

This 2024 Ohio Senate candidate pledged to help GOP with a new PAC. Did he deliver?

Haley BeMiller

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After he lost Ohio's 2022 U.S. Senate primary, state Sen. Matt Dolan pledged to put his money where his mouth is.

The Chagrin Falls Republican placed third in the messy race for the GOP nomination behind Sen. J.D. Vance and former state treasurer Josh Mandel. His success surprised the political world. After all, he was the only candidate to distance himself from former President Donald Trump in a primary defined by Trump's influence.

Dolan, who's now running in the 2024 Senate race, took this as a sign that Ohioans are interested in pragmatism and launched a super PAC to promote his policy positions and vision for the GOP. Dubbed Ohio Matters PAC, Dolan said the group aimed to support issue-oriented Republicans and ensure the party is executing on its ideas.

"If we're going to continue to just focus on the past, we're going to fail as Republicans," he said last year. "I would hope others would stand up and say the same thing and just say, it's time for the Republicans to move on."

But more than one year after its launch, Ohio Matters has spent more money on Dolan's campaign consultants than candidates. And Dolan, who's part of the wealthy family that owns the Cleveland Guardians, never made the personal contribution he promised when the PAC kicked off.

The findings come after one of Dolan's primary opponents, Secretary of State Frank LaRose, criticized him for not doing enough to support Issue 1, the failed effort to make it harder to amend Ohio's constitution. LaRose's campaign declined to comment for this story.

"One would think that if you're creating a super PAC, that the person creating that PAC would actually be a major contributor of the PAC," said David Cohen, a political scientist at the University of Akron. "The fact that he's contributed nothing leads me to believe that the PAC was nothing than a public relations gimmick."

How Matt Dolan's PAC spent its money

Ohio Matters received over \$89,000 in donations after Dolan announced the PAC's formation, including a combined \$11,600 from Guardians chairman Paul Dolan and other members of the senator's family. These donors backed Dolan's 2022 Senate campaign and agreed to move their contributions to the PAC account.

Dolan said he would invest an undetermined amount of his own money, but that never happened, according to Federal Election Commission filings.

The group has received occasional contributions since then and had about \$85,000 on hand as of July. In total, it's donated to six candidates:

- \$1,000 to Rep. Nick Santucci, R- Howland Twp.
- \$300 to Ethan Reynolds, who previously served as New Carlisle councilman and mayor.
- \$250 to Attorney General Dave Yost's 2022 campaign.
- \$250 to Treasurer Robert Sprague's 2022 campaign.
- \$250 to Auditor Keith Faber's 2022 campaign.
- \$250 to Sen. Michael Rulli, R-Salem.

Ohio Matters also gave \$2,000 to the Ohio Republican Party and \$2,500 to the Ohio Young Republican PAC. At the same time, it's paid \$29,000 to political firms run by Dolan's campaign manager and top political adviser. The consultants helped advise and manage the super PAC between Dolan's Senate bids.

"Ohio Matters PAC is actively working to support candidates, causes and organizations committed to championing conservative policy and building a stronger Republican Party," said Brad Miller, a spokesman for Dolan's campaign. "While we do not telegraph strategy, during the weeks and months ahead, the PAC will continue its work to support principled leaders dedicated to fostering collaboration and engagement in order to expand economic opportunity and security in Ohio and build a stronger future for America."

Cohen said super PACs need to raise millions of dollars and either get behind one key race or several candidates to be influential. Anything short of that isn't serving much of a purpose, he argued.

"The purpose of a super PAC is to influence the political system in some way," Cohen said. "I'm just confused as to why he created this super PAC, yet he contributed nothing to it. It just seems to be languishing."