



Koch-connected groups spend big to influence Tennessee's 5th congressional district race

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July 16th, 2022

In the Tennessee 5th congressional district primary, where Republican bona fides already struck three candidates from the ballot, groups tied to libertarian billionaire Charles Koch have spent nearly a half-million dollars to slam frontrunners Beth Harwell and Kurt Winstead as “too liberal,” and boost Maury County Mayor Andy Ogles.

A super PAC established by a Koch ally bought \$400,000 in radio and TV ads this month slamming Harwell and Winstead as “too liberal for Tennessee,” disclosures to the Federal Election Commission show.

Ads slam Winstead for having donated to Democrats' campaigns in the past, and having voted in Democratic primaries.

They criticize Harwell for being endorsed by a state affiliate of the National Education Association during her 2018 bid for governor, and for supporting the Improve Act of 2017, which increased the state gas tax by six cents over three years, and repealed the Hall income tax on interest and dividends.

"Both running for Congress as 'Republicans,' both beholden to liberal Democrats," the ad states.

The ads were bought by the School Freedom Fund, a super PAC established last November with direct ties to the free-market limited government nonprofit Club for Growth.

The PAC is funded almost exclusively by donations from billionaire Tic Toc investor Jeff Yass, who manages Susquehanna International Group.

Yass also sits on the board of directors for Koch's libertarian think tank, the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C. He's donated \$15 million to the School Freedom Fund since November, according to FEC disclosures.

Presumably, the buys are made in support of Maury County Mayor Andy Ogles, but neither Club for Growth nor the School Freedom Fund have formally endorsed Ogles.

But, Ogles does have direct ties to another Koch-funded organization, Americans for Prosperity. Ogles previously worked as executive director, spokesman and chief lobbyist for Americans for Prosperity of Tennessee.

Americans for Prosperity Action, the political nonprofit's PAC, endorsed Ogles in May, pledging to leverage “a wide range of tactics, including the country’s largest grassroots outreach, a full-time dedicated staff, and trained volunteers to educate and mobilize voters to support Ogles’ campaign.”

AFP Action has spent \$8.2 million supporting Republican congressional candidates so far this cycle, including \$95,322 on behalf of Ogles, according to disclosures.

Together, Club for Growth and Americans for Prosperity Action have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars and played a significant role in the election of 37 conservative members of the House Freedom Caucus, according to a Politico analysis.

Not surprisingly, the House Freedom Caucus’ political action committee, the House Freedom Fund, has also formally endorsed Ogles.

Early voting in the district 5 primary began Friday, July 15.

The Ogles campaign did not respond to a request for comment.