

Who is Buying Your Election? A Pre-Election Guide to Connecticut Super PACs *Key Findings*

October 19, 2018

Connecticut super PACs, which can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money to support or oppose electoral candidates, are being used as a tool for a handful of wealthy individuals, lobbying organizations, and businesses to buy our elections to serve their interests. A massive influx of several million dollars in super PAC donations thus far in 2018 -- more than half of it from out-of-state interests -- drowns out the voices of Connecticut citizens and candidates, undermines the goals of Connecticut's strong campaign finance laws, and damages public confidence in the integrity of our election system.

Through [Connect the Dollars](#), our collaborative project to track independent expenditures in the state, [Common Cause in Connecticut](#) and the [Connecticut Citizen Action Group](#) have assembled a comprehensive report on super PACs in Connecticut. **Using reports filed by these PACs with the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) through October 11, we have traced income all 19 active Connecticut super PACs and spending for the top five super PACs for the 2018 calendar year.**

Unfortunately, because of erroneous or missing information in reports from two major super PACs -- Change Connecticut PAC and Protect Freedom PAC, it is difficult to know exactly how much these PACs have actually raised and spent and which candidates they are benefiting. The **Change Connecticut PAC** has failed to identify how the majority of their expenses have been used to support or oppose candidates, as required by law. Our review of spending data from its reports reveals that it is also greatly understating its expenses. Reports from the **Protect Freedom PAC** have conflicting information about their total amount of donations -- either \$2.1 million or \$1.2 million. If they have received the larger amount, then all super PACs in the state received \$6.9 million this year. If Protect Freedom has raised \$1.2 million, then the total for all super PACs combined is \$6.1 million.

About four out of five dollars in donations to Connecticut super PACs are going to Republican PACs -- PACs that are affiliated with the Republican party or that target their support to an individual GOP candidate. Among all donations to these partisan PACs, Republican PACs have received 97%.

Funding for Connecticut super PACs is dominated almost entirely by a handful of big money interests -- partisan national PACs, lobbying organizations, and a few wealthy individuals. Contributions from only 11 donors account for more than 90% of all donations to Connecticut super PACs thus far in 2018. National PACs contribute the largest share of income, followed by individual donations. While direct contributions from individual businesses make up a small share of overall donations, business interests, through a variety of paths, are a primary driver of super PAC money. Contributions from business trade associations make up the third largest share of contributions. In addition, most of the major individual contributors are business executives, and, corporations and their executives are major contributors to the national PACs that have, in turn, donated to Connecticut super PACs.

Under Connecticut law, super PACs must disclose their donors. However, the majority of funds for Connecticut super PACs are from "dark" or "gray" money sources, with donors that are undisclosed or difficult to trace. Dark money sources are not required to disclose their donors and include advocacy organizations, like 501(c)(6) trade associations and 501(c)(4) "social welfare" organizations. National PACs must disclose donors, but they gather donations from many sources, so it is not possible to connect dollars from a specific donor through a national PAC to a state PAC. These difficult-to-trace funds are called "gray money." These dark or gray money sources account for 62% of all donations (under a high Protect Freedom PAC income estimate) or 70% (under a low Protect Freedom PAC estimate).

Many super PACs wrap themselves in sheep's clothing, choosing vague and innocuous names that disguise their funders and agendas. Super PACs across the country are notorious for choosing value-laden, inoffensive, and vague names that reveal nothing about their goals and backers. Few voters could guess that Build CT PAC and Leaders for a Stronger CT PAC are run by charter school advocates, that Stronger CT PAC is operated by business advocates, or that Change Connecticut PAC is funded by a national Republican PAC.

The five largest Connecticut super PACs are:

- **Change Connecticut PAC** is almost entirely funded by the Republican State Leadership Committee, a national PAC that has funneled \$800,000 to the local organization. It is focused on supporting GOP state legislative candidates. It is the subject of multiple complaints that it has violated state law by failing to disclose the candidates its spending is intended to support or oppose. Change Connecticut PAC has raised 18 times more than its Democratic counterpart, a super PAC called Connecticut Values, which is funded solely by the Democratic State Legislative Committee.
- **Change PAC** is funded and operated by is the Republican Governors Association (RGA), a national PAC. It has the greatest funding of any Connecticut super PAC, with \$2.6 million from the RGA so far, and is supporting Bob Stefanowski

for Governor. Change PAC has raised 21 times more than its Democratic counterpart, Our Connecticut, which is funded by the Democratic Governors Association.

- **Protect Freedom PAC** is operated by a national PAC with the same name. It has received the vast majority of its funding from wealthy individual donors. This single candidate committee supported Bob Stefanowski through his successful GOP primary election. Combining expenditures from Change PAC and Protect Freedom PAC, Bob Stefanowski has benefited from \$3.4 million in targeted super PAC spending. By comparison, the Stefanowski campaign itself reported total income of \$2.4 million, as of their October 10 filing, not counting \$2.65 million in loans the candidate made to his campaign. Protect Freedom PAC's reports contain conflicting information about the amount of donations they have received - either \$2.1 million or \$1.2 million.
- **FixCT PAC** raised \$145,000 and focused its support on Steve Obsitnik in the GOP Gubernatorial primary. Candidate campaigns and Super PACs are not legally permitted to coordinate their activities. In June, the State Elections Enforcement Commission launched an investigation of the Obsitnik campaign and whether it had illegally raised campaign contributions or coordinated its activities with the FixCT PAC.
- **Realtors for Connecticut PAC** was formed and is run directly by the Connecticut Association of Realtors, which contributed all of its \$604,420 in income.

While super PAC spending accounts for the majority of independent expenditures in the state, and is the primary focus of this report, other organizations can also make these expenditures to influence elections. Some of these organizations, such as labor unions, have legal structures that are different from state super PACs. They are not required to disclose their donors and so can be considered a source of dark money. Another is a national PAC. In our full report, we also highlight some of this spending in Connecticut. Our analysis of expenditures by the Service Employee International Union (SEIU) found spending totaling \$332,405 through their October 10 report. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) has spent \$75,195, and the National Association of Realtors Fund has spent \$126,202.