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Durbin Chairs Hearing on Citizens United Decision and the Rise of Super PACs

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WASHINGTON, D.C.--(ENEWS PF)--July 24, 2012. Assistant Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) chaired a hearing today on the Citizens United decision and the rise of Super PACs. The hearing, "Taking Back Our Democracy: Responding to Citizens United and the Rise of Super PACs" examine the proposed responses to the Citizens United, including constitutional amendments and pending legislation like the Fair Elections Now Act, a commonsense proposal that would provide qualified candidates for Congress with grants, matching funds, and vouchers to replace campaign fundraising that largely relies on large donors and special interests. This was the second hearing Senator Durbin has chaired on the impact of Citizens United.

"Since the Supreme Court's decision on Citizens United, we have seen the rapid rise of Super PACs and unprecedented influence buying by wealthy individuals seeking to advance their agendas," Durbin said. "This year, election spending by outside groups will likely shatter previous records, but very little will be known about who's footing the bill. In a democracy that values open debate and participation, voters should know who has paid for the political ads designed to persuade them. Bills like the Fair Elections Now Act and the DISCLOSE Act are a good start. But it's increasingly clear that the only way to really reform our system is to pass a constitutional amendment to regulate how we finance our elections."

In 2006, outside groups spent \$70 million to influence federal midterm elections. In 2010, that number more than quadrupled to \$294 million. According to OpenSecrets.org, spending by outside groups has doubled since the presidential elections of 2008 while independent expenditures have more than tripled. So far this year, Super PACs have raised over a quarter of a billion dollars.

Helping to illustrate the scope of the problem Citizens United created and how the American people have grown wary of their representatives in Congress, campaign finance expert and Harvard Law School Professor Lawrence Lessig said the following: "There have been but few decisions in the history of the Supreme Court that have excited as much outrage and sustained fury from citizens across the political spectrum as has Citizens United. [The people] have lost the faith that their government is responsive to them, because they have

become convinced that their government is more responsive to those who fund your campaigns.”

Buddy Roemer, a former Congressman, Governor of Alabama and 2012 Republican presidential candidate put it more bluntly: “As the only person running for President who was elected both as Congressman and as Governor, it is my belief that Washington DC is not just broken. It is bought, rented, leased, and owned by the money givers. Special interests, the bundlers, PACs, Super PACs, lobbyists, the Wall Street bankers, the pharmaceuticals, the corporate giants, the insurance companies, organized labor, the GSE’s like Fannie and Freddie, energy companies, on and on and on and on. And this is not about one party versus the other, or about one person or another. It is about systemic and institutional corruption where the size of your check rather than the strength of your need or idea determine your place in line.”

Senators Baucus (D-MT), Udall (D-NM), Sanders (I-VT), Representative Donna Edwards (D-MD) and Ilya Shapiro, Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute also testified at today’s hearing.

Nearly 2 million people signed petitions in favor of a constitutional amendment overturning Citizens United and those signatures were delivered to the subcommittee before today’s hearing.

This was Durbin’s second hearing on the impact of Citizens United. His first was last spring and focused on his Fair Elections Now Act. More information about that hearing, including a webcast, [can be found here](#).

Today’s hearing was before the Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, which Durbin chairs.