



NEWS RELEASE

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INDEPENDENT SPENDING IN LEGISLATIVE PRIMARY ELECTION IS MOST EVER; PRIMARY ENDS WITH LOTS OF LEFTOVER FUNDS

Independent special interest committees spent \$1.2 million on the 2017 legislative primary, a new high, according to reports filed 20 days after the June 6 election with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

“While the amounts are much smaller compared to independent spending in general elections, we are now witnessing a steady surge of independent spending in primary races. The 2017 total is nearly double the total from 2013,” said Jeff Brindle, ELEC’s executive director.

Table 1
Spending by Candidates and Independent
Groups in Legislative Primary Elections

Year	Candidates	Independents	Total	% Independents
2017	\$27,665,721	\$1,177,389	\$28,843,110	4%
2015	\$12,527,364	\$ 924,723	\$13,452,087	7%
2013	\$22,153,242	\$ 635,354	\$22,788,596	3%
2011	\$27,258,440	None	\$27,258,440	NA

He pointed out that in 2011, independent groups spent \$1.8 million in the general election- just \$500,000 more than this year’s primary. Two years ago, independent groups spent \$10.7 million in the general election with just Assembly members running.

Independent spending did comprise a larger percentage share of the 2015 total primary spending (7 % versus 4%) even though independent outlays were lower than this year. However, Brindle said he has no doubt the long-term trend is clearly up.

“This is another sign that independent spending is taking on a larger role in New Jersey elections,” said Brindle. “The sooner the Legislature broadens disclosure requirements for these groups, the sooner the public will have a complete picture of the role these groups are playing.”

Based largely on the bipartisan recommendations of ELEC, both parties have introduced legislation that would require far broader disclosure by independent groups that participate in New Jersey elections.

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During the 2017 primary, three districts- 3, 24 and 26- drew the heaviest concentration of independent spending.

Table 2
Independent Spending in
Legislative Primary Elections

Independent Committee	3	12	24	26	31	40	Statewide	Totals
Garden State Forward	\$317,800						\$322,774	\$ 640,574
Stronger Foundations Inc.			\$ 73,300	\$211,800				\$ 285,100
National Association of Realtors Fund			\$ 81,026	\$ 36,455				\$ 117,481
Better Education for Kids Inc.					\$80,726			\$ 80,726
Local Government Voter Education		\$36,058						\$ 36,058
NJ Coalition of Real Estate				\$ 15,000				\$ 15,000
New Jersey Family First						\$2,450		\$ 2,450
Totals	\$317,800	\$36,058	\$154,326	\$263,255	\$80,726	\$2,450	\$322,774	\$1,177,389

Reports filed by legislative candidates showed that they completed the 2017 primary with \$14.8 million in reserves, one of the largest bounties ever left over to roll into fall legislative elections.

Table 3
Campaign Finance by Legislative Candidates
in 2017 Primary Election Versus Earlier Elections

Year	Raised	Spent	Reserves*	Elections? **
2017	\$34,875,842	\$27,665,721	\$14,774,600	G/S/A
2015	\$14,661,031	\$12,527,364	\$ 6,644,378	A
2013	\$28,111,870	\$22,153,242	\$13,398,825	G/S/A
2011	\$34,165,804	\$27,258,440	\$13,698,365	S/A

*Cash-on-Hand or Transferred to General Election **G=Gubernatorial, S=Senate, A=Assembly

Not adjusting for inflation, the \$14.8 million in post-primary reserves is a new high. The 2011 total adjusted for inflation is slightly larger (\$14.9 million).

Democrats control 24 of 40 seats in the Senate, and 52 of 80 seats in the Assembly. They have more than a two-to-one advantage over Republicans in total reserves. Most cash-on-hand is expected to be included in funds transferred to the fall general election.

Table 4
Party Reserves as
of June 23, 2017

Party	Cash-On-Hand	Transferred to General	Total Reserves
Democrats	\$6,199,491	\$5,494,019	\$11,693,510
Republicans	\$1,014,204	\$2,066,886	\$ 3,081,090
Both Parties	\$7,213,695	\$7,560,905	\$14,774,600

“The majority party usually has an edge in fund-raising, and this year is no exception,” Brindle said. He noted that in recent legislative elections, Democrats also have benefited from support from independent special interest committees. Brindle added, however, that “this advantage can change from year to year.”

“While we still can expect major skirmishes in a handful of so-called battleground districts, Democrats clearly are in strong financial position to defend their majorities,” he said.

Incumbents also head toward the fall elections with bigger reserves than challengers.

Table 5
Reserves of Incumbents and
Challengers as of June 23, 2017

Group	Cash-on-Hand	Transferred To General	Total Reserves
Incumbents	\$6,321,417	\$6,145,142	\$12,466,560
Challengers	\$ 892,278	\$1,415,763	\$ 2,308,040
Combined Totals	\$7,213,695	\$7,560,905	\$14,774,600

Senate candidates hold larger reserves headed into the general elections than Assembly candidates.

Table 6
Reserves of Senate and Assembly
Candidates as of June 23, 2017

Group	Cash-on-Hand	Transferred To General	Total Reserves
Senate	\$4,164,449	\$3,767,020	\$ 7,931,469
Assembly	\$3,049,246	\$3,793,885	\$ 6,843,131
Both Houses	\$7,213,695	\$7,560,905	\$14,774,600

Unlike the general election, the primary election has far fewer losers because the intent is to nominate a Senate candidate and two Assembly candidates for each party in all 40 legislative districts.

The 2017 primary did feature 8 contested primaries in the Senate (5 Republican, 3 Democrat), and 16 contested primaries in the Assembly (5 Republican, 11 Democrat).

Due to the contested primaries, there were 36 losers in the primary. That is far smaller than the 120 or more expected in the November 7, 2017 general election.

As a consequence, winners drastically outspent losers.

Table 7
Spending by Winning and
Losing Legislative Candidates

Type	Amount
Winners	\$27,234,784
Losers	\$ 430,937
Total	\$27,665,721

The numbers in this report should be considered preliminary. The analysis is based on legislative fundraising reports received by 5 pm. on June 29, 2017.

Reports filed by legislative candidates are available online on ELEC’s website at www.elec.state.nj.us. A downloadable summary of data from those reports is available in both spreadsheet and PDF formats at www.elec.state.nj.us/publicinformation/statistics.htm.