



NEWS RELEASE

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BIG SIX FUND-RAISING DROPS AMID VIRUS SCARE

Second quarter fund-raising by the two state parties and four legislative leadership PACs was down 36 percent during a period when the COVID-19 pandemic hit hardest in New Jersey, according to reports filed with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

By contrast, fundraising during the second quarter four years ago was up 20 percent. In both 2016 and this year, party officials were trying to rebuild their coffers after a state election year when the Assembly was the lone house in contention. The virus outbreak appears to be the main difference.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF FIRST AND SECOND QUARTER
FUNDRAISING FOR "BIG SIX"
2020 VERSUS 2016

PARTY	FIRST QUARTER 2020	SECOND QUARTER 2020	DIFFERENCE-\$	DIFFERENCE-%
Republicans	\$291,428	\$139,038	\$(152,390)	-52%
Democrats	\$527,956	\$386,070	\$(141,886)	-27%
BOTH PARTIES	\$819,384	\$525,108	\$(294,276)	-36%
PARTY	FIRST QUARTER 2016	SECOND QUARTER 2016	DIFFERENCE-\$	DIFFERENCE-%
Republicans	\$218,267	\$298,170	\$ 79,903	37%
Democrats	\$454,781	\$508,459	\$ 53,678	12%
BOTH PARTIES	\$673,048	\$806,629	\$133,581	20%

While there still are two more quarters to come, "Big Six" fundraising so far this year totals \$1.3 million. Looking back to 2007, that is the least the Big Six has raised for the first half of the year except for 2014, when they raised just under \$1.3 million. Adjusted for inflation, even that total was worth more (nearly \$1.4 million) than this year's take so far.

Jeff Brindle, ELEC's Executive Director, said while Big Six fundraising has not totally collapsed, its fundraising certainly seems squeezed by the surprise pandemic that struck right before the quarter that began April 1. Big Six committees must file reports with ELEC every three months updating their financial activity.

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“We’ve seen stories that some candidates nationally and in areas like New York City are having fundraising difficulties due to the virus crisis,” he said. “Based solely on fundraising numbers for the recent quarter, it seems to be presenting a challenge here as well.”

TABLE 2
CAMPAIGN FINANCE ACTIVITY BY “BIG SIX”
AT END OF SECOND QUARTER BY YEAR

BOTH PARTIES	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH*	STATE ELECTIONS**
2007	\$5,776,859	\$2,328,316	\$8,015,277	\$7,911,808	S/A
2008	\$3,438,622	\$2,238,356	\$1,577,591	\$ 918,612	
2009	\$3,653,103	\$1,811,223	\$3,682,236	\$3,548,060	G/A
2010	\$2,175,742	\$1,637,673	\$1,835,526	\$1,666,742	
2011	\$3,684,467	\$1,915,020	\$3,329,478	\$3,051,770	S/A
2012	\$2,988,610	\$2,590,387	\$1,426,366	\$1,193,221	
2013	\$3,382,737	\$1,874,081	\$3,189,889	\$3,093,711	G/S/A
2014	\$1,276,109 ¹	\$1,319,714	\$ 800,994	\$ 287,246	
2015	\$2,476,599	\$1,983,389	\$2,160,318	\$1,624,601	A
2016	\$1,661,559	\$1,513,987	\$1,127,086	\$ 979,443	
2017	\$2,751,561	\$2,205,599	\$2,263,401	\$2,178,899	G/S/A
2018	\$2,991,664	\$2,416,353	\$1,321,894	\$1,237,392	
2019	\$2,283,313	\$1,729,263	\$2,075,620	\$1,988,194	A²
2020	\$1,342,492	\$1,090,629	\$ 911,929	\$ 807,204	

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

**G=Gubernatorial; S=Senate; A=Assembly

An analysis by the Center for Responsive Politics recently said that “political fundraising took an intense dip as the coronavirus pandemic ravaged the nation in mid-March and early April.”³

According to fundraising event information tracked by GovNetNJ.com, none of the Big Six committees held fundraisers during the second quarter 2020. Three of the six committees held fundraisers during the second quarter 2019.

In March of this year, 13 legislators and one county party cancelled or postponed fundraising events. The only reported fundraisers during the second quarter were two held by a single legislator.

With virus infection numbers much lower now than in March and April, one Big Six committee did hold a fundraiser July 14, which is in the third quarter, according to GovNetNJ.com.

“There is still time for party officials to play catch-up. The two state parties have raised the most cash so far this year and they are more likely to get involved in this year’s federal election. The four legislative leadership PACs tend to be most active in state election years, which isn’t until next year,” Brindle said.

¹ \$1,389,637 adjusted for inflation

² There was also a special legislative election for the first legislative district Senate seat.

³ Karl Evers-Hillstrom, “Political Donations Dropped Off as Coronavirus Pandemic Peaked,” June 9, 2020, <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2020/06/political-donations-dropped-off-as-coronavirus-pandemic-peaked/>

“For the foreseeable future, however, more fundraising may occur using telephone, mail and party committee website solicitations than in-person events,” he said.

Through June 30, Democrats have raised and spent twice as much as Republicans and have more than twice the cash-on-hand. Democrats hold majorities in both houses and control 77 of the 120 legislative seats.

**TABLE 3
FUNDRAISING BY “BIG SIX” COMMITTEES
JANUARY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2020**

REPUBLICANS	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND	NET WORTH*
New Jersey Republican State Committee	\$ 244,187	\$ 202,013	\$ 177,694	\$ 177,694
Senate Republican Majority	\$ 86,600	\$ 63,160	\$ 52,264	\$ 40,624
Assembly Republican Victory	\$ 97,679	\$ 78,618	\$ 59,844	\$ 59,844
SubTotal-Republicans	\$ 428,466	\$ 343,791	\$ 289,802	\$ 278,162
DEMOCRATS				
New Jersey Democratic State Committee	\$ 572,825	\$ 426,479	\$ 180,364	\$ 150,946
Senate Democratic Majority	\$ 137,001	\$ 99,295	\$ 427,281	\$ 394,053
Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee	\$ 204,200	\$ 221,064	\$ 14,482	\$ (15,957)
SubTotal-Democrats	\$ 914,026	\$ 746,838	\$ 622,127	\$ 529,042
Total-Both Parties	\$1,342,492	\$1,090,629	\$ 911,929	\$ 807,204

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

Brindle said the new fundraising difficulties caused by the COVID19 crisis makes it even more imperative that the Legislature adopt ELEC recommendations that would make it easier for party committees to raise funds.

These recommendations include letting party committees accept larger contributions from regular donors as well as public contractors, while sharply limiting the amount public contractors can contribute to political action committees. Requiring independent special interest groups to meet the same disclosure rules as parties and candidates might help reduce their fundraising advantage over parties and candidates.

“Today’s virus crisis is one more threat to the political party system in New Jersey. Steps must be taken to help parties survive this and other challenges because ultimately parties are more transparent and accountable than a system dominated by ‘dark money’ groups,” Brindle said.

State Parties and Legislative Leadership Committees are required to report their financial activity to the Commission on a quarterly basis. The reports are available on ELEC’s website at www.elec.state.nj.us. ELEC also can be accessed on Facebook (www.facebook.com/NJElectionLaw) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/elecnj).

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