

What Jon Huntsman is willing to say

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

November 9, 2011

A [good point](#) from James Fearon: A while back, Jon Huntsman [talked to David Weigel](#) about his serious love for Captain Beefheart, a recording artist about five clicks too polarizingly odd for most presidential candidates (of either party) to admit to ever having even heard. Yet at the August 11 presidential primary debate, [Huntsman joined the other GOP candidates](#) in insisting that even a 10:1 ratio of spending cuts to tax increases was unacceptable--too much taxes.

On the second point, nobody really believed him. Clearly Huntsman's the relative moderate in the room, a role he's embraced. But that's just the point. How is it possible that Huntsman sees his deep interest in Beefheart's avant-psychedelic-weirdo music as a safe thing to talk about publicly, but not his understanding of the fact that, since presidents can't usually get every single thing that they want, 10 out of 11 isn't bad?

Fearon notes several possible explanations, the most obvious being (a) a lack of strategic foresight from an also-ran candidate and (b) a hell-with-it attitude from a candidate who *knows* he's an also-ran. Fair enough, and in the unlikely event that Huntsman wins the nomination, I'm sure that every time Beefheart comes up in the general it will be someone else's doing.

On the other hand, it's worth remembering that if Huntsman had done the opposite--released a [poll-tested playlist](#), told the debate audience that getting a great deal is often preferable to blowing up the bargaining room--his poll numbers would likely be even worse than they are. That's today's GOP: Nothing's freakier or fringier than being willing, under the right circumstances, to ask higher-income Americans to throw in even a little bit more.