



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on November 5, 2015

Is Bloomberg's Anti-gun Money Becoming Toxic?

In its post-mortem on the Virginia State Senate races decided on Tuesday, the *Washington Post* [nearly ran out of adjectives](#) in describing the extent of the loss suffered by anti-gun Governor Terry McAuliffe and his anti-gun financier, Michael Bloomberg (shown): "Their aggressive advocacy in a pivotal [state] Senate race in the Richmond area may have backfired by producing a pro-Republican backlash.... [Democrat Daniel] Gecker's loss was the key setback in an election that tarnished McAuliffe's reputation as a political wizard.... [McAuliffe] gambled big and lost."

McAuliffe wasn't just gambling with his own money, either. Two weeks before the election, Bloomberg money poured into two races that, had either of their candidates succeeded, would have given control of the state's upper legislative body to the Democrats, enhancing McAuliffe's chances at creating an anti-gun legacy and confirming that Bloomberg money in sufficient quantities could buy elections.

Gecker's opponent was Glen Sturtevant, a local school board member and a pro-gun rights supporter. When Sturtevant learned of the millions pouring in to support Gecker from Bloomberg's Everytown for Gun Safety group, he ran ads exposing the inflow of out-of-state money that turned the election in his favor.

Because of McAuliffe's support for Gecker going as far back as the Democratic primary, and his expressed animus for the National Rifle Association, Gecker looked to turn the tide in the Republican-controlled state senate. One Democrat victory would have done it.

In commenting on the last-minute strategy of burying Sturtevant in Bloomberg money and how it backfired, state Senator Chap Peterson, a Democrat from Fairfax, said: "The gun thing ... I would have done it differently. It's speculation at this point, but I feel the Gecker seat was one we thought we were going to win.... [The gun issue] was one variable that was thrown in at the last minute."

An editorial in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* was much blunter: Gecker "made a massive mistake [in accepting ads from Bloomberg's group] ... a campaign focused on guns redounded to Gecker's despair."

Sturtevant's victory not only cost Bloomberg millions — his group invested more than \$1 million directly in Gecker's campaign, along with millions outside of it, compared to less than \$100,000 from the NRA — but McAuliffe's reputation as well. As the *Washington Post* noted, following the failure to take the seat for Democrats:

McAuliffe chose to invest substantial, personal political capital in the race. He raised millions of dollars, helping to make it the costliest legislative campaign in Virginia history. He brought in dozens of campaign operatives to identify potential supporters and get them to the polls. He barnstormed all over the state, getting hoarse in the process.

Virginia State Republicans breathed a sigh of relief over Sturtevant's victory, which kept McAuliffe from



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controlling the senate. Senate Majority Leader Thomas Norment said:

Today, Virginians voted for a fiscally responsible and conservative majority. Our victory is all the more impressive in that it was achieved despite the record-breaking millions of dollars spent by Governor McAuliffe, his allies and out-of-state PACS.

This election was decided by Virginians.

Bloomberg's group also invested heavily in another hotly contested race, which was won by the Democrat, Jeremy McPike, but by a much narrower margin than expected. In a district which President Obama had won over Romney in 2012 by 63-35 percent, McPike defeated his Republican challenger taking just 54 percent of the vote.

The liberal *Christian Science Monitor* expressed hope the morning of the election that at least one of the Democrat candidates would win their contests and give the senate control to the Democrats:

Everytown [for Gun Safety] entered the races for the hotly contested Virginia Senate districts ... in late October. It produced a television ad campaign starring Andy Parker, the father of a Roanoke, Va., TV journalist [who was] fatally shot during a live broadcast in August.

Everytown spent \$2.2 million on the campaign, raising Mr. Gecker's haul to \$2.5 million and doubling Mr. Pike's to \$3 million (twice that of his Republican opponent).

If Democrats win just one of those seats, they will have enough to form a majority in the upper chamber....

Wins on Tuesday for McPike and Gecker could be significant for gun control advocates in general and [Bloomberg's] Everytown specifically.

But said the *Monitor*, "A loss on Tuesday might give Everytown cause to rethink its strategy."

That loss on Tuesday may be a harbinger for the nation as a whole. Virginia is a "microcosm of America as a whole," according to Nicole Hendrix, a professor of criminal justice at Radford University, reflecting "many of the challenges with firearms seen across the country. In many ways, how Virginia responds ... may foretell the direction of the country."

One conclusion that may tentatively be offered following Gecker's — and Bloomberg's — loss in Virginia is that Michael Bloomberg's money, funneled through his Everytown for Gun Safety organization, might just be getting toxic: spending more of it may mean decreasing his chances of winning critical elections such as the one in Virginia.

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