



NEWS RELEASE

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A HANDFUL OF DISTRICTS LIVEN UP AN OTHERWISE QUIET START TO LEGISLATIVE GENERAL ELECTION

Two years after a legislative election that smashed spending records, the fall campaign for 80 state Assembly seats and one state Senate seat is off to a sluggish start, according to 29-day pre-election reports filed with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

Legislative candidates have raised \$14.3 million but spent just \$7.1 million so far. The total is based on reports due October 7 that reflect financial activity through October 4.

Legislators in the last election had already spent \$12.2 million- 72 percent more- though it should be noted that all 40 Senate seats also were in play during 2017.

The \$7.1 million spent this year is higher than the \$6.6 million spent in 2015, another year when Assembly candidates had the ballot to themselves. The 2019 election occurs November 5.

The main reason overall spending is down sharply is because reported independent spending to date has reached just \$728,046. That is nearly 15 times less than the \$10.7 million spent independently at this point in 2017. It is also smaller than the \$5.4 million spent by independent groups in 2015.

Table 1
Legislative Campaign Spending
For 29-Day Reporting Period

YEAR	LEGISLATIVE	INDEPENDENT GROUPS	TOTAL	TYPE
2019*	\$ 7,109,902	\$ 728,046 ¹	\$ 7,837,948	A
2017	\$12,191,375	\$10,695,427	\$22,886,802	A/S
2015	\$ 6,589,670	\$ 5,393,739	\$11,983,409	A

*Legislative total includes spending on a special election for first legislative district state Senate seat.

“It is still early in the race. In some elections, the heaviest spending comes during the last week or two of the campaign,” said Jeff Brindle, ELEC’s Executive Director.

“However, it also could be that most of this year’s races are not viewed as very competitive. Both parties and independent groups may be saving their campaign dollars until next year, when presidential and congressional elections will take place,” he said.

¹ General Majority PAC (\$393,337) and Garden State Forward (\$334,709).

The 2017 legislative election featured the highest spending (nearly \$19 million) ever nationally in a state legislative race. It involved the third legislative district. None of the 2019 legislative skirmishes are likely to come close to that figure.

Based on historical trends and pre-election forecasts, the top six districts reporting the most fundraising- 1,8,11,16,21, and 25- all are viewed among the most likely “battleground” districts this fall. There are 40 legislative districts in New Jersey.

“Battleground districts tend to be those with the tightest voting margins in previous elections. Both parties view them as winnable, so they tend to be the most expensive elections,” said Brindle.

Nearly 40 percent of all campaign funds have poured into the top six districts. Nearly two-thirds of total spending statewide has occurred in those six districts alone.

For the top 10 districts, the percentages are even higher- 52 percent of fundraising and 73 percent of spending.

Table 2
Legislative District Spending Top Ten
Districts Through October 4, 2019

DISTRICT	RAISED	SPENT	CASH
21	\$1,252,504	\$ 960,897	\$ 291,608
11	\$ 956,552	\$ 771,013	\$ 185,539
16	\$ 858,584	\$ 757,495	\$ 101,089
1*	\$ 982,847	\$ 665,917	\$ 316,930
8	\$ 789,708	\$ 535,828	\$ 253,880
25	\$ 626,357	\$ 391,026	\$ 235,331
19	\$ 607,384	\$ 373,257	\$ 234,127
2	\$ 516,172	\$ 286,586	\$ 229,586
14	\$ 510,814	\$ 244,358	\$ 266,456
38	\$ 317,308	\$ 189,323	\$ 127,985
Totals- Top 6	\$5,466,551	\$4,082,175	\$1,384,376
Top 6 as % of All 40 Districts	38%	57%	19%
Totals- Top 10	\$7,418,229	\$5,175,700	\$2,242,529
Top 10 As % of All 40 Districts	52%	73%	31%

*Includes spending on state Senate special election. All other districts involve Assembly candidates only.

“Battleground districts always dominate spending,” said Brindle. “Spending in most other districts around the state is lighter because incumbents of both parties face little risk of losing due to redistricting.”

Democrats hold a 54-to-26 margin in the Assembly. They have held the majority since 2002, and they are raising and spending more money than Republican or independent candidates.

Table 3
Breakdown of Legislative Campaign Finance
Activity by Party through October 4, 2019

PARTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND
Democratic Candidates	\$10,999,897	\$5,733,701	\$5,266,196
Independent Candidates	\$ 16,854	\$ 4,465	\$ 12,389
Republican Candidates	\$ 3,269,185	\$1,371,736	\$1,897,449
All Parties	\$14,285,936	\$7,109,902	\$7,176,034

Incumbents benefit from a big advantage over challengers in terms of fundraising, raising more than four times more money than newcomers and spending nearly three times more. They also have more than seven times more cash to spend with the election less than a month away.

Table 4
Breakdown of Spending by Incumbents
and Challengers through October 4, 2019

PARTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND
Incumbents	\$11,458,563	\$5,160,075	\$6,298,488
Challengers	\$ 2,827,374	\$1,949,828	\$ 877,546
All Candidates	\$14,285,936	\$7,109,902	\$7,176,034

The numbers in this report should be considered preliminary. The analysis is based on reports received by October 15, 2019.

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.

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