

THE PEARL-CLUTCHERS NORMALIZING INFLAMMATORY DOG WHISTLES

As expected, last night Justin Amash held off a challenge from a corporatist Republican, Brian Ellis (though the margin was closer than polls predicted). What has the local punditry surprised, however, is Amash's victory speech, where he attacked Ellis and former Congressman Crazy Pete Hoekstra, who endorsed Ellis.

AMASH VICTORY SPEECH: U.S. Rep. Justin Amash's win over 3rd District GOP primary challenger Brian Ellis wasn't too surprising, but his victory speech was. Rather than simply celebrate, Amash reportedly refused to answer a concession phone call from Ellis and then unloaded on the businessman, who had run a TV ad calling him "Al Qaeda's best friend" in Congress. "I ran for office to stop people like you," Amash said to Ellis, who was not present. He also ripped former U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, who backed Ellis in a separate commercial. "I'm glad we can hand you one more loss before you fade into total obscurity and irrelevance," he said of Hoekstra. ([more >>](#))

I get that you're supposed to give a happy unity speech after you win (though I personally don't much care if MI Republicans rip themselves apart, and MI's Republican Congressmen already broke protocol by offering no support to Amash and in Mike Rogers' case giving big support for Ellis). But not only *is* Crazy Pete a disgrace, Ellis did try to gain traction by smearing Amash.

From the coverage, I think Amash was most pissed that Ellis and Hoekstra treated a vote Amash refused to cast to defund Planned Parenthood on constitutional grounds as a pro-choice vote.

But in an interview with Fox, Amash also called Ellis' ad rather famously repeating a claim he's al Qaeda's best friend in Congress disgusting.

“I'm an Arab-American, and he has the audacity to say I'm Al-Qaeda's best friend in congress. That's pretty disgusting.”

This ad, which played (among other prominent ad buys) during the World Cup, really pissed me off.

Not only for the treatment of Gitmo as anything but a terrible money pit, all in the hopes of maintaining some extra-legal space to sustain the notion of war rather than law. But especially for the notion that anything but lock-step support for counterproductive counterterrorism policies makes you a friend of al Qaeda.

And yes, especially the suggestion that one of Congress' only Arab-American members (Amash's parents are Palestinian and Syrian Christians) might therefore be an Islamic terrorist.

For 12 years – ever since Saxby Chambliss used a similar technique to take out Max Cleland – our political culture has tolerated ads that invoke terror to short-circuit any real political debate about how we fight it. Those ads get treated as business as usual. Win or lose the race and then make nice with your opponent.

That such ads are still (were ever!) considered acceptable political discourse – that Amash, and not Ellis, is getting the scolds – damns our political system. By treating any debate over the efficacy of counterterrorism policy as terrorism itself, we foreclose potentially far more effective ways of keeping the country safe

and potentially far smarter ways to spend limited resources. (Crazy Pete, for example, fear-mongered about moving Gitmo detainees to a prison threatened with closure in Michigan, thereby losing Michigan jobs, but also committing the US to continue to spend exorbitant amounts to keep our gulag open.)

At some point, it needs to be okay to call out such bullshit. Because until then, we'll never be able to actually debate the best way to keep the country safe.