), [George H. W. Bush](#), [George W. Bush](#), [George Wallace](#), [Green Party](#), [Henry Clay](#), [Henry Wallace](#), [Jesse Ventura](#), [Joe Lieberman](#), [John Anderson](#), [Jon Huntsman](#), [Justice Party](#), [Libertarian Party](#), [Lowell Weicker](#), [Millard Fillmore](#), [Mitt Romney](#), [News](#), [Pat Buchanan](#), [Patrick Lucey](#), [Ralph Nader](#), [Rasmussen Poll](#), [Reform Party](#), [Richad Winger](#), [Rick Santorum](#), [Rocky Anderson](#), [Ron Paul](#), [Ronald Reagan](#), [Roseanne Barr](#), [Ross Perot](#), [Stephen Douglas](#), [Strom Thurmond](#), [Theodore Roosevelt](#), [Third Parties](#), [Virgil Goode](#), [William Wirt](#), [Politics](#)

[Ralph Lauren Online](#)

Enjoy Free Shipping for St. Patty's Weekend. Use Code RLLUCK. Ends

3/18

AdChoices 

© 2011 Sunshine State News

Please read our [Privacy Policy](#). By using this site, you accept our [Terms of Service](#).

Source URL: <http://www.sunshinestatenews.com/story/established-politicians-going-third-party-2012-race>