



NEWS RELEASE

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BULK OF CAMPAIGN MONEY POURS INTO BATTLEGROUND DISTRICTS

A few competitive legislative districts are attracting the most campaign dollars as this year's state Assembly election¹ enters its final days, according to reports filed by candidates and independent special interest groups with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

Among the highlights of those reports:

- The first legislative district, which includes parts of Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland Counties and features a special election for state Senate along with campaigns for two assembly seats, so far has seen the most combined spending- \$2.5 million.

- The top five districts alone have consumed \$9.1 million in candidate and independent spending- 49 percent of the \$18.5 million waged so far on the general election.

- The top 10 districts have drawn \$12.7 million in spending- 69 percent of the total.

- Candidates already have spent \$13 million while independent groups have invested \$5.3 million.

- To date, independent spending is down sharply from 2017, when nearly \$16 million already had been spent by the final week of the campaign.

Jeff Brindle, ELEC's Executive Director, said while the campaign has been marked by a surprisingly large drop in independent spending, there still is plenty of drama in some district showdowns.

"Battleground or swing districts historically tend to attract the largest amounts of money and this year is no exception," he said. "These usually are districts where margins of victory are smallest and both parties see opportunities."

"It is conceivable, however, that the overall spending, including that of independent groups, is down because they are saving their fund-raising efforts for next year's congressional and presidential elections," he said.

This year, pre-election forecasts along with historical trends pointed to districts 1, 2, 8, 11, 16, 21, and 25 as potential battlegrounds. Reports filed by candidates 11 days before the election, along with separate filings by independent groups, show these seven districts all falling within the top eight for spending.

¹ Also includes a special election for the first legislative district Senate seat.

Table 1
Top Ten Legislative Districts by Spending

DISTRICT	CANDIDATES	INDEPENDENT GROUPS	TOTAL
1	\$ 1,522,849	\$ 991,711	\$ 2,514,560
21	\$ 1,388,298	\$ 764,110	\$ 2,152,408
8	\$ 1,122,952	\$ 736,672	\$ 1,859,624
11	\$ 1,208,217	\$ 273,299	\$ 1,481,516
16	\$ 1,086,573		\$ 1,086,573
2	\$ 718,698	\$ 253,515	\$ 972,213
25	\$ 784,941	\$ 104,092	\$ 889,033
3	\$ 749,123		\$ 749,123
39	\$ 449,148	\$ 90,225	\$ 539,373
19	\$ 501,425		\$ 501,425
All Districts	\$13,031,240	\$5,285,467	\$18,316,707
Top Five \$	\$ 6,328,889	\$3,019,307	\$ 9,094,681
Top Five %	49%	57%	50%
Top Ten \$	\$9,532,224	\$3,213,624	\$12,745,848
Top Ten %	73%	61%	70%

“Due to legislative redistricting, the outcomes in most legislative districts heavily favor one party or the other,” said Brindle. “Barring infrequent statewide controversies like the large tax hikes in 1990, normally only a few districts are likely to shift each year from one party to another.”

One surprise in this year’s elections is the steep decline in independent spending.

The \$5.3 million in independent spending so far is 70 percent below 2017.

Table 2
Spending by Independent Special Interest Committees in New Jersey Legislative Elections²

YEAR	GENERAL	HOUSES RUNNING
2007	\$ 165,000	Senate, Assembly
2009	\$ 15,999	Assembly
2011	\$ 1,835,000	Senate, Assembly
2013	\$15,442,717	Senate, Assembly
2015	\$10,724,287	Assembly
2017	\$15,875,509	Senate, Assembly
2019	\$ 5,285,467	Assembly*

*Also one special election for state Senate

“At least this year, independent spending has nose-dived,” said Brindle.

² Go to https://www.elec.nj.gov/publicinformation/ind_spend_gub_leg_19772017.html for updated numbers (added 12.9.21)

“Barring a surprise Pearl Harbor-style sneak attack in the next few days, which seems less likely with each passing day, this will go down as the smallest spending by independent groups since 2011, when they first became a significant player in legislative elections,” Brindle said.

Table 3
Spending to Date by Independent
Special Interest Groups

INDEPENDENT GROUP	SPENDING
General Majority PAC	\$2,562,057
NJ Coalition of Real Estate	\$ 600,513
Garden State Forward (New Jersey Education Association)	\$ 550,875
Working for Working Americans (Carpenters)	\$ 500,000
Stronger Foundations (Operating Engineers Local 825)	\$ 340,142
Growing Economic Opportunities (Laborers)	\$ 230,313
Monday Morning New Jersey	\$ 201,472
Just the Facts NJ	\$ 142,112
NJ United	\$ 90,000
NJ League of Conservation Voters	\$ 13,487
NJ Right to Life	\$ 4,492
Total	\$5,285,467

Democrats, who control both legislative houses, continue to benefit from a major money advantage.

Table 4
Breakdown of Legislative Campaign Finance
Activity by Party through October 22, 2019

PARTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND
Democratic Candidates	\$15,382,296	\$10,169,841	\$5,212,455
Independent Candidates	\$ 24,231	\$ 10,897	\$ 13,334
Republican Candidates	\$ 4,403,991	\$ 2,850,501	\$1,553,490
All Parties	\$19,810,518	\$13,031,240	\$6,779,279

Incumbents also are maintaining their huge edge over challengers.

Table 5
Breakdown of Spending by Incumbents
and Challengers through October 22, 2019

PARTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND
Incumbents	\$15,659,237	\$ 9,511,870	\$6,147,366
Challengers	\$ 4,151,282	\$ 3,519,369	\$ 631,912
All Candidates	\$19,810,518	\$13,031,240	\$6,779,279

The analysis is based on candidate 11-day pre-election day reports due October 25, 2019 and received by October 29, 2019. Independent spending totals were based on filings through October 31, 2019.

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

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