

THE DAILY CALLER

Justin Amash's Victory Is A Win For Free Markets, And A Blow To Chamber Cronyism

By: David Boaz
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Big business's campaign to purge libertarians from Congress and state legislatures stumbled again last night in Michigan, where Rep. Justin Amash soundly defeated his Chamber of Commerce-backed challenger in a Republican primary.

Amash defeated Brian Ellis with 57 percent of the vote.

Organized business interests don't seem to like Republicans who take Republican values seriously. Most Republicans say they believe in fiscal conservatism and free enterprise. The self-proclaimed "liberty Republicans" actually vote that way, even when it comes to subsidies and other government help for established businesses.

Business won an under-the-radar victory in May when the Georgia Chamber of Commerce and companies such as Delta Airlines, Georgia Power, and AT&T suddenly set up a Georgia Coalition for Job Growth and managed to defeat a Republican legislator, Rep. Charles Gregory, who was just too libertarian for them.

Gregory, a big fan of former presidential candidate Ron Paul, wasn't trying to legalize drugs or bring the troops home from Afghanistan. No, the ads and the special website that the Georgia Coalition set up accused him of voting against education spending and against an intrusive measure to require drug testing for food stamp applicants.

The real issue was probably that he wouldn't go along with pork-barrel projects that benefit business, such as taxpayer funding to help the Atlanta Braves move to Cobb County.

One lobbyist involved in the business effort told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "We're not going to let liberty Republicans throw business out of the Republican Party."

It seems unlikely that a free-marketer like Gregory wanted to "throw business out." But he did want to persuade the GOP to stop supporting subsidies and sweetheart deals for \$700 million businesses like the Braves.

Business operatives ran into trouble early on in Kentucky, where they lobbied hard though unsuccessfully to persuade the head of the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce to run against Rep. Thomas Massie, a frequent ally of Amash. Massie, a businessman himself, is a strong fiscal conservative, but some local business leaders don't like what they see as his stand-off approach.

And in California's June primary Rep. Tom McClintock, a crusader against earmarks, turned back a challenge from Washington business consultant Art Moore, who "thinks representatives should deliver for folks back home," in the words of a local reporter. McClintock got 56 percent in a three-way primary, but he'll have to face Moore again under California's nonpartisan primary system.

But Amash seems to have been the number one target of establishment business interests in the Republican Party. He seems like an odd choice for business opposition – the most pro-free-enterprise and most libertarian member of Congress.

You don't have to take my word for that, by the way. The Club for Growth rates Amash 100 percent. The National Taxpayers Union rates him second among 435 members of Congress in fiscal conservatism. He scored 100 percent on the Freedomworks Scorecard. He organized a bipartisan effort to rein in the National Security Agency that came within a few votes of passing the House. He heads the House Liberty Caucus. He told the *New York Times*, "I follow a set of principles, I follow the Constitution. And that's what I base my votes on. Limited government, economic freedom and individual liberty."

Why would the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, along with the Grand Rapids and Michigan chambers, try to unseat him?

Could it be because Amash opposes the Export-Import Bank, while the Chamber vigorously supports it? Or because Amash opposes corporate bailouts, like the \$800 billion TARP, and profligate spending, such as President Obama's \$800 billion "stimulus" bill – both of which the Chamber supported?

They said they wanted a congressman who would work with others to "get things done." Andrew Johnston, the political director of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, told the *Wall Street Journal*, "There is frustration among those who think his rigidity makes it difficult to move forward on legislation." He promised that Ellis "will have access to funds that will be helpful to his campaign." It wasn't just local businessmen. Washington lobbyists rallied around Ellis. He also put \$800,000 of his own money into his campaign – in the form of loans, which could have been paid back out of more lobbyists' contributions if he had won the race.

Amash wasn't without friends, of course, even in the business community. Several members of Amway's DeVos and Van Andel families contributed to his re-election, and he was supported by Freedomworks and the Club for Growth. And a majority of the Republican voters.

This clash between politically minded businessmen and free-market libertarians is an old one. Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* to denounce mercantilism, the crony capitalism of his

day. Milton Friedman wrote, “There’s a common misconception that people who are in favor of a free market are also in favor of everything that big business does. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

Maybe the Chamber of Commerce should take note of the “libertarian populist” currents in today’s politics and learn to work with, not against, elected officials who actually support the free market that the Chamber professes to defend.

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