

## **Amash Or Paul: Where Does the Liberty Movement Stand On Impeachment?**

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America's two most prominent libertarians disagree on impeaching President Donald Trump, and their public debate has revealed a rift within the libertarian movement.

When Michigan Republican Rep. Justin Amash became the first GOP Congressman to call for Trump's impeachment, he argued his libertarian principles demanded it of him. But Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul argues those same libertarian principles tell him the Trump-Russia investigation was illegitimate and shouldn't be used for impeachment.

While their debate may appear to be an internecine spat among libertarians, it has had an impact on national politics more broadly, with Amash's stand playing a major part in swinging independents toward impeachment.

With a national spotlight on America's top libertarian politicians, some members of the movement are stressing that their disagreement doesn't mean one has abandoned principle.

"I don't see Rand Paul directly criticizing Amash," Cato Institute Executive Vice President David Boaz told The Daily Caller. "The question, I think, is how concerned they should be with investigative abuse revealing presidential bad actions."

Young Americans for Liberty President Cliff Maloney agreed, arguing that Amash's impeachment stance is authentic, not politically motivated.

"Justin Amash has voted for less government spending than any other member of Congress since 2010. I'm more interested in votes that drain the swamp than rhetoric," he told TheDC. "Justin, Rand, and Thomas Massie are in a league of their own. Strategies to advance the libertarian philosophy might be different, but I'm impressed with their ability to stand firm in a land of legislators who keep voting for more government overreach and stripping our liberty away."

Eric Schuler of The Libertarian Institute takes a more utilitarian view of impeachment that is sympathetic to Amash, but ultimately siding with Paul. While Schuler thinks President Trump deserves to be impeached, he argues a President Mike Pence could be even more dangerous for the movement.

"During the VP debate last year, Pence confidently laid out a horrifying policy approach including safe zones [in Syria] and asserting 'strong leadership' — which is a favorite American euphemism for belligerence," Schuler wrote. "The bottom line is that if you're worried about

what policies Trump is going to implement, you should probably be even more worried about Pence.”

Not all libertarians have taken such a charitable view of Amash, however. Antiwar.com Editorial Director Justin Raimondo argues Amash’s call for impeachment represents a betrayal of his principles.

“Amash [is] justifying the Deep State’s covert operation to subvert Trump — indeed, to overthrow him — the worst crime in American history,” Raimondo told TheDC. “How an alleged advocate of civil liberties can rationalize the party in power spying on the opposition using the powerful tech at its command — is beyond me. Amash has completely discredited himself.”

Mueller’s report describes a consistent effort by the president to use his office to obstruct or otherwise corruptly impede the Russian election interference investigation because it put his interests at risk.

Investigative abuse is indeed an issue both Paul and Amash have agreed on in the past, specifically regarding the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). Both congressmen have argued FISA courts can lead to unjust surveillance of Americans. In his Fox News interview, Rand pointed to the “un-libertarian” surveillance of General Michael Flynn, which played a major part in bringing about Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation.

“I see an abuse of power from Comey, Clapper, Brennan, from all these guys,” Paul said. “I think they took this great power we entrusted them with to spy on foreigners and they directed it against Americans for partisan reasons. So, I think this has to be investigated and I think it’s wrong for any Republican to think, ‘Oh gosh, this is a legitimate investigation.’ I think it’s a very partisan investigation.”

As Boaz pointed out, Paul has been reluctant to openly criticize Amash, but he has been more explicit in recent days. When Don Lemon of Fox Business asked Paul about Amash’s impeachment stance on May 30, Paul was clear.

“Libertarians like myself have for a long time said that the intelligence community has too much power,” Paul said. “So I don’t understand a libertarian who would take this investigation and say ‘Oh we should pursue it.’”

While Paul is convinced the investigation was itself illegitimate, Amash is more concerned with President Trump’s controversial actions that the investigation — regardless of its legitimacy — revealed.

“The president has an obligation not to violate the public trust, including using official powers for corrupt purposes. For instance, presidents have the authority to nominate judges, but a president couldn’t select someone to nominate because they’d promised the president money,” Amash wrote on Twitter.

In a court of law, Paul’s argument might render any evidence of Trump’s wrongdoing inadmissible, but impeachment proceedings are far from a court of law. Congress has virtually total discretion under the Constitution to define an impeachable offense, making Amash and Democrats technically correct when saying Trump may have committed one.

“Surely the one person who needs some sort of governance is the most powerful man in the world,” Boaz said. “The idea that the worst thing is [investigative abuse] caught the president seems off to me. We should be less afraid of the impeachment power than we are.”