



Now is the Time for Libertarian Politicians to Take Charge Against Police Militarization

By Casey Given
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As Ferguson, Missouri continues to devolve into chaos, Paul Waldman is standing on the sidelines sticking his tongue out at the liberty movement.

“Why aren’t libertarians talking about Ferguson?” the American Prospect editor asks in the Washington Post, pointing to the fact that prominent politicians and pundits like Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), Rep. Justin Amash (R-Mich.), and John Stossell haven’t said much since last Saturday’s shooting of unarmed teenager Michael Brown.

As a noted progressive, Waldman’s motivations in calling out libertarians is little more than partisan tribalism. After all, libertarian thinkers have a long history of opposing police militarization; as seen in the work of publications like Reason Magazine, think tanks like the Cato Institute, and journalists like Radley Balko. Mediaite has aggregated a thorough list of libertarian commentary on the issue proving this point well.

However, Waldman is correct that it’s taken a few days for small-government congressional champions Paul and Amash to comment on this egregious example of the police state in action. Liberty-loving politicians should take note and jump ahead of partisan trolls like Waldman in the future to establish themselves as true defenders of freedom.

To their credit, both Paul and Amash have broken their silence on the matter since the article was published.

Amash tweeted at 10:12 PM on Aug. 13, “Images & reports out of #Ferguson are frightening. Is this a war zone or a US city? Gov’t escalates tensions w/military equipment & tactics.” Paul published in op-ed in Time calling to demilitarize the police in wake of the tragedy.

While it is encouraging to watch both politicians disprove Waldman’s bunk criticism, the Ferguson situation presents a rare opportunity for them to lead the charge against police militarization.

To begin with, police militarization like what the American public is witnessing in Ferguson is the very embodiment of big government.

Since 2001, the Department of Homeland Security has spent \$34 billion in federal grants for state and local police departments to purchase weapons of warlike tanks and assault rifles, fueling paramilitarylike operations in America's cities and even small towns. In the early 1970s, there were only a few hundred SWAT raids across the country; by 2005, that number had skyrocketed to 50,000. Even worse, hundreds of these raids have targeted innocent people – some even tragically leading to their deaths.

Politicians afraid of big government squandering their money and trampling on their freedom are witnessing it in action in Ferguson today, highlighting the urgency to get in front of the issue.

Paul should especially be on top of his game as the current Republican frontrunner for the 2016 presidential election. The Kentucky politician has historically reached across the aisle to form alliances with Democrats on issues where the libertarian policy perspective aligns with progressives.

For example, he co-sponsored the Justice Safety Valve Act of 2013 with Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), giving federal judges more flexibility in sentencing than what mandatory minimums would prescribe. By pushing for more transparency in DHS's military-to-police pipeline, Paul could further promote his reputation as a no-nonsense, nonpartisan politician who consistently calls the government out when it tramples on Americans' freedom.

Furthermore, doing so could greatly improve Paul's reputation among potential African-American voters. The senator has admirably tried to reach out to this historically Democratic demographic by speaking at Howard University last fall, but the talk did not go as smoothly as he imagined.

By positioning himself as a leader in Congress fighting police militarization, Paul could patch up this rocky relationship and establish himself as a statesman who cares about all Americans' struggles.

However, Paul and Amash are by no means the only two politicians who can take advantage of the Ferguson situation. The Republican Party in general can work wonders in improving its reputation among the citizenry as defenders of liberty by getting in front of this issue.

After all, what is happening in Ferguson is an injustice not just to Missourians, but all Americans of every political persuasion.