



NEWS RELEASE

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3RD DISTRICT RACE MAY BE MOST EXPENSIVE LEGISLATIVE RACE IN US HISTORY; OVERALL LEGISLATIVE INDEPENDENT SPENDING SOARS TO NEW RECORD

Driven skyward by what appears to be the most expensive legislative campaign in American history, independent spending in legislative races reached a new record in 2017, according to reports filed with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission.

An estimated \$14.4 million was spent by independent groups just in the third legislative district, with the total cost reaching about \$18.7 million when candidate spending is included. Data provided by the National Institute on Money in State Politics indicates this may be the most money ever spent in a single legislative district throughout the United States.

Table 1
Most Expensive Legislative
Campaigns in the United States*

STATE	YEAR	WINNER	PARTY	DISTRICT	INDEPENDENT SPENDING	CANDIDATES-CONTRIBUTIONS/SPENDING	TOTAL	INFLATION ADJUSTED
NJ	2017	Sweeney, Senate President Steve	Democrat	3	\$14,421,793	\$ 4,322,147	\$18,743,940	\$18,743,940
CA	2000	Burton, Senator John	Democrat	3	NONE	\$11,529,589	\$11,529,589	\$16,515,232
CA	2016	Grayson, Assemblyman Tim	Democrat	14	\$10,877,097	\$ 1,700,541	\$12,577,638	\$12,926,448
CA	2008	Strickland, Senator Tony	Republican	19	\$ 2,126,934	\$ 8,534,885	\$10,661,819	\$12,214,768
CA	2014	Backer, Assemblywoman Catharine	Republican	16	\$ 7,134,313	\$ 4,544,783	\$11,679,096	\$12,168,833

*List includes campaigns where most or all of money was spent in district. Illinois House Speaker Jim Durkin raised \$19.4 million in 2016 election but gave \$18.5 million to other candidates or parties. Non-New Jersey candidate totals are contributions and were provided by the National Institute on Money in State Politics.

“As independent special interest groups rapidly expand their influence over elections, spending records seem to be falling by the wayside almost every election cycle,” said Jeff Brindle, ELEC’s Executive Director. “The amount spent on the third legislative district alone this year is staggering. It is more than most past gubernatorial candidates have spent statewide.”

“We urge both parties to adopt ELEC-recommended legislation that would require independent spenders to fully disclose their fund-raising and spending in New Jersey campaigns,” he added.

Independent spending totaled \$20.9 million in the general election and \$2.2 million in the primary for a grand sum of \$23 million. That is 43 percent more than the previous record of \$16.1 million in the 2013 election year.

Table 2
Spending by Independent Special Interest
Committees in New Jersey Legislative Elections

YEAR	PRIMARY	GENERAL	BOTH ELECTIONS	HOUSES RUNNING
2007	\$ 0	\$ 165,000	\$ 165,000	Senate, Assembly
2009	\$ 0	\$ 15,999	\$ 15,999	Assembly
2011	\$ 0	\$ 1,835,000	\$ 1,835,500	Senate, Assembly
2013	\$ 635,354	\$15,442,717	\$16,078,071	Senate, Assembly
2015	\$ 927,561	\$10,908,983	\$11,836,544	Assembly
2017	\$2,160,923	\$20,893,258	\$23,054,181	Senate, Assembly

Reports that reflect campaign finance activity through November 24 show legislative candidates have raised \$43 million, spent \$35.4 million, and report \$7.7 million in cash reserves, which can be tapped for future campaigns. Overall spending in the general election, including independent committees, totals \$56.3 million.

Table 3
Campaign Finance Activity of Legislative
Candidates through November 24, 2017 (General Election Only)

GROUP	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND
Legislative Candidates	\$42,991,915	\$35,384,677	\$7,658,934
Independent Committees	NA	\$20,893,258	NA
TOTAL		\$56,277,935	

Largely due to its involvement in the 3rd district race, Garden State Forward, a 527 political organization operated by the New Jersey Education Association, topped all independent spenders in this year’s legislative elections at \$6.6 million.

Another group heavily involved in the same race, New Jerseyans for a Better Tomorrow, spent about \$5.8 million and took the number two spot.

Table 4
Independent Committee Spending on
2017 Legislative Elections

GROUP	PRIMARY	GENERAL	BOTH ELECTIONS
Garden State Forward (New Jersey Education Association)***	\$ 640,574	\$ 5,947,098	\$ 6,587,672
New Jerseyans for a Better Tomorrow	\$ 825,043	\$ 5,002,655	\$ 5,827,698
General Majority PAC		\$ 5,555,354	\$ 5,555,354
Stronger Foundations Inc (Operating Engineers Local 825)	\$ 285,100	\$ 1,225,105	\$ 1,510,205
Carpenters for Growth and Progress		\$ 1,250,500	\$ 1,250,500
NJ Coalition of Real Estate	\$ 15,000	\$ 566,568	\$ 581,568
Better Education for Kids Inc.*	\$ 80,726	\$ 357,347	\$ 438,073
Progressive Values Committee		\$ 410,030	\$ 410,030
Growing Economic Opportunities (Laborers)	\$ 158,491	\$ 163,577	\$ 322,068
Republican State Leadership Committee**		\$ 212,056	\$ 212,056
Opportunity for All		\$ 135,030	\$ 135,030
National Association of Realtors Fund	\$ 117,481		\$ 117,481
General Growth Fund (General Majority affiliate)		\$ 43,264	\$ 43,264
Local Government Voter Education	\$ 36,058		\$ 36,058
New Jersey Working Families		\$ 17,181	\$ 17,181
Food and Water Action		\$ 7,493	\$ 7,493
New Jersey Family First	\$ 2,450		\$ 2,450
TOTAL	\$2,160,923	\$20,893,258	\$23,054,181

*Also gave \$25,000 to Senate Democratic Majority

**Also gave \$25,000 to Senate Republican Majority

***Includes \$250,000 to Progressive Values Committee

An estimated one of three dollars spent on the 2017 legislative election poured into the third legislative district.

Table 5
Estimated Cost of 3rd District
Legislative General Election

GROUP	AMOUNT	NOTE
New Jerseyans for a Better Tomorrow	\$ 5,002,655	
Garden State Forward (NJEA)	\$ 4,757,678	Committee gave no district breakdown. Estimate based on heavy media spending in district. Represents 80 percent of total legislative spending.
Candidates- Democrats	\$ 4,125,878	
General Majority PAC	\$ 2,627,793	Contribution to New Jerseyans
Carpenters Fund for Growth and Progress	\$ 1,250,500	Includes \$250,000 to General Majority
Better Education for Kids	\$ 357,347	
NJ Coalition of Real Estate	\$ 296,400	
Candidates- Republicans	\$ 196,269	
Stronger Foundations Inc. (Operating Engineers)	\$ 129,420	
League of Humane Voters of NJ	NA	Spent under \$6,300; no details
PROJECTED TOTAL	\$18,743,940	

Another indication of the extraordinary scope of spending in the district is that media spending alone totaled at least \$7.6 million, according to Advertising Analytics, an advertising tracking service.

The 3rd district media buy alone- \$8.6 million- is more than the previous state record for a legislative district- the \$6.1 million campaign in 2003 between Democratic Senator Fred Madden (D-4th) and Republican George Geist. (In current dollars, it cost \$8.2 million).

Table 6
Television Advertising Buys
June through November

GROUP	AMOUNT
Garden State Forward	\$3,263,283
New Jerseyans for a Better Tomorrow	\$2,066,000
Sweeney Burzichelli & Taliaferro	\$1,519,000
Sweeney, Stephen *	\$ 996,141
Carpenters Fund for Growth and Progress	\$ 732,000
TOTAL	\$8,576,424

Source: Advertising Analytics * Candidate reports

Ten of the 40 legislative districts- one quarter of the total- drew at least \$40 million in spending, about 71 percent of the \$56.3 million spent overall on the general election.

Table 7
Top Ten Districts by Spending

DISTRICT	CANDIDATES	INDEPENDENT COMMITTEES*	TOTAL SPENDING
3	\$4,322,147	\$14,421,793	\$18,743,940
11	\$3,729,836	\$ 1,226,713	\$ 4,956,549
2	\$3,247,506	\$ 587,956	\$ 3,835,462
16	\$2,757,545	\$ 347,970	\$ 3,105,515
38	\$2,118,009		\$ 2,118,009
39	\$1,984,134		\$ 1,984,134
36	\$1,649,714		\$ 1,649,714
21	\$1,366,945		\$ 1,366,945
8	\$ 747,227	\$ 382,820	\$ 1,130,047
14	\$1,029,062		\$ 1,029,062
		TOTAL	\$39,919,377

*District breakdown not available for all expenditures.

Democrats enjoyed an overwhelming fund-raising advantage over Republicans and independent candidates.

Table 8
Party Breakdown of Legislative Campaign Finance Activity
through November 24, 2017

PARTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND
Democrats	\$31,834,507	\$25,403,202	\$6,466,113
Independent Candidates	\$ 16,513	\$ 15,941	\$ 543
Republicans	\$11,140,896	\$ 9,965,534	\$1,192,279
TOTAL	\$42,991,915	\$35,384,677	\$7,658,934

Losers were woefully outspent by winners, most of whom were incumbents.

Table 9
Campaign Finance Activity
Winners Versus Losers

GROUP	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND
Winners	\$36,110,348	\$28,952,901	\$7,198,380
Losers	\$ 6,881,567	\$ 6,431,776	\$ 460,554
TOTAL	\$42,991,915	\$35,384,677	\$7,658,934

Assembly candidates raised more and spent more funds but Senate candidates have more leftover cash.

Table 10
Campaign Finance Activity by Legislative House

GROUP	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND
Assembly Candidates	\$22,570,547	\$19,204,127	\$3,407,132
Senate Candidates	\$20,421,368	\$16,180,550	\$4,251,802
TOTAL	\$42,991,915	\$35,384,677	\$7,658,934

Numbers for candidates are taken from 20-day post-election fundraising reports received by noon November 30, 2017. They reflect activity through November 24.

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

Some, but not all, independent groups file reports with ELEC. These reports can be searched at <http://www.elec.state.nj.us/ELECReport/SearchIndExp.aspx>. Some also disclose their activities in reports made public by the Internal Revenue Service at www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Political-Organizations.