



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on August 6, 2014

Justin Amash Prevails, Amidst Chamber of Commerce Victories

U.S. House of Representatives Liberty Caucus Chairman Justin Amash survived a strong primary challenge from establishment forces, but those same groups picked off Rep. Kerry Bentivolio and prevailed in an open primary to replace retiring House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers. The libertarian-leaning Michigan Republican Amash won [57-43 percent](#) over challenger and businessman Michael Ellis.



In the current election cycle, Amash had been the prime target of both U.S. Chamber of Commerce crony capitalists and defenders of NSA warrantless surveillance, and challenger Brian Ellis had funded his own candidacy with a \$1.2-million loan. *Time* magazine [noted](#) that “GOP leaders were desperate to defeat Justin Amash” and acknowledged that “Since arriving in Washington in the wake of the 2010 Tea Party wave, Amash has distinguished himself as an independent thinker who’s willing to buck party leaders.” Indeed, Amash and three other independent-minded GOP representatives had been kicked off key committee assignments for alleged disloyalty to party leaders at the beginning of this Congress.

Amash was unapologetic in his [victory speech](#), and came out swinging against his primary opponent and the establishment figures who tried to defeat him. “Brian Ellis, you owe my family and this community an apology,” Amash declared in his election night victory speech. “You had the audacity to try to call me today after running a campaign that was called ‘the nastiest in the country.’ I ran for office to stop people like you.”

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce had supported Ellis with almost \$200,000 in [independent expenditures](#), but Amash had substantial financial cover from pro-liberty independent groups who spent freely on his behalf. Club for Growth disbursed more than \$700,000, and FreedomWorks provided \$12,000 to defend Amash from the establishment insurgency.

Challenger Brian Ellis had won endorsements from the last two chairmen of the House Intelligence Committee, both of whom are Michigan Republicans. Former House Intelligence Committee Chairman Pete Hoekstra endorsed Ellis over Amash three weeks before the primary, and current Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers (cumulative [Freedom Index score](#): 50 percent) held a \$1,000-a-plate fundraiser for Ellis.

Amash [told](#) a local television station,

People at home know that I’m about protecting the rights of ordinary Americans. And Brian Ellis and Peter Hoekstra during his time as Intelligence Committee Chairman have been about protecting the surveillance state. What happened during his tenure was the NSA Spying program. And Brian Ellis has endorsed that program and I’m against it, and that’s what this really is all about.



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Amash [condemned](#) Hoekstra in his August 5 victory speech, stating that “I want to say to lobbyist Pete Hoekstra, you’re a disgrace.”

The race was indeed among the nastiest in the nation, with Ellis calling Amash “al Qaeda’s best friend” in a television advertisement.

Amash ([Freedom Index](#): 94 percent) [told](#) one reporter after his victory,

My race should give confidence to people in Congress. There are a lot of people who are bullied into voting the wrong way. They are bullied by the leadership. They’re bullied by lobbyists. I’m giving confidence to them that they can do the right thing. That they can stand up for regular people. That they can follow the Constitution.

But voters rarely send such a clear message, and overall the Michigan primary did not send quite as clear-cut a message as Amash’s conclusion in his own third district. Across the state in the 12th Congressional District, incumbent Republican Kerry Bentivolio ([Freedom Index](#): 80 percent) went down to a convincing [66-34 defeat](#) to real estate mogul David Trott, despite some help from the Republican leadership in Congress. Bentivolio received some independent support from the Tea Party-linked Freedom Defense Fund (\$177,000) and raised a respectable \$653,000, but it wasn’t nearly enough to overcome the monetary tsunami of Trott’s campaign. Real estate broker David Trott funded his own campaign to the tune of at least \$2.4 million, and raised millions for his campaign coffers from contributors and PACs.

Former high school history teacher Bentivolio had been on the establishment hit list since first being elected in early 2012. He was dubbed the “accidental congressman” because he benefited from the oversight of five-term Congressman Thaddeus McCotter, who failed to acquire enough signatures to get on the ballot for re-election. Bentivolio ended up the only man on the ballot and survived a well-funded establishment write-in campaign in 2012. But the establishment had long mocked Bentivolio for being a part-time reindeer farmer and having performed as Santa Claus on occasion. Though he did not ruffle the establishment feathers as much as Amash or most other Liberty Caucus members, Bentivolio was singled out for defeat almost as soon as his 2012 election.

The Tea Party/constitutionalist/liberty movement also lost a golden opportunity to pick up the seat of retiring establishment Congressman Mike Rogers ([Freedom Index](#): 50 percent). The key defender of warrantless NSA surveillance in the House of Representatives, Rogers had hand-picked former State Senate Republican leader Mike Bishop to succeed him over Amash protégé State Rep. Tom McMillin. McMillin had introduced bills to stop warrantless surveillance at the statewide level and had been endorsed by Amash and Kansas Republican Congressman Tim Huelskamp (both contributed to McMillin’s campaign).

In the end, Bishop [prevailed](#) 60-40 over McMillin, a former Christian Coalition state coordinator. Bishop raised more than \$480,000 for the contest, more than double McMillin’s \$215,000. Much of the difference can be attributed to the \$134,000 Bishop raised from political action committees (PACs). Incumbent Mike Rogers also contributed \$4,000 to Bishop’s campaign from his own campaign war chest.

Photo of Rep. Justin Amash: AP Images



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