



Citizens United Helps Liberal Dem Unseat Veteran House Incumbent

A Super PAC and a dark money group dropped hundreds of thousands for Seth Moulton

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An upstart Democratic candidate unseated a veteran incumbent lawmaker on Tuesday thanks in part to the sizable support of independent expenditure groups that the primary winner has claimed to revile.

Iraq war veteran Seth Moulton upset nine-term Rep. John Tierney (D., Mass.) on Tuesday. November's contest will pit Moulton against Republican Richard Tisei, who lost to Tierney in 2012. The race is expected to be tight.

Like many liberal Democrats, Moulton professes his distaste for existing campaign finance laws and outside spending groups emboldened by the 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*.

However, Moulton's victory on Tuesday was aided in large measure by hundreds of thousands of dollars in independent expenditures by just those types of groups.

Two Super PACs backed Moulton with large ad buys and other independent expenditures. Together, they spent [more than \\$650,000](#) supporting Moulton or attacking Tierney during the primary race.

Tierney, in contrast, received [just \\$10](#) in outside support in the form of a website endorsement from the Sierra Club.

One of Moulton's independent supporters, Super PAC Forward Massachusetts, was [formed](#) in late May by Boston-based political consultant Darryl Tattrie. It spent \$85,119 backing Moulton and attacking Tierney. It is [the only race](#) in which the group has been involved.

The other group backing Moulton, VoteVets Action Fund, is a 501(c)(4) non-profit, meaning it does not have to disclose its donors. It dropped \$574,346 on two media buys supporting Moulton in August and September.

Moulton's campaign did not respond to questions about the role that Forward Massachusetts and VoteVets played in his victory.

However, some campaign finance experts say last minute ad buys like those VoteVets financed can propel underdog—and underfunded—candidates to victory against sitting legislators.

Without the liberalized post-Citizens United campaign finance laws, many challengers would be unable to put up a meaningful fight against incumbents, [noted](#) Cato Institute chairman and constitutional law expert Robert Levy.

“Restrict political expression and you restrict the ability of upstart challengers to defeat current officeholders,” according to Levy.

Asked about independent groups’ abilities to provide Congress with fresh blood, Moulton campaign spokeswoman Carrie Rankin reiterated that the candidate “fundamentally believes we need strong campaign finance reform. There is too much money in Washington and the system needs to be fixed.”

She provided a link to Moulton’s “issues” page, which declares, “In the wake of Citizens United, special interests have spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to cheat the system and manipulate Congress. That’s not good for democracy, and it’s not good for getting things done.”

Another recent Supreme Court decision, *McCutcheon v. FEC*, has also earned scorn from campaign finance reformers. Like Citizens United, it worked to Moulton’s benefit.

The decision lifted caps on how much individuals can donate to all political parties and campaigns during an election cycle. As of the end of June, 310 donors had given more than \$123,200 to federal campaigns, the pre-McCutcheon aggregate limit.

Among those donors is John Fish, president of a Massachusetts construction company, who [maxed out](#) to Moulton’s campaign in December, donating \$2,600 to each of his primary and general election war chests.

Fish’s contributions to Moulton were among \$152,900 in donations so far this cycle.