



Rep. Amash Says Rubio Would “Take Us Backward”

While Senator Marco Rubio of Florida almost certainly will enter the race for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016, it appears even more certain that he won't win the support of Justin Amash (shown), the GOP congressman from Michigan, who has become something of a hero to libertarian Republicans for his opposition to federal government collections of Americans' phone records and e-mails in the name of national security.



“I think we have a great group of people who are pushing the country in the right direction,” [Amash said](#) at last weekend's International Students for Liberty Conference in Washington. “And we've got some people like Senator Rubio who want to take us backward, and move the party in the wrong direction, and make it into a very small party.” In an op-ed article for foxnews.com last month, Rubio criticized President Obama for “putting the U.S. war against Islamic extremism” on hold and warned that that the world's “failed and failing states breed instability and are potential safe havens for terrorists who will eventually turn their attention toward us.” The first-term senator said the U.S. must maintain its intelligence gathering activities on the home front.

“The U.S. government should implore American technology companies to cooperate with authorities so that we can better track terrorist activity and monitor terrorist communications as we face the increasing challenge of homegrown terrorists radicalized by little more than what they see on the Internet,” Rubio wrote. “This year, a new Republican majority in both houses of Congress will have to extend current authorities under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, and I urge my colleagues to consider a permanent extension of the counterterrorism tools our intelligence community relies on to keep the American people safe.”

Congress passed the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act in the late 1970's to keep tabs on the activities of foreign agents operating in the United States. In recent years, however, the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court has issued warrants to government agencies authorizing massive data collections of communications among Americans, ostensibly to find leads to terror suspects and foil their plots. In letters to Attorney General Eric Holder and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Mark Udall (D-Colo.) have expressed alarm over the sweeping authority the FISA court has granted in its interpretations of Section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act, regarding the collection of data on people's reading habits, bank accounts, medical records, and other personal information.

“We believe most Americans would be stunned to learn the details of how these secret court opinions have interpreted section 215 of the Patriot Act,” the senators wrote in a Marc 15, 2012 letter to Holder, a little more than a year before Edward Snowden's revelations in June 2013 about the billions of records of domestic phone calls and e-mails collected by the National Security Agency every day. Representative Amash soon after sponsored a bill in the House to curb the surveillance activities. The measure fell 12 votes short of passage, 205-217. A watered-down version was sponsored by



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on February 19, 2015

Representative James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) in May of last year but was blocked by a filibuster in the Senate.

Senator Rubio's call for renewal of FISA and his appeal to telecom companies to cooperate in turning over records to the government obviously did not go over well with Representative Amash. The congressman put a link to the article in a tweet, along with a one-word verdict on Rubio as a presidential hopeful: "Disqualified."

Rubio, in that same article, criticized "the absence of early, forceful intervention by the United States or European nations" in Syria's civil war. The civil war started in 2011 and by 2013, President Obama was reported to be on the verge of intervening militarily on the side of the "moderate" rebels, an action urged by Senators John McCain (R-Ariz.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), and other members of Congress. Had such an intervention occurred and had it succeeded in toppling the regime of Bashar al-Assad, it would have eliminated the most effective opposition now combatting ISIS in Syria.

Reason.com editor Nick Gillespie credited Amash and Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) with rallying opposition when Obama threatened military action against Assad for crossing a "red line" by allegedly using chemical weapons against the rebels. Other reports indicated it was unclear which side had loosed the lethal chemicals.

"Paul and Amash consistently take on their own party when it comes to limiting executive power, rolling back the surveillance state and other war-on-terror excesses and redefining foreign policy," Gillespie wrote in an [article for the Daily Beast](#). "Neither of them is a pacifist or an isolationist. But when it comes to purely elective war — not just in Syria but wherever our mad bomber in chief wants to drop a load next — you can be certain they will be leading the opposition."

No one should be surprised if the Michigan congressman is seen backing Paul against Rubio, Bush, Christie, Cruz, Jindal, Kasich, and perhaps a dozen others if and when the Kentucky senator makes his formal entrance into the presidential marathon, most likely this spring. Amash urged Paul to make that race right after last November's midterm elections, when he took part in a daylong meeting of what [Bloomberg described](#) as Paul's "extended political circle."

"He's got the best organization and the best message," Amash said. "And that second part is what's really crucial."

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



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