



Trump Taunts Amash as a 'Dumb' 'Loser' Who 'Knew He Couldn't Get the [GOP] Nomination'

While presidential speculation swirls, a second poll shows the congressman down double digits in a Republican primary he will no longer compete in

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It took President Donald Trump just over three hours to react—gleefully—to this morning's announcement by Rep. Justin Amash (I-Mich.) that the libertarian congressman was leaving the GOP:

“Great news for the Republican Party as one of the dumbest & most disloyal men in Congress is “quitting” the Party. No Collusion, No Obstruction! Knew he couldn't get the nomination to run again in the Great State of Michigan. Already being challenged for his seat. A total loser!”

It's not the first time Trump has called Amash a "loser."

While Cato Institute Executive Vice President David Boaz retorted Thursday that "Almost every word in this tweet is false," the president does have some polling stats on his side.

Breitbart News reported Wednesday that Strategic National, a Republican strategy outfit run by Grand Rapids political player John Yob, surveyed 400 likely GOP primary voters in Michigan's third congressional district from June 29 to July 1, and came up with the following numbers: 27 percent for state Rep. Jim Lower, 17 percent each for Amash and state Rep. Lynn Afendoulis (who only declared her candidacy on June 27), 5 percent for former Sand Lake Village Trustee Tom Norton, and 4 percent for supermarket heir Pete Meijer, who announced after the answers came back.

The poll, which is not yet online, has a reported margin of error of 4.89 percent; Strategic National carries a C+ pollster rating from FiveThirtyEight. Still, that's the second survey in less than a month to find Amash trailing Lower by double digits. And some of the details look ominous for the congressman's future with his Republican constituents—52 percent consider him "very unfavorable" and 19 percent "somewhat unfavorable," compared to just 12 percent each for "somewhat favorable" and "very favorable." A full 82 percent said they want a candidate who is a "strong supporter of President Trump," compared to 7 percent who prefer "criticizing President Trump."

Yet for all the unpromising math, local scuttlebutt until just prior to Amash's announcement was that a jungle GOP primary would advantage the five-term incumbent. "There's the strong

possibility that this becomes a feeding frenzy instead of an orderly opposition to Amash, with many candidates seeking to gain the president's approval in the primary," Michigan Republican consultant John Sellek warned the *Detroit News* earlier this week. "That will potentially clear the path for Amash to eek [sic] out a primary victory."

Instead of all that, the 39-year-old is now filing papers to run against whoever emerges from the GOP primary scrum—which, per *Breitbart*, is already shaping up to a contest largely about the candidates' level of pro-Trumpness—plus the survivor of a competitive Democratic field that includes former Obama White House Counsel staffer Nick Colvin.

But Amash faces a significant obstacle in the general election: Michigan is one of just nine states to have a straight-ticket ballot option, whereby voters can fill out a single box with the name of a political party to cast a ballot for each and every one of that party's nominees. Third-party candidates and especially independents are disfavored by such systems. "Straight-ticket voting makes it prohibitive to run outside of the major parties," Amash told me last August.

So which is more likely: that an incumbent with name recognition could survive a divided-for-now GOP primary despite swimming against the riptide of Republican public opinion on impeachment, or that he could defy the gravity of straight-ticket voting in a three-way race that will attract some of the most attention and money in the nation?

"No independent has ever been elected to the Michigan legislature, nor to congress from Michigan," *Ballot-Access News* Editor Richard Winger noted today. The recent electoral track record of major-party representatives who switch to Libertarian once in office is somewhere between grim and gruesome.

Yet as Winger also noted: "Sometimes well-known public officials leave a major party and become an independent, and then a few months later, join a minor party. Examples are Ralph Chapman, Maine legislator who went from [Democrat] to [independent] to Green; Virgil Good, who went from Dem to Rep to independent to Constitution; Lincoln Chafee, who went from Rep to Dem to independent to Libertarian." Which is to say, Amash may well be *transitioning*, or at least giving himself the option to, should the Democratic nominating process cough up a democratic socialist, a math-flouting buttinsky, or a cop.

Another potential consideration: In a contested Republican primary where the main issue would be his insufficient loyalty to the party leader, it would be a problem to be fending off nonstop *will-you-or-won't-you* questions about a Libertarian Party run. He'll still get those questions now, but will likely answer not defensively, but with the same kind of conflicted-but-interested openness he exhibited in a conversation two weeks ago with libertarian podcaster Brian Nichols:

I don't want to rule that kind of stuff out. My goal is to do what I can to defend the Constitution in the best way I can. And if that means running for something else, then that's something I would do. So, I keep those options on the table; I think about where I can be most effective.

And I do have a position of influence. I have more of a national profile, and I want to use that to help set things back on course for our country. So, to help restore our faith in the Constitution, and our system of government, and protect people's rights from an abusive government. So, I want to do those things, and I'll think about the best way to do that.

And I've been very grateful, very honored, to represent my district. It's really one of the greatest honors of my life, and I wake up every morning so thankful to the people of my district for giving me the chance to represent them in Congress. So, it's something that I hold dear and enjoy doing. And I will keep all things on the table. But I really do like the work that I'm doing, and I feel like I'm making a difference.

So Amash once again has the country's political attention, at least for a while. He has used it previously to move public opinion—especially among his fellow independents!—on impeachment; now he's clearly gunning for similar success on the more abstract goals of declaring personal independence from two-party tribalism, and reinvigorating constitutional separation of powers. Is being one particularly lonely and loud voice among 438 increasingly ineffectual legislators the way to get that done? *The Washington Post's* Aaron Blake, for one, has his doubts.

"The question now is whether *he* will do something about it—or more specifically, whether he will do something that actually has an impact," Blake wrote. "There is one obvious path available, if he truly has the courage of his convictions: running for president."