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Republican Hindu Coalition rolls out GOP heavy hitters for launch



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A new Indian-American lobby on Tuesday convened a powerful group of Republicans — including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) — in a Washington hotel as it pledged to raise millions in campaign cash for GOP candidates this cycle.

The Republican Hindu Coalition (RHC) held its public launch at the Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill, gathering McConnell and Sens. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.) and Ron Johnson (R-Wis.).

The RHC’s founder, Chicago-based businessman Shalabh “Shalli” Kumar, has promised to personally donate at least \$2 million to Republicans running for office in 2016, and the coalition aims to give at least \$10 million to GOP candidates this cycle.

Ayotte, Portman and Johnson are all facing tough re-election battles in 2016.

Influential House members, including Rules Committee Chairman Pete Sessions (R-Texas) and Rep. Ed Royce (R-Calif.), the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, also attended.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, the honorary chairman of the RHC, entered the ballroom with Kumar.

"I think launching an organization like the RHC could literally change history," Gingrich told the audience.

Gingrich said the U.S. and India face a common enemy in radical jihadists, adding he had grave concerns about the dangers of Pakistan.

Kumar designed the RHC to mobilize Indian-Americans into an influential conservative force and to tighten business and strategic ties between India and the U.S.

The technology entrepreneur got the idea for the RHC when he saw how successful and influential the Republican Jewish Coalition has been with lawmakers in Washington and across America.

"Having watched the Republican Jewish Coalition work to achieve its goals ... I was inspired to found RHC," Kumar said.

Based on Tuesday's attendance list, the Indian-American businessman and the RHC will have no trouble getting their telephone calls answered on Capitol Hill.

Kumar, who is close to India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has relationships in the Republican Party dating back to the Reagan administration.

Kumar has been a generous donor to Republicans, sending \$50,000 to Mitt Romney's joint fundraising account in 2012 and more than \$100,000 to the Republican Party and its candidates over the past five years.

"Shalli, thank you so much for what you're doing," McConnell told the businessman, saying how glad he was that India was moving away from socialism and toward free market principles.

Turning to the audience, which included influential Indian-American businessmen, McConnell said of the GOP: "Believe me, it's your natural home and we welcome you."