

The Supreme Court abolished such limits with its 2014 decision in *McCutcheon v. FEC*. Massachusetts abandoned its aggregate limits on donations to state-level candidates the day the Court released its decision, with the dozen other states with such limits in place quickly revisiting their policies.

Super PACs are not supposed to coordinate their activities with candidates themselves. There has often been a thin membrane between such groups and the campaigns they back, however, with former top aides to many candidates running super PACs operating on their behalf. A set of e-mails among aides to Republican governor Scott Walker revealed in 2014 showed that such separations are sometimes entirely porous. The e-mails suggested that the governor himself was involved in soliciting large-dollar donations on behalf of Club for Growth, a nominally independent group that had his back during a 2012 recall campaign. Among other transactions, the e-mails revealed that Walker had spoken by phone with Kenneth G. Langone, a cofounder of Home Depot, who donated \$15,000 to the Club for Growth that day, as well as meeting with real estate developer Donald Trump, who also gave \$15,000.<sup>d</sup>

According to an e-mail from his fundraising consultant to Club for Growth, Walker wanted “all the issue advocacy efforts run thru one group to ensure correct messaging.” Many candidates have complained in recent years that they can’t pick the issues they want to talk about, since the people running super PACs may have their own agendas. Not all super PACs, after all, are set up by a candidate’s buddies. Many are run by interest groups consumed by a single issue, or an individual whose concerns may have little to do with the district or state at hand.

With party spending sometimes dwarfed by super PACs, some people argue that it’s time to lift the restrictions on fundraising that parties still operate under. The existing laws have “succeeded in profoundly altering the state of American politics by severely weakening American political parties to the benefit of outside spending groups who may raise and spend unlimited funds in connection with federal elections,” election lawyers Neil Reiff, a Democrat, and Donald McGahn, a Republican, said in testimony before a U.S. Senate committee in 2014.

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<sup>a</sup> Fredreka Schouten, “Federal Super PACs Spend Big on Local Elections,” *USA Today*, February 25, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2014/02/25/super-pacs-spending-local-races/5617121/>.

<sup>b</sup> Quoted in Peter Overby, “Outside Group Mirrors Successful Strategies of Political Parties,” NPR, August 22, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2014/08/22/342354175/outside-group-mirrors-successful-strategies-of-political-parties>.

<sup>c</sup> Kenneth P. Vogel, “Big Money, the Koch Brothers and Me,” *Politico*, May 29, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/big-money-the-koch-brothers-and-me-107225.html>.

<sup>d</sup> Adam Nagourney and Michael Barbaro, “Emails Show Bigger Fund-Raising Role for Wisconsin Leader,” *New York Times*, August 22, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/23/us/politics/emails-show-bigger-fund-raising-role-for-gov-scott-walker-of-wisconsin.html>.