



# NEWS RELEASE

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Independent groups spent an estimated \$1.8 million in the 2011 legislative elections, nearly 11 times the amount in the previous year where all 120 legislative seats were at stake, according to a new analysis by the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

The growing clout of independent groups in New Jersey legislative campaigns is one of the key findings of a new analysis entitled “White Paper No. 23- Legislative General Elections 2011- Rise of the Independents.”

It found that special interest groups operating outside candidates and parties- hence, the term “outside groups”- may have a disproportionate impact by targeting legislative districts where neither party is totally dominant.

While not all independent groups detailed their spending, ELEC was able to analyze about \$1.2 million spent during the campaign. It found that about 91 percent went to so-called “battleground” districts. As a comparison, candidates and parties spent only about 63 percent of their funds in the same districts.

Joe Donohue, ELEC’s Deputy Director and author of the study, said independent spending in campaigns has existed ever since federal and state regulators began enforcing campaign finance disclosure laws in the early 1970s. Independent spending began rising in the mid-1990s after issue-oriented ads became popular in federal campaigns, he added.

“Independent groups became an even bigger factor after the so-called McCain Feingold law in 2002 prohibited national parties from accepting unlimited “soft money” contributions from special interest groups. After the ban, special interests began waging more of their own independent campaigns.”

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“The U.S. Supreme Court’s *Citizens United v. FEC* ruling in 2010 finally blew the lid off independent spending by ending a long-standing ban on independent spending by corporations and unions,” Donohue said. “Now, the clout of independent groups is growing faster than ever.”

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, non-party outside spending in presidential campaign years tripled to nearly \$1.1 billion just between 2008 and 2012.

“Already in the 2013 New Jersey legislative election, one group alone has raised nearly as much as all independent groups spent just two years ago,” Donohue said.

Since some groups engaged in independent spending are not required to disclose their campaign finance activities, ELEC has recommended legislation that would broaden public disclosure.

White Paper 23 also reiterates a previous recommendation that candidates need to do a better job of detailing expenditures, particularly media outlays.

Among other highlights from the research report:

- Disregarding nearly \$4 million in public funds spent in the 2007 election under a now-discontinued pilot program, the 2011 legislative election drew the most private spending ever- \$45.9 million.
- Spending in two perennial battleground districts- the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup>- was high enough to rank among the top five all time most expensive legislative races.
- All 37 Senate incumbents won in 2011- the highest win rate in at least a decade for Senate members.
- Candidates in 2011 saved an unprecedented amount- \$6.4 million- for their 2013 campaigns.

White Paper 23 and other research reports are available by contacting ELEC at 609-292-8700, or on its website at [www.elec.state.nj.us](http://www.elec.state.nj.us).

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