Does Johnson lean Libertarian?
By Don Walker of the Journal Sentinel
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Ron Johnson, who is in a hotly contested race against U.S. Sen. Russ Feingold, often speaks about freedom, limited government, lower taxes and the free-market system.

Johnson is running as a Republican. But he is an admirer of Ayn Rand, whose book "Atlas Shrugged" describes a dystopian America and now is popular among many Libertarians. And many of his stands on the major issues could easily fit in the Libertarian Party playbook.

Johnson doesn't see it that way.

"I'm not into labels," he said recently when asked if he leaned Libertarian. "This government has gotten too big and spends too much money."

John Frendreis, a political science professor at Loyola University in Chicago, says Johnson might be better characterized as a tea party Republican rather than Libertarian.

"Libertarians share with conservative Republicans in general and the tea party a significant and extreme dislike and distrust of government activity in an economic sphere," Frendreis said.

Frendreis said Libertarians adopt a more consistent philosophical stand against government intervention.

"Where Ron Johnson departs from the Libertarians is on issues like immigration, abortion, the defense of marriage act, gay rights and military adventurism," Frendreis said.

Johnson's attitude is more a right-populist attitude, he said.

Johnson said there were many issues with which he differed from Libertarians, though he declined to say which ones.

John McAdams, a Marquette University political science professor, said he doubted that, if Johnson is elected senator, he would vote any differently than a typical Republican.

"I would simply call him a conservative," McAdams said.

Frendreis says Johnson also differs from the Libertarians in one other important aspect: science.

Johnson has said that manmade climate change is not provable through science. The Libertarians, Frendreis said, "don't tend to doubt science. They are not anti-intellectual."

On the campaign trail, Johnson has mentioned his admiration for U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.)
"DeMint has embraced the tea party movement as essentially a movement that is revitalizing the GOP," Frendreis said.

While Johnson was in Washington this week for fund-raisers, Feingold released a new ad criticizing him for supporting trade agreements that Feingold said sent jobs out of the country.

Also Thursday, a new Rasmussen poll put Johnson over Feingold, 54% to 42%, among likely voters. The poll was done on Wednesday. The firm surveyed 750 likely voters. The margin of error was plus or minus 4 percentage points.