



NEWS RELEASE

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Heavy Spending Largely Targets Legislative “Battleground” Districts

With the election one week away, seven state legislative districts have become the main focus of candidates and special interest groups making independent expenditures, according to new reports filed with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

Topping the list is the 11th Legislative District, which includes Monmouth County. Spending there already is expected to exceed \$8.8 million. That would make it one of the five most expensive legislative races ever.

Significant spending also has been aimed at legislative districts 16,4,38,3,2, and 8.

Independent groups typically spend most of their funds on “battleground” or “swing” districts. All seven “target” districts have drawn at least \$500,000 in independent spending.¹

Table 1
Seven Legislative Districts Most Targeted By Independent Spenders

Districts	Candidates			Independent Spenders	Projected Totals**
	Raised	Spent	Cash	Spent*	
11	\$ 6,062,235	\$ 5,580,917	\$ 481,318	\$ 2,748,117	\$ 8,810,352
16	\$ 3,880,863	\$ 3,710,543	\$ 170,320	\$ 2,185,205	\$ 6,066,069
4	\$ 2,690,886	\$ 2,248,319	\$ 442,567	\$ 2,397,909	\$ 5,088,795
38	\$ 4,025,784	\$ 3,464,024	\$ 561,759	\$ 505,041	\$ 4,530,824
3	\$ 2,683,842	\$ 2,088,551	\$ 595,291	\$ 1,526,101	\$ 4,209,943
2	\$ 1,687,388	\$ 1,275,713	\$ 411,675	\$ 590,589	\$ 2,277,977
8	\$ 1,041,661	\$ 805,981	\$ 235,680	\$ 642,232	\$ 1,683,892
Totals- Seven Districts	\$22,072,658	\$19,174,047	\$ 2,898,611	\$10,595,194	\$32,667,852
Percentage of All Districts	45%	62%	16%	61%	

*Spending specifically targeted for district. **Assumes all cash reserves will be spent.

“Already, more than \$32.7 million has been committed to the seven “battleground” districts where the two major parties are engaged in their most intense competition,” said Jeff Brindle, ELEC’s Executive Director.

¹ The next highest district received only \$27,000 in independent spending.

“Nearly half the money raised for all 40 legislative districts has been targeted for these seven districts. About two-thirds of candidate and independent committee spending also has focused on these contests,” he said.

Brindle said special interest groups have assumed a bigger role in state elections since 2009 by spending money on their own instead of just making contributions to candidates and parties. These include unions, businesses, ideological organizations, trade associations and others that are not supposed to coordinate their spending with candidates or parties.

“This election has brought a key change. Under legislation signed by Governor Phil Murphy in April, independent groups involved in the campaign now face a statutory obligation to disclose contributors as well as their expenses,” Brindle said. “ELEC first made a bipartisan recommendation for this requirement in 2010.”

During this year’s general election, at least 22 independent groups already have pumped more than \$17 million into the election.

Table 2
Spending by Independent Committees
on 2023 Legislative General Election

Group	Spent
Middle Ground	\$ 2,649,658
Brighter Future Forward	\$ 1,950,958
Stronger Foundations Inc (Operating Engineers)	\$ 1,939,954
Garden State Forward (NJEA) ²	\$ 1,900,000
Prosperity Rising NJ Inc	\$ 1,638,551
Working for Working Americans (Carpenters) ³	\$ 1,500,000
Growing Economic Opportunities (Laborers) ⁴	\$ 1,159,374
Carpenters Action Fund ⁵	\$ 1,000,000
American Representative Majority	\$ 737,128
Strengthen Our State	\$ 675,254
Women for a Stronger New Jersey ⁶	\$ 597,127
Republican State Leadership Committee	\$ 582,897
New Jersey Coalition of Real Estate	\$ 351,492
Progress for NJ PAC	\$ 250,000
Garden State Success ⁷	\$ 209,742
South Jersey Strong	\$ 173,209
Planned Parenthood NJ Super PAC Inc	\$ 44,284
Jersey Freedom	\$ 35,226
Patriots for Progress	\$ 18,802
NRA Political Victory Fund	\$ 7,497
NJ Right to Life PAC	\$ 7,320
NJ Family Policy Center	\$ 6,089
Grand Total	\$17,434,564

² Contributed \$1 million to Prosperity Rising and \$900,000 to Middle Ground.

³ Contributed to Brighter Future Forward.

⁴ Contributed \$450,000 to Prosperity Rising and \$400,000 to Middle Ground.

⁵ Contributed to Brighter Future Forward.

⁶ Total includes spending only on legislative candidates.

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That sum already is the second most by independent spenders in a New Jersey legislative election except for 2017, when outlays by these so-called “outside” groups topped \$27 million.

Legislative candidates recently filed reports that update fundraising and spending. It shows Democrats, who control both legislative houses, continue to hold a fund-raising advantage of nearly three-to-one.

Table 3
Party Breakdown of Legislative Campaign
Finance Activity Through October 24

Party	Raised	Spent	Cash
Democrats	\$35,638,322	\$22,179,442	\$13,458,880
Republicans	\$12,956,181	\$ 8,498,992	\$ 4,457,190
Independent candidates	\$ 20,167	\$ 13,122	\$ 7,045
Grand Total	\$48,614,670	\$30,691,556	\$17,923,114

Incumbents have raised more than twice as much as challengers, spent nearly two times more and have nearly five times larger cash reserves than challengers.

Table 4
Campaign Finance Activity
Incumbents Versus Challengers

Party	Raised	Spent	Cash
Incumbents	\$33,604,685	\$18,860,110	\$14,744,575
Challengers	\$15,009,985	\$11,831,446	\$ 3,178,539
Grand Total	\$48,614,670	\$30,691,556	\$17,923,114

This analysis is based on candidate 11-day pre-election day reports reflecting activity between October 7 and 24, 2023. They were due October 27, 2023. Independent spending totals were based on 11-day reports as well as “72/24 notices” that detail last-minute contributions and expenditures above \$200.

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