



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on January 8, 2013

Rep. Amash Honors Oath and Opposes \$10 Billion Sandy Relief Bill

Constitutionalists saddened by the departure of the consistent defender of the faith, Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), have reason to rejoice in the ascendancy of [Representative Justin Amash](#) (R-Mich.).

On Friday, Amash took another stride following the footsteps of his mentor by voting against [a bill authorizing a nearly \\$10 billion increase](#) in the borrowing authority of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The extra funds were to be used for the relief of victims of Hurricane Sandy.



Despite [the “no” votes cast by Amash and 66 others](#), the measure garnered substantial support in both houses of Congress and was subsequently [signed into law by President Obama on Sunday, January 6](#).

On the Senate side, the son of Rep. Ron Paul, [Senator Rand Paul \(R-Ky.\) spoke against the Sandy relief package](#), reminding his colleagues that “We’re not very good with money up here.”

In support of his position, Paul pointed to the fact that the bill up for consideration contained money for Alaskan fisheries and Palau (a Pacific island).

Finally, Senator Paul recommended that if money were to be spent on Sandy relief, then there should be greater congressional oversight and that Congress was too profligate to be trusted with nearly \$10 billion and a three year spending window.

Voting on the measure was one of the first acts of the new Congress in the new year. Recently reelected Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-Ohio) promised that consideration of the relief package would be a high priority when the 113th Congress convened after the holidays.

Amash has attracted the attention of many in the liberty movement for a couple of headline-worthy events.

First, there was Boehner’s booting of Amash and three other conservative Republicans from key committees, including the powerful House Budget Committee.

In early December, 2012, [Amash and Representative Tim Huelskamp \(R-Kan.\) were booted from the Budget Committee](#) — likely a result of the two congressmen’s record of opposing the speaker on key fiscal issues. Last year, for example, Huelskamp and Amash voted against raising the debt ceiling and are adamantly opposed to any tax increases. And earlier this year, Huelskamp and Amash cast the only House Budget Committee votes against Paul Ryan’s budget plan that was the darling of Republicans, including Boehner.

When word of the shady process that resulted in his removal from the committee percolated up through the Republican Party, Amash demanded that Boehner “Show us the scorecard!”

The “scorecard” mentioned by Amash in his statement was reportedly a tally of Republican



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representatives' votes used to measure how faithfully the members had toed the party line. As Amash explains on his Facebook page, he was told that he received a "0" on the as-yet-unreleased scorecard compiled by GOP leadership.

"Given my work with Democrats and Republicans on serious proposals to balance the budget, it is certain that the scorecard awarded points for supporting bigger deficits and more debt," [Amash wrote in response to the Speaker's letter](#).

According to [sources cited by Roll Call](#), members of the Steering Committee "reviewed a spreadsheet listing each GOP lawmaker and how often he or she had voted with leadership." Given Amash's and Huelskamp's record, it is likely their names ranked at the top of Boehner's hit list.

Boehner heads the 34-member Steering Committee that includes members of House leadership, committee chairs, and other lawmakers selected from different regions of the country. After meeting last week, the group recommended Paul Ryan be returned to his seat as Budget Committee chairman.

It is easy to see, then, why Boehner could not allow Huelskamp and Amash to sit on a committee whose chairman they alone had the courage to oppose. Once again, the GOP demonstrates that when it comes to leadership decisions, party is given priority over principle.

As a result of the apparently vengeful firing of Amash, Huelskamp, and others, a movement to oust Boehner as speaker gained momentum in the days prior to the Christmas break.

When Congress came back after the New Year holiday, however, many of those who were thought likely to oppose Boehner lost their nerve and voted to give him back the gavel.

Amash stood firm, however. On the opening day of the 113th Congress, Amash — [whose name comes third in the alphabetical roll call](#) — cast the first vote for Speaker and it wasn't for John Boehner.

Instead, Amash supported Idaho [Representative Raúl Labrador](#) to succeed Boehner as Speaker.

"Proud 2 vote 4 @Raul_Labrador 4 Spkr. Raúl would defend liberty & work honestly w/Ds on debt reduction. We must act now 4 sake of next gen," tweeted the social media-savvy Amash on the day of the vote.

Curiously, Labrador himself did not cast a vote when his name was called the day of the vote for Speaker of the House.

Despite the commendable and courageous effort of Amash and others, [Boehner was reelected on January 3, receiving 220 votes](#), just 6 votes above the 214 he needed to maintain his position.

Fifteen representatives voted for other candidates, did not vote, or voted simply "present."

Amash received one vote for Speaker, cast by [Representative Thomas Massie](#) (R-Ky.).

As a strict constitutionalists, Amash has had regular run-ins with Boehner and the rest of the GOP establishment.

According to a story in National Review Online, Amash told reporters that [voters in his district have his back](#) in his fight against Boehner's demand that Republicans put party above principle or be punished.

"If Speaker Boehner wants to come back to my district, he's not going to be met with very much welcome," Amash told reporters.

Amash expressed little faith in the strength of the speaker's backbone when it comes to negotiations with President Obama regarding the predicted plunge off the "fiscal cliff."



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"I spent a lot of time saying, 'Speaker Boehner is doing the best job we can do.' I did that for a year, a year and a half. But we're not doing the best job we can do," Amash said. "We need people who are going to be bold, we need leaders."

"This is about who's fighting for the American people," Amash continues. "I want to speak out now because I want to encourage my colleagues to be more outspoken."

Justin Amash is a rarity. A representative of the people who honors his oath of office to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic" is an endangered species in Washington.

Amash's fidelity in the face of what many would call a charitable vote in favor of helping the suffering is reminiscent of another maverick congressman.

After being called to the carpet by a constituent for a vote in favor of a bill appropriating \$20,000 to victims of a fire in Georgetown, Representative David Crockett of Tennessee delivered [the following remarks from the floor of the House in 1831](#):

Mr. Speaker — I have as much respect for the memory of the deceased, and as much sympathy for the sufferings of the living, if suffering there be, as any man in this House, but we must not permit our respect for the dead or our sympathy for a part of the living to lead us into an act of injustice to the balance of the living. I will not go into an argument to prove that Congress has no power to appropriate this money as an act of charity. Every member upon this floor knows it.

We have the right, as individuals, to give away as much of our own money as we please in charity; but as members of Congress we have no right so to appropriate a dollar of the public money.

And Crockett concluded:

Mr. Speaker, I have said we have the right to give as much of our own money as we please. I am the poorest man on this floor. I cannot vote for this bill, but I will give one week's pay to the object, and if every member of Congress will do the same, it will amount to more than the bill asks.

When it comes to spending money for the relief of victims of natural disasters, Amash understands as David Crockett did that it isn't the amount, it's the principle. As individuals, members of Congress (and all Americans) may donate as much money as they desire to help those in need. Congress, however, has no right to spend a single cent of the people's money on charitable endeavors, no matter how worthy the cause, as that authority is not given in the Constitution.

Photo of Rep. Justin Amash (R-Mich.): AP Images

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