



NEWS RELEASE

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COUNTY PARTIES HOLDING THEIR OWN SO FAR DESPITE COVID-19 CRISIS

Fund-raising and spending by county political parties so far remains steady despite concern the COVID-19 public health crisis may dampen all political fund-raising, according to reports filed with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

During the three-month period ending March 31, 2020, county parties as a whole raised \$1.2 million, spent \$1.3 million and reported \$2.2 million in cash reserves.

YEAR	RAISED	SPENT*	CASH-ON-HAND	STATE/FEDERAL ELECTION YEAR?
2010	\$1,023,791	\$1,199,044	\$2,078,378	Federal
2011	\$1,088,038	\$1,108,475	\$1,141,821	State
2012	\$ 891,658	\$ 978,826	\$1,023,935	Federal
2013	\$ 957,098	\$ 980,628	\$1,457,253	State
2014	\$1,048,455	\$1,099,335	\$1,312,788	Federal
2015	\$1,080,157	\$1,118,813	\$1,437,520	State
2016	\$1,499,334	\$ 970,613	\$2,027,203	Federal
2017	\$1,195,248	\$1,250,534	\$2,086,933	State
2018	\$1,371,138	\$1,378,945	\$2,657,429	Federal
2019	\$1,648,413	\$1,654,402	\$3,341,448	State
2020	\$1,234,693	\$1,290,897	\$2,155,834	Federal

*Spending can exceed fund-raising due to use of reserves or borrowing.

Not adjusting for inflation, first quarter fund-raising totals for 2020 are higher than in seven of the last ten election years. County party officials reported higher totals only in 2016, 2018 and 2019.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has rocked all of our lives. It certainly poses new challenges to candidates, parties and PACs trying to raise money for their continued operations,” said Jeff Brindle, ELEC’s Executive Director.

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“While the first quarter reports of county parties are encouraging, they may not reflect the full impact of state restrictions, which included bans on public gatherings like fund-raisers. Those limits didn’t take effect until a couple of weeks before the end of the reporting period,” said Brindle. “ELEC will remain vigilant for signs that the crisis is becoming a serious hindrance to election fund-raising.”

Compared to four years ago, Democratic party committees improved in all campaign finance categories. Republicans spent more this year but reported less fund-raising and cash reserves than in 2016.

Table 2				
Fundraising By “Big Six” Committees				
January 1 Through March 31				
2020	RAISED	SPENT**	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH*
Democratic County Party Committees	\$ 855,501	\$ 933,271	\$1,750,284	\$1,748,872
Republican County Party Committees	\$ 379,192	\$ 357,626	\$ 405,550	\$ 830,052
Total- Both Parties	\$1,234,693	\$1,290,897	\$2,155,834	\$2,578,924
2016	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH
Democratic County Party Committees	\$ 799,673	\$ 679,954	\$1,245,021	\$ 968,679
Republican County Party Committees	\$ 699,661	\$ 290,658	\$ 782,181	\$1,699,526
Total- Both Parties	\$1,499,334	\$ 970,612	\$2,027,202	\$2,668,205
Difference 2020 versus 2016	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH
Democratic County Party Committees	7%	37%	41%	81%
Republican County Party Committees	-46%	23%	-48%	-51%
Total- Both Parties	-18%	33%	6%	-3%

*Net worth is cash-on-hand adjusted for debts owed to or by the committee.

**Spending can exceed fundraising due to use of reserves or borrowing.

While county party fund-raising does not appear to be falling off a cliff, it has been relatively stagnant during the past decade compared to the previous decade.

For instance, county parties raised \$2.9 million in the first quarter of 2003. That was their best first quarter receipts in two decades. The current figure of \$1.2 million is 58 percent less.

“Even before the current virus crisis, party officials in New Jersey were facing long-term difficulties. Tight state caps on donations by public contractors cut into their coffers beginning around 2005,” Brindle said.

“Another threat is competition from independent special interest groups, which used to send more checks to parties. Now they spend millions annually on New Jersey by bypassing parties and spending their money directly on campaigns,” according to Brindle.

To try to counter these trends, ELEC has recommended several legislative fixes, including lifting contribution limits for party committees, ending a \$300 limit on most public contractor contributions to parties, and imposing such that strict limit instead on contributions to continuing political action committees (PACs).

“Unless we move to reinvigorate parties and require more disclosure by independent spenders, election financing will continue to become less transparent and less accountable,” Brindle said.

Six Democratic county party committees – Bergen, Camden, Gloucester, Mercer, Passaic, and Union- reported a cash reserve above \$100,000 for the quarter.

Table 3 Campaign Finance Activity of Democratic County Party Committees January 1 Through March 31, 2020				
COUNTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH*
Atlantic	\$ 26,117	\$ 18,016	\$ 16,804	\$ 16,804
Bergen	\$225,530	\$111,928	\$ 146,036	\$ 146,036
Burlington	\$ 15,250	\$ 2,850	\$ 18,052	\$ 473
Camden	\$118,092	\$339,028	\$ 120,861	\$ 120,861
Cape May	\$ 4,536	\$ 5,284	\$ 3,466	\$ 3,466
Cumberland	\$ 17,761	\$ 10,859	\$ 11,304	\$ 11,304
Essex	\$ 86,834	\$ 84,132	\$ 89,042	\$ 89,042
Gloucester	\$ 11,000	\$ 41,650	\$ 518,431	\$ 518,431
Hudson	NA	NA	NA	NA
Hunterdon	\$ 6,975	\$ 6,600	\$ 19,554	\$ 19,554
Mercer	\$ 41,175	\$ 15,176	\$ 223,366	\$ 223,366
Middlesex	\$ 79,059	\$111,337	\$ 14,130	\$ 14,130
Monmouth	\$ 52,546	\$ 41,317	\$ 11,423	\$ 11,423
Morris	NA	NA	NA	NA
Ocean	\$ 5,739	\$ 3,981	\$ 25,086	\$ 41,252
Passaic	\$ 87,545	\$ 61,155	\$ 312,987	\$ 312,987
Salem	NA	NA	NA	NA
Somerset	\$ 21,094	\$ 27,883	\$ 52,745	\$ 52,745
Sussex	\$562	\$ 1,902	\$ 8,106	\$ 8,106
Union	\$ 55,686	\$ 50,172	\$ 158,893	\$ 158,893
Warren	NA	NA	NA	NA
Democrats-Total	\$855,501	\$933,271	\$1,750,284	\$1,748,872

*Net worth is cash-on-hand adjusted for debts owed to or by the committee.

NA= Not Available

No Republican county party committees that have filed a report showed a cash reserve larger than \$100,000. Burlington reported a net worth of more than \$100,000 since it is owed money by others.

Table 4 Campaign Finance Activity Of Republican County Party Committees January 1 Through March 31, 2020				
COUNTY	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH*
Atlantic	\$ 1,417	\$ 16,281	\$ 6,468	\$ 6,468
Bergen	\$ 24,635	\$ 35,272	\$ 8,088	\$ 8,088
Burlington	\$ 65,246	\$ 58,574	\$ 27,017	\$459,119
Camden	\$ 8,405	\$ 8,595	\$ 7,514	\$ 7,514
Cape May	NA	NA	NA	NA
Cumberland	\$ 18,744	\$ 11,075	\$ 14,295	\$ 14,295
Essex	\$ 18,500	\$ 1,175	\$ 39,279	\$ 39,279
Gloucester	\$ 58,055	\$ 46,847	\$ 32,926	\$ 32,926
Hudson	NA	NA	NA	NA
Hunterdon	\$ 27,960	\$ 24,952	\$ 6,657	\$ 6,657
Mercer	\$ 1,175	\$ 2,013	\$ 5,047	\$ 5,047
Middlesex	\$ 2,670	\$ 1,688	\$ 17,366	\$ 17,366
Monmouth	\$ 17,409	\$ 34,330	\$ 23,057	\$ 23,057
Morris	\$ 20,959	\$ 18,338	\$ 12,831	\$ 5,231
Ocean	\$ 41,798	\$ 33,004	\$ 25,461	\$ 25,461
Passaic	NA	NA	NA	NA
Salem	NA	NA	NA	NA
Somerset	\$ 17,720	\$ 30,290	\$ 93,351	\$ 93,351
Sussex	\$ 9,490	\$ 7,862	\$ 18,293	\$ 18,293
Union	\$ 32,610	\$ 18,977	\$ 57,839	\$ 57,839
Warren	\$ 12,400	\$ 8,353	\$ 10,061	\$ 10,061
Republicans-Total	\$397,192	\$357,626	\$405,550	\$830,052

*Net worth is cash-on-hand adjusted for debts owed to or by the committee.
 NA=Not available.

The numbers in this analysis are based on reports filed by noon May 12, 2020. They have yet to be verified by ELEC staff, and should be considered preliminary.

Individual reports can be reviewed on ELEC’s website (www.elec.state.nj.us).

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