



# NEWS RELEASE

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P.O. Box 185  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0185

(609) 292-8700 or Toll Free Within NJ 1-888-313-ELEC (3532)

CONTACT: JEFF BRINDLE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FOR RELEASE:  
September 12, 2018  
Updates in bold italics- 12/21/18

## TOP 25 SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS SPENT MORE THAN \$74 MILLION IN 2017

The top 25 special interest groups in 2017 spent more than \$74 million trying to influence elections and government policy in New Jersey, according to a new analysis by the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

The analysis seeks to measure the full clout of the pressure groups by totaling their direct contributions and independent spending, which influence elections, and lobbying, which influences policy. A similar analysis was done in 2013. In both years, there were elections for the governor's post and all 120 legislative seats.

Comparing 2017 with 2013, a mix of unions, 527 political committees, business groups and ideological organizations spent almost \$18.6 million (34 percent) more in 2017 than the top 25 in 2013. Fifteen groups listed in 2013 also appear on the 2017 list.

The biggest increase during the period by the pressure groups came in independent spending, which rose \$14.9 million, or 56 percent. Contributions were up \$1.2 million (7 percent), while lobbying grew \$2.4 million (23 percent).

**Table 1**  
**Top 25 Special Interest Groups-**  
**2013 Versus 2017**

Type of Influence	2013	2017	Change\$	Change%
Contributions	\$18,383,341*	\$19,601,080	\$ 1,217,739	7%
Independent Spending	\$26,492,908	\$41,450,715	\$14,957,807	56%
Lobbying	\$10,559,362	\$13,002,329	\$ 2,442,967	23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$55,435,611</b>	<b>\$74,054,124</b>	<b>\$18,618,513</b>	<b>34%</b>

\*Mostly PAC contributions; small amount made by special interest group directly or its employees

“In the past, special interest groups used lobbying and political action committees as their main vehicle for influencing public policy,” said Jeff Brindle, ELEC’s Executive Director.

“During the last decade, independent groups have quickly become their preferred weapon. The top 25 groups alone spent more on independent spending last year (\$41.4 million) than all estimated PAC spending (\$28.9 million) on state and local elections,” he said.

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“This is more reason why the legislature needs to enact ELEC-recommended legislation that would require independent groups to fully disclose their campaign finances while also seeking to strengthen political parties and greatly simplify pay-to-play rules,” Brindle said. “Pay-to-play reform would sharply reduce the amount public contractors could give to PACs.”

**Table 2**  
**Top 25 Special Interest**  
**Groups 2017**

GROUP†	CONTRIBUTIONS	INDEPENDENT SPENDING	LOBBYING	TOTAL	TYPE
New Jersey Education Association	\$ 951,605	\$ 8,455,421	\$ 512,656	\$ 9,919,682	Union
General Majority PAC	None	\$ 6,965,848	None	\$ 6,965,848	527 Political Committee
Committee to Build the Economy	None	\$ 6,572,755	None	\$ 6,572,755	527 Political Committee††
New Jerseyans for a Better Tomorrow	None	\$ 6,408,206	None	\$ 6,408,206	527 Political Committee
Laborers Affiliates	\$ 3,348,300	\$ 2,541,068	\$ 9,034	\$ 5,898,402	Union
Northeast Regional Council of Carpenters NJ PEC and affiliates	\$ 2,239,875	\$ 3,043,832	\$ 90,791	\$ 5,374,498	Union
IBEW Affiliates	\$ 4,230,463	None	\$ 98,400	\$ 4,328,863	Union
Operating Engineers Locals 825 and 68	\$ 1,861,524	\$ 1,651,403	\$ 36,000	\$ 3,548,927	Union
Democratic Governors Association	\$ 747,900	\$ 2,449,330	None	\$ 3,197,230	Ideological
Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ*	\$ 200,650	None	\$ 2,524,921	\$ 2,725,571	Health Insurer
Public Service Enterprise Group*	\$ 355,100	None	\$ 2,350,364	\$ 2,705,464	Energy Utility
Republican Governors Association	\$ 4,300	\$ 2,355,445	None	\$ 2,359,745	Ideological
Plumbers and Pipefitters	\$ 1,934,782	None	\$ 33,000	\$ 1,967,782	Union
Communication Workers of America affiliates	\$ 1,346,236	\$ 275,000	None	\$ 1,621,236	Union
Realtors	\$ 459,800	\$ 699,049	\$ 353,948	\$ 1,512,798	Realtors
NJ Food Council	\$ 110,750	None	\$ 1,151,556	\$ 1,262,306	Business
Occidental Petroleum Corporation*	\$ 12,500	None	\$ 1,198,826	\$ 1,211,326	Business
New Jersey Coalition for Fair Energy*	\$ 650	None	\$ 939,058	\$ 939,708	Business
New Jersey Hospital Association	\$ 69,800	None	\$ 818,332	\$ 888,132	Hospitals
New Jersey Business and Industry Association and New Jersey Organization for a Better State	\$ 463,610	None	\$ 414,910	\$ 878,520	Business
Prudential Financial Inc*	\$ 89,135	None	\$ 778,353	\$ 867,488	Financial Services
NJSPBA	\$ 601,250	\$ 33,358	\$ 154,250	\$ 788,858	Union
NJ Association for Justice PAC	\$ 506,400	None	\$ 234,300	\$ 740,700	Lawyers
Verizon NJ	\$ 62,450	None	\$ 652,124	\$ 714,574	Communications firm
Saint Josephs Healthcare System*	\$ 4,000	None	\$ 651,506	\$ 655,506	Hospitals
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$19,601,080</b>	<b>\$41,450,715</b>	<b>\$13,002,329</b>	<b>\$74,054,124</b>	

\*Includes donations from individual employees or corporation †Full PAC names on last page. †† Now a Super PAC

In 2017, the top 25 advocacy groups alone comprised 68 percent of all political action committee spending, 83 percent of independent spending and 14 percent of lobbying.

**Table 3**  
**Top 25 Special Interests versus Total Spending 2017**

TYPE OF INFLUENCE	TOP 25	ALL GROUPS	% TOP 25
Contributions	\$19,601,080*	\$ 28,914,345	68%
Independent Spending	\$41,450,715	\$ 49,717,419	83%
Lobbying	\$13,002,329	\$ 91,718,809	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$74,054,124</b>	<b>\$170,350,573</b>	<b>43%</b>

\*Mostly PAC contributions; small amount made by special interest group directly or its employees

Among the top 25, unions did the heaviest spending at more than \$33 million, or 45 percent.

**Table 4**  
**Top 25 Special Interest Groups Broken Down by Type**

TYPE	TOTAL	PERCENT
Union	\$33,448,248	45%
527 Political Committee	\$19,946,809	27%
Ideological	\$ 5,556,975	8%
Business	\$ 4,291,210	6%
Health Insurer	\$ 2,725,571	4%
Energy Utility	\$ 2,705,464	4%
Hospitals	\$ 1,543,638	2%
Realtors	\$ 1,512,798	2%
Financial Services	\$ 867,488	1%
Lawyers	\$ 740,700	1%
Communications Firm	\$ 714,574	1%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$74,054,124</b>	<b>100%</b>

Seventeen of the top 25 pressure groups operate traditional continuing political committees registered in New Jersey, also known as PACs. These are subject to contribution limits and file quarterly reports with ELEC. PACs traditionally have been the main method for special interest groups to funnel political contributions to state and local campaigns.

In 2017, 275 PACs filed quarterly reports with ELEC. Spending by those groups totaled \$28,198,057. In addition, some PACs, mostly out-of-state, made contributions without filing reports with ELEC. They spent \$716,288. Total PAC giving to New Jersey elections reached a new high in 2017, topping \$28,914,345.

PAC contributions increased by \$16.8 million or 139 percent over 2016, when there were no statewide non-federal elections. It was the highest PAC spending since 2013, the last year in which the governor's position and all 120 legislative seats were in play.

**Table 5**  
**Contributions by Political Action Committees (PACs)**  
**to NJ State and Local Candidates and Committees\***

YEAR	AMOUNT	CHANGE \$	CHANGE %	STATE ELECTIONS**
2011	\$18,014,998			S,A
2012	\$ 8,929,281	\$ (9,085,717)	-50%	None
2013	\$22,140,110	\$ 13,210,829	148%	G,S,A
2014	\$11,130,655	\$(11,009,455)	-50%	None
2015	\$17,809,502	\$ 6,678,848	60%	A
2016	<b>\$12,104,117</b>	<b>\$ (5,705,385)</b>	-32%	None
2017	\$28,914,345	\$ 16,809,128	139%	G,S,A

\*Excludes federal and out-of-state candidates

\*\*G=Gubernatorial, S=Senate, A=Assembly

“PAC spending typically ramps up during election years, particularly when all state elected positions are in contention as they were in 2017,” said Brindle. “In addition, the state’s pay-to-play law exempts PACs, providing an incentive for public contractors to give to them rather than parties.”

“Unlike independent groups, which can accept unlimited contributions, PACs are subject to state contribution limits. But PACs still play an important role in electoral politics because they can make direct contributions to candidates,” he said.

Total PAC spending in 2017, including contributions to out-of-state and federal candidates, was \$47.6 million. The \$28.9 million spent on New Jersey non-federal elections represents 61 percent of this total.

**Table 6**  
**Top 25 PAC Contributors to NJ State and Local Candidates and Committees**

PAC NAME†	GOVERNOR	LEGISLATIVE	STATE PARTIES	COUNTY PARTIES	LOCAL/OTHER PACS	TOTAL
NJ State Laborers PAC	\$ 8,884	\$ 792,691	\$ 50,000	\$ 863,800	\$1,306,242	\$3,021,617
Northeast Regional Council of Carpenters NJ PEC	\$ 4,300	\$ 518,600	\$ 25,000	\$ 944,700	\$ 747,275	\$2,239,875
International Union of Operating Engineers Local 825	\$ 4,300	\$ 1,100,700	\$ 30,000	\$ 65,000	\$ 225,804	\$1,425,804
CWA NJ PEC	\$ 7,504	\$ 385,370	\$ 5,000	\$ 481,000	\$ 251,600	\$1,130,474
NJ Education Association PAC	\$ 4,300	\$ 449,918	\$ 25,000	\$ 275,800	\$ 188,360	\$ 943,378
IBEW Local #351	\$ 48,600	\$ 145,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 322,900	\$ 379,263	\$ 920,763
Local Union 164 IBEW Cope Fund	\$ 8,600	\$ 199,900	\$ 6,000	\$ 317,900	\$ 303,061	\$ 835,461
Local 102 IBEW PAC	\$ 51,300	\$ 370,700	\$ 28,700	\$ 86,350	\$ 105,775	\$ 642,825
NJ State Association of Pipe Trades PAC Fund	\$ 50,000	\$ 74,500	\$ 25,000	\$ 264,999	\$ 225,000	\$ 639,499
NJSPBA PAC	\$ 48,679	\$ 392,429	\$ 37,500	\$ 82,500	\$ 73,500	\$ 634,608
IBEW LU 456 Cope Fund	\$ 83,600	\$ 215,800	\$ 25,000	\$ 227,000	\$ 41,095	\$ 592,495
BAC Administrative District Council of NJ	\$ 119,500	\$ 175,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 4,250	\$ 235,835	\$ 559,585
AFSCME Public Employees Organized to Promote Legislative Equality	\$ 8,600	\$ 234,350	\$ 25,000	\$ 277,000	\$ 13,700	\$ 558,650
Unite Here Tip State and Local Fund	\$ 279,300	\$ 168,193			\$ 100,000	\$ 547,493
International Longshoremens Assoc AFL-CIO Cmte on PE	\$ 125,000	\$ 101,625	\$ 25,000	\$ 247,000	\$ 48,175	\$ 546,800
NJ Association for Justice PAC	\$ 8,600	\$ 402,800	\$ 30,000		\$ 65,000	\$ 506,400
Realtors PAC		\$ 386,400	\$ 35,000	\$ 7,600	\$ 30,800	\$ 459,800
IBEW PAC-DC	\$ 158,350	\$ 116,150	\$ 25,300	\$ 106,750	\$ 34,010	\$ 440,560
United Food & Commercial Workers	\$ 344,300	\$ 1,000	\$ 11,800			\$ 357,100
United Association			\$ 100,000		\$ 250,000	\$ 350,000
NJ Apartment Association PAC, Inc	\$ 8,600	\$ 327,900	\$ 5,000		\$ 5,000	\$ 346,500
Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 322 PEC	\$ 6,000	\$ 104,500		\$ 44,200	\$ 175,837	\$ 330,537
NJ Organization for A Better State		\$ 321,600			\$ (5,000)	\$ 316,600
Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 9	\$ 4,800	\$ 165,100	\$ 9,000	\$ 25,975	\$ 98,300	\$ 303,175
Sheet Metal Workers LU 19 Pel	\$ 75,000	\$ 30,575	\$ 25,000	\$ 10,400	\$ 149,500	\$ 290,475
<b>Totals- Top 25 PACs</b>	<b>\$1,458,117</b>	<b>\$ 7,180,802</b>	<b>\$ 598,300</b>	<b>\$4,655,124</b>	<b>\$5,048,132</b>	<b>\$18,940,474</b>
<b>Totals- All 275 registered PACs</b>	<b>\$2,182,847</b>	<b>\$12,650,013</b>	<b>\$1,081,610</b>	<b>\$5,159,008</b>	<b>\$7,124,579</b>	<b>\$28,198,057</b>
<b>Top 25 as % of Total PACs</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>67%</b>

† Full PAC names on last page.

The top 25 PACs were a major force in 2017. They alone contributed 67 percent of the total PAC contributions to state and local non-federal elections (\$18.9 million). They also contributed 90 percent of the funds received by county parties, 71 percent that went to local elections and other PACs, 67 percent contributed by PACs to support gubernatorial candidates, 57 percent of the contributions to legislative candidates and 55 percent of the PAC funds received by state parties.

Twenty-one of the top 25 PACs represent unions, including the top ten. Of the nearly \$29 million in PAC spending last year, 76 percent came from unions, according to reports filed with ELEC. That is the highest percentage since at least 2011, when ELEC first started doing a detailed breakdown of PAC contributions to state and local candidates.

**Table 7**  
**Contributions by Union Political Action Committees (PACs)**  
**to New Jersey State and Local Candidates and Committees**

YEAR	AMOUNT*	% OF TOTAL NJ PAC CONTRIBUTIONS
2013	\$14,268,199	64%
2014	\$ 7,149,273	64%
2015	\$11,811,678	66%
2016	\$ 7,981,768	66%
2017	\$21,876,329	76%

\*Not available before 2013

Since the first political action committee (PAC) was formed by unions in 1943, labor organizations nationally and in New Jersey have relied heavily on PACs as their chief source of political spending.

It is not a surprise that unions are active in New Jersey politics since the state has one of the highest concentrations of union membership.

There were 628,734 union members in New Jersey in 2017, according to Unionstats.com, a reference website operated by Professors Barry Hirsch of Georgia State University and David Macpherson of Trinity College.

Their data shows that New Jersey ranked sixth in union membership last year at 16.1 percent union membership. New York was first at 23.8 percent, while only 2.6 percent of South Carolina workers are union members. The national average- 10.8 percent. With 341,540 unionized public workers, New Jersey had the fourth highest concentration at 59.5 percent. Though less than New York's top-ranking 67.4 percent, it is nearly twice the national average of 31.1 percent.

Democrats in January took control of the governor's seat for the first time since 2009 and have held majorities in both legislative houses since 2001. Among recipients of PAC contributions where the party could be determined, Democrats received \$20.3 million, or 70 percent. Union-led PACs comprised the largest amount- \$15.8 million.

Republicans received 13 percent of total PAC contributions and just 7 percent of union PAC contributions.

**Table 8**  
**Political Party Contributions by PAC Type\***

PAC TYPE	TOTAL-DEMOCRATS	PERCENT	TOTAL-REPUBLICANS	PERCENT	LOCAL/OTHER PACS	PERCENT	GRAND TOTAL
Union	\$15,839,593	72%	\$1,622,019	7%	\$4,414,717	20%	\$21,876,329
Professional	\$ 1,977,167	70%	\$ 792,110	28%	\$ 70,703	2%	\$ 2,839,980
Trade Association	\$ 1,098,367	65%	\$ 531,665	31%	\$ 63,525	4%	\$ 1,693,557
Ideological	\$ 509,871	49%	\$ 341,312	33%	\$ 193,884	19%	\$ 1,047,577
Regulated Industries	\$ 474,860	72%	\$ 157,985	24%	\$ 23,350	4%	\$ 656,195
Business	\$ 327,147	65%	\$ 138,615	28%	\$ 35,635	7%	\$ 501,397
Other Ongoing	\$ 111,950	37%	\$ 31,960	11%	\$ 155,400	52%	\$ 299,310
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$20,338,955</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>\$3,615,666</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>\$4,957,213</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>\$28,914,345</b>

\*Total includes \$2,500 contribution to independent candidate

The overwhelming percentage of PAC contributions (78%) went to incumbents in 2017. Of the \$3.1 million received by challengers, nearly \$2.2 million went to either Democratic Governor Phil Murphy or Republican opponent Kimberly Guadagno. Neither were gubernatorial incumbents last year. The analysis excludes donations to party committees and legislative leadership PACs, which support both incumbents and challengers, and excludes local elections if party affiliation was uncertain.

**Table 9**  
**PAC Contributions to Known**  
**Incumbents and Challengers\***

RECIPIENTS	AMOUNT	PERCENT
Incumbents	\$10,819,381	78%
Challengers	\$ 3,093,397	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$13,912,778</b>	<b>100%</b>

Legislative incumbent candidates received the biggest share of PAC contributions- 92 percent.

**Table 10**  
**PAC Contributions to Legislative**  
**Incumbents and Challengers\***

RECIPIENTS	AMOUNT	PERCENT
Incumbents	\$10,291,113	92%
Challengers	\$ 911,549	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$11,202,663</b>	<b>100%</b>

The following PACs gave the most to legislative committees.

**Table 11**  
**Top Ten PAC Contributors to Legislative Committees\***

PAC NAME	AMOUNT
International Union of Operating Engineers Local 825	\$1,100,700
NJ State Laborers PAC	\$ 792,691
Northeast Regional Council of Carpenters NJ PEC	\$ 518,600
NJ Education Association PAC	\$ 449,918
NJ Association for Justice PAC	\$ 402,800
NJSPBA PAC	\$ 392,429
Realtors PAC	\$ 386,400
CWA NJ PEC	\$ 385,370
Local 102 IBEW PAC	\$ 370,700
NJ Apartment Association PAC, Inc	\$ 327,900

\*Includes contributions to legislative leadership committees and individual legislators

County parties, which also are active during a statewide election year, were the second largest recipients of PAC contributions in 2017. The following PACs gave the most to county parties.

**Table 12**  
**Top Ten PAC Contributors to County Parties**

PAC NAME	AMOUNT
Northeast Regional Council of Carpenters NJ PEC	\$944,700
NJ State Laborers PAC	\$863,800
CWA NJ PEC	\$481,000
IBEW Local #351	\$322,900
Local Union 164 IBEW Cope Fund	\$317,900
AFSCME Public Employees Organized to Promote Legislative Equality	\$277,000
NJ Education Association PAC	\$275,800
NJ State Association Of Pipe Trades PAC Fund	\$264,999
International Longshoremens Association AFL-CIO Cmte On PE	\$247,000
IBEW LU 456 Cope Fund	\$227,000

Continuing political committees (CPCs or PACs) generally are required to file detailed disclosure reports with ELEC when, during a calendar year, they expend more than \$6,300. They must file reports with ELEC each quarter that list their contributions and expenditures.

For purposes of this analysis, special interest PACs are defined as those that identified themselves as a business, labor union, professional association, ideological group, civic association, trade association, or other ongoing. The list also includes PACs formed by employees of regulated industries such as banks and insurance companies, which cannot use corporate funds for campaign contributions.

This press release is a compilation of figures reported to the Commission, and is not intended to express any opinion concerning the accuracy or completeness of any filed report. Although the Commission has taken all reasonable precautions to prevent mathematical or typographical errors, they may occur. When mistakes are discovered, ELEC makes corrections.

Copies of PAC, lobbying and independent spending reports are available on ELEC’s website at [www.elec.state.nj.us](http://www.elec.state.nj.us).

Key to PAC Abbreviations or Aliases:

*AFSCME= American Federal of State, County and Municipal Employees;*

*BAC= Bricklayers and Allied Crafts of NJ;*

*CWA= Communications Workers of America;*

*IBEW= International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers;*

*NJSPBA=NJ State Policemen’s Benevolent Association Inc.;*

*United Association=Plumbers.*

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