

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 2, 2011

CONTACT
Emily O'Neill
202.225.3866
emily.o'neill@mail.house.gov

AMASH FOIA AMENDMENT PASSES HOUSE

Washington, D.C.—The U.S. House of Representatives passed an amendment on Thursday offered by U.S. Representative Justin Amash (MI-03) to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations bill to prohibit DHS political appointees from improperly blocking the release of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) documents. The amendment passed 257 to 164.

“Investigations by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform suggest that DHS has played politics with FOIA requests. My amendment allows DHS political appointees to continue to be aware of FOIA requests and documents proposed to be released, but prevents political appointees from interfering with the public’s legal right to know,” said Amash.

FOIA requires the U.S. government to report previously undisclosed information to the public that does not pose a threat to national security. Countless instances of government waste, fraud, and abuse have been discovered through FOIA.

Recently, DHS has come under fire for implementing an unprecedented policy that allows political appointees to interfere with FOIA requests and documents proposed to be released. An investigation launched by the *Associated Press* even led the news organization to sue DHS over the new policy.

Testimony heard before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform suggests that DHS political appointees improperly withheld or delayed the release of FOIA documents. Civil service employees within DHS’ FOIA office revealed that political appointees’ approval was required before FOIA documents could be released to the public. This additional process repeatedly caused FOIA documents to be released after the 20-day statutory deadline for responses, and numerous documents were improperly redacted, apparently for political reasons.

“FOIA is a vital tool for government transparency. We need to ensure FOIA continues to expose government corruption and remains free from politics,” concluded Amash.

###