

It's 10 Degrees on the North Shore. Do you know where Congressman Tierney is?

by Marisa DeFranco

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For three recent Februaries, while you were schlepping through snow and ice, clearing out ice dams, and generally freezing your cookies off here on the North Shore, your Congressman John Tierney was traipsing across the globe to balmy climes like Puerto Rico and Amman, Jordan.

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Since 2008, Congressman John Tierney has taken six international trips, courtesy of the Aspen Institute. Congressman Tierney has enjoyed seven all-expenses-paid trips, during the worst economic recession of our time. While Congressman John Tierney was in sunny Puerto Rico, back here on the cold North Shore, you were preparing to file your tax returns and pay Uncle Sam who was doing very little to alleviate your economic stress. While Tierney was in Amman, Jordan, you were shoveling out from yet another blizzard. While Tierney was in Tunisia, you were just finally paying off all the heating, plowing, and roof repair bills accumulated over a long cold winter. While he was in Paris, France, your small business was crunching your numbers in order to pay for third quarter taxes.

What is wrong with this picture?

Other than displaying an obvious lack of New England hardiness and how out of touch it is to take such travel gifts, your Congressman John Tierney is taking these free trips from a privately funded organization that wants to direct, create and control policy. The GOP's ultra rich guys (the Koch brothers) v. the Democrats' ultra rich guys (George Soros, Warren Buffet) do not support a real democracy.

Tierney's financial disclosure reports don't even bother to give reasons for most of the trips. One does give the title, "Energy Security: Policy

Consideration for the New Congress.” In Puerto Rico. Couldn’t our Representatives learn more about energy by, hmmm, talking to Representatives from Texas, Alaska, Louisiana, North Dakota? But if our Congressman needs the alleged expertise of such private groups (which they truly do not) surely he could meet with these very rich people at their plush offices (or hotels) in Washington D.C.? But, then, it is too cold in Washington D.C., isn't it.

I don’t begrudge Congressman Tierney a vacation. He can go to any sunny climate in February, but surely he should do it on his own dime. Certainly our taxes pay our representatives a very generous salary (\$174,000 per year plus many benefits including health care that is not part of the Affordable Care Act). In fact, I admit, we often travel in February too—if it’s not to the Sunbelt of Erie, Pennsylvania to see my family, then it is to the balmy streets of Queens to see my in-laws for Chinese New Year. If I come back with a tan, it’s just from the sun reflecting off the three feet of snow I’m shoveling.

Congressman Tierney stands alone in the Massachusetts delegation for extensive foreign travel to sunny climes in the depths of winter. No other member of the Massachusetts delegation is even close in terms of taking trips funded by private organizations.

I have pledged to run a clean money campaign and take no money from PACs. I want to listen only to my constituents, not to an insular shadowy group run by some very rich guys. My three opponents have not taken the pledge. I will also pledge that as your Congresswoman, I will never accept travel gifts from any outside private organization. Are We The People going to decide policy or are front groups for billionaires going to wine and dine and fly our Congressmen all over the world and know that these trips will influence decisions they make in D.C.