

Murphy to Drop Bill to End Conflicts of Interest, Thwart Special Interest Influence at Supreme Court

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - After learning about outrageous actions by Supreme Court Justices Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) is working on legislation to end conflicts of interest at the nation's highest court. In the midst of the Citizens United case, Thomas and Scalia were hosted by the infamous Koch brothers, who funded many of the attacks ads this fall, at lavish retreats intended to discuss their radical agenda and plot political strategy on issues like the Citizens United case.

"If I were to ask someone on a Main Street in Connecticut if they would be comfortable with a Supreme Court justice accepting a plane ticket and all expenses paid at a fancy hotel courtesy of a special interest, I know what their answer would be. No way. Yet, Justices Scalia and Thomas did just that - while one of the Koch brothers' top priorities was pending before the highest court in the land. It is outrageous, and demands that Congress take action," said Murphy.

The landmark 5-4 Citizens United decision overturned restrictions on corporate funding in elections that were in place since 1947, and the ramifications of it were quickly felt across the nation. The flood gates of anonymous corporate spending immediately opened, and shadowy independent groups that did not have to disclose their funding sources spent millions in the months leading up to the election. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, spending by outside groups jumped 330 percent to nearly \$300 million when compared to 2006.

These groups had innocent sounding names such as, 60 Plus or the American Action Network, but were largely funded by corporate interests. Two of the main benefactors of these groups were Charles and David Koch, billionaire brothers who operate a Kansas-based energy company. The Koch Industries PAC spent \$2.6 million in the 2010 election cycle, and individuals associated with Koch Industries and its affiliates contributed another \$1.8 million. In addition to funding outside groups, the Koch brothers organized a number of conservative retreats and conferences to discuss their radical views and plot strategies to benefit their interests, which Thomas and Scalia attended.

Murphy's bill will:

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apply the Judicial Conference's Code of Conduct, which applies to all other federal judges, to Supreme Court justices. This would allow the public to access more timely and detailed information when an outside group wants to have a justice participate in a conference, such as the funders of the conference;

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require the justices to simply publicly disclose their reasoning behind a recusal when they withdraw from a case;

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require the Court to develop a process for parties to a case before the Court to request a decision from the Court, or a panel of the Court, regarding the potential conflict of interest of a particular Justice.

"If this is the tip of the iceberg, with justices conflicted on several fronts, and refusing to disclose their conflicts or recuse themselves from cases, we've got to stop this immediately. Right now, we have no clue. With a potential Supreme Court fight on the new health insurance law looming, we need to know the Supreme Court is immune to outside influence," said Murphy.

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