



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on March 17, 2013

Michigan Rep. Justin Amash Considers U.S. Senate Bid

Libertarian-leaning Congressman Justin Amash of Michigan (Freedom Index rating: [92 percent](#)) is considering a run for the soon-to-be vacant U.S. Senate seat in Michigan, according to various [interviews](#) the two-term congressman has conducted over the previous week. Michigan's senior Senator Carl Levin (Freedom Index rating: [5 percent](#)) [announced](#) March 7 that he would not seek reelection to a seventh term in 2014. Levin has represented Democratic-leaning Michigan in the U.S. Senate since 1979.



While no candidate has yet to formally enter the race, several candidates for both parties are expected to do so. Among the establishment candidates Amash could face in the GOP primary is fellow Michigan Congressman Dave Camp (Freedom Index rating: [67 percent](#)), whose fourth congressional district abuts Amash's third district.

Amash has been a central figure in the internecine war within the Republican Party, making national news in recent weeks as the butt of insults from Arizona Senator John McCain. "It's always the wacko birds on right and left that get the media megaphone," McCain said in an [interview](#) for the *Huffington Post* posted March 7. McCain told interviewer Jon Ward he was referring to "Rand Paul, Cruz, Amash, whoever."

The Republican Party seems split between establishment neoconservative figures such as the hawkish McCain and South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, who are arrayed against the Tea Party/Libertarian/constitutionalist wing such as Amash, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, and Texas Senator Ted Cruz. McCain's outburst on the *Huffington Post* prompted Amash to [tweet](#) the following, noting that while Senator Paul was filibustering, McCain was having dinner at the White House:

Sen McCain called @SenRandPaul @SenTedCruz & me "wacko birds." Bravo, Senator. You got us. Did you come up with that at #DinnerWithBarack?

While McCain later [apologized](#) for the "wacko birds" crack, Amash embraced the epithet, registering the domain [WackoBird.com](#) and posting the headline: "Tell John McCain: 'Wacko birds' defend the Constitution!"

Is registration of WackoBird.com a sign Amash will jump into the race? It's hard to say, and it's equally difficult to say how Amash's brand of libertarian-leaning ideology will play with the Michigan electorate. In a general election, Democrats will certainly portray Amash's libertarianism as a hard-line and right-wing on the flaky side, i.e., as a "wacko bird." But Amash's non-interventionist foreign policy and pro-civil liberties positions, combined with his principled disputes with GOP party leaders, may be just what is needed to move independents into the GOP column on election day.

Some of Amash's own friends remain unconvinced that the 32-year-old former state senator could win. "While I love the thought of Amash joining Senators Paul, Lee, and Cruz in the Senate, I don't think



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Amash should run for Carl Levin's soon-to-be-open seat in the Senate," libertarian blogger Ron Davis [opined](#), because "Amash doesn't yet have the statewide name recognition (and the reputation that's sure to follow) necessary to win in a statewide election." Indeed, as if to buttress Davis' claims, the leftist PPP polling company [reported](#) March 8 that 71 percent of Michigan voters had no opinion of Amash (He also had a 9/20 favorable/unfavorable rating among voters who gave an opinion).

Amash is a two-term congressman based in the Grand Rapids area who survived an expensive race in 2012 against former state Rep. Steve Pestka, who loaned his campaign more than a [\\$1.6 million](#) in the unsuccessful effort. Pestka outspent Amash in the district by a nearly [2-1 margin](#) in the 2012 election. Amash prevailed by a 53-44 margin in the [GOP-leaning](#) district.

It remains to be seen if that's strong enough to pull off a statewide victory in Democratic-leaning Michigan. President Obama [won](#) the state 55 percent to 45 percent — despite Mitt Romney's claim to having grown up in the state (where his father George Romney served as governor). In fact, that's above the national average of 52-48.

The last Republican U.S. senator from Michigan was [Spencer Abraham](#), who, like Amash, is also an Orthodox Christian of Lebanese descent. In 2000 Abraham narrowly lost a reelection bid to now-Senator Debbie Stabenow.

Political analyst Stuart Rothenberg still rates the Senate seat as "safe Democratic," explaining in a *Roll Call* [column](#) that "Michigan's fundamentals still pose major problems for Republicans. Democrats have won the past six presidential elections and 11 of the past 12 Senate elections in the Wolverine State. The sole Senate victory came in 1994, when a huge national Republican wave helped Spencer Abraham win retiring Democratic Sen. Donald W. Riegle Jr.'s open seat."

On the other hand, both houses of the state legislature in Michigan are controlled by Republicans. Republicans also hold a majority of the state's congressional districts — nine out of 14. The party also pulled in the governorship under former Gateway executive [Rick Snyder](#) during the 2010 Tea Party-influenced election ([Snyder won 58-40](#) over the Democrat, Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero). And despite compiling a record of losing most statewide races for president, senator, and governor in recent decades, Republicans have been reliably elected to the [secretary of state](#) and [attorney general](#) positions in Michigan for more than a decade.

So a Republican winning a U.S. Senate race in Michigan is quite a plausible scenario, if less-than-probable.

At least one Michigan blogger thinks "Amash would be crazy not to run for U.S. Senate next year," and that it's his race to lose. *Grand Rapids Press* blogger Susan J. Demas [notes](#) that Amash should be able to match any rival financially, with what she claims are "Amash's deep ties with the powerful DeVos family" and support among fans of former Congressman Ron Paul (Amash was one of only 11 congressional candidates endorsed by the elder Paul in 2012). Amash boasts strong grass-roots support from local Tea Party organizations, which were crucial to his first congressional victory in 2010.

The well-funded Club for Growth also rates Amash highly, and could play a major role in the race. And John Ramsey's Liberty For All SuperPAC has also funded Amash. Liberty For All SuperPAC lightly funded Amash's 2012 reelection race (just [\\$826](#)), but poured as much as [\\$600,000](#) into a couple of key races in the 2012 cycle (and [won nine of 10 races](#) the SuperPAC funded). According to a separate *Grand Rapids Press* story, Ramsey has already created a "[Draft Justin for Michigan](#)" Facebook page, which has drawn nearly 2,000 "likes." The report [claimed](#) "Liberty for All, a super PAC founded by 22-year-old



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millionaire John Ramsey, responded to the report by pledging a six- to seven-figure donation to Amash if he runs.”

Photo of Rep. Justin Amash: AP Images



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