

New Indian SuperPAC jumps into Duckworth-Walsh race

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Indian-American businessman and CEO Shalli Kumar speaks in his Carol Stream office about the SuperPAC he and other businessmen started to support Republican Congressman Joe Walsh against Democrat Tammy Duckworth in the 8th Congressional District.

SCOTT SANDERS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Tammy Duckworth, left, opposes Joe Walsh in the 8th Congressional District for the 2012 General Election.

By [Kerry Lester](#) and [Eric Peterson](#)

The formation of a new Indian American SuperPAC supporting Congressman Joe Walsh's campaign illustrates the political division within the Asian community in the 8th Congressional District.

Indian Americans for Freedom, a group founded by Carol Stream businessman Shalli Kumar in August, is airing ads on cable television and in several newspapers questioning Hoffman Estates Democrat Tammy Duckworth's support of the Council on American Islamic Relations.

The council's Chicago chapter, in turn, has ripped Walsh for statements he made over the summer suggesting "radical Islam" is a threat in suburbs including Elgin, Addison and Elk Grove Village.

Kumar, in an interview at his office at AVG Electronics where framed patents, family photos and a picture of Ronald Reagan decorate the walls, said Indian Americans for Freedom plans to spend about \$500,000 in the 8th District race.

The initial ads show Duckworth wearing a headscarf at an event at a Villa Park Islamic center earlier this fall, where both she and Ahmed Rehab, executive director of CAIR Chicago, spoke. In the commercial, a voice-over plays over Middle Eastern music and questions why Duckworth would share a stage with CAIR.

"Ms. Duckworth, you should know better!" the commercial reads.

At that mid-September event, Duckworth told a group she was "absolutely horrified" about Walsh's comments on radical Islam in the suburbs.

"He put entire populations of Americans at risk. Singled them out to be the subject of fear and mistrust," she said to applause.

Duckworth, asked whether she supports CAIR, responded in an email citing a need to "support organizations who promote tolerance and understanding."

Walsh has described the group as linked to terrorism.

Kumar said he believes Duckworth's association with CAIR represented a lapse of judgment that ignored the opinions of fellow Democrats like U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin. While Durbin has supported many of CAIR's positions, he has also cited its "extreme rhetoric."

Kumar said the 8th District race "can't present more of a contrast" in terms of candidates.

He said he's disappointed a military veteran like Duckworth hasn't taken the strong stand against sending financial aid to Pakistan that Walsh has.

While Walsh has made headlines for his recent controversial statements about abortion, Kumar said he believes the important concern in this election is the direction of the nation's economy, not social issues.

Indian Americans for Freedom has been reprimanded by the Federal Election Commission for failing to properly fill out its statement of organization. It must submit a response to the commission by Nov. 23. Kumar described that oversight as a first-time error.

The 8th Congressional District, stretching from Addison to Elgin and including portions of Kane, Cook and DuPage counties, was dubbed "perhaps the most Asian district in the Midwest" by Raja Krishnamoorthi, who lost a Democratic primary bid.

According to 2012 census figures, 12 percent of the district's residents are of Asian descent. Many of those residents are Muslim, who are largely supporting Duckworth.

Suburban Indians with ties to the region of Gujarat have expressed support for Walsh, who has written two letters to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's office advocating for controversial Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi to be given a diplomatic visa.

Modi was denied permission to enter the U.S. because he was accused, though not convicted, of allowing the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Gujarat while prime minister in 2002.

"We should invite him here. We in this country could learn much by what Mr. Modi has done in the state of Gujarat," Walsh said.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Robert Blake said Tuesday that Modi "is free to apply for another visa whenever he chooses and the system will take its course."

Walsh, in a statement, hailed the apparent reversal in course as a "victory for the Indian community."

Kumar, who as a college student in India founded an anti-corruption group, praised Modi for his work against nepotism in the financially successful region of Gujarat.

"Modi is my idol," Kumar said, calling him the "most noncorrupt" politician he's ever known.