



NEWS RELEASE

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Eighth and Second Legislative Districts Clashes Rank Among Top Five All-Time Costliest Races

Election showdowns in just two legislative districts cost a combined \$16.3 million, nearly one of three dollars spent on this year's general election, according to the latest reports filed with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission.

“Spending in the Eighth Legislative District topped \$8.5 million, third all time when adjusting for inflation,” said Jeff Brindle, ELEC’s Executive Director. “Outlays in the Second Legislative District reached \$7.7 million, making it the fifth most expensive ever. It also is the first time two legislative races have topped \$6 million during one election.”

Spending in both districts probably was even higher because not all independent groups disclosed where they spent their money. Another first occurred as the Eighth Legislative District featured the state’s most expensive race though it has been in the top five twice since 2001.

**Table 1
Top Ten Costliest Legislative Races in New Jersey
History Ranked by Inflation-Adjusted Totals**

DISTRICT	COUNTIES	YEAR	TOTAL SPENDING AT THE TIME	TOTAL SPENDING-INFLATION ADJUSTED
3	Gloucester/Salem/Cumberland	2017	\$24,100,941*	\$26,590,942
4	Camden/Gloucester	2003	\$ 6,142,441	\$ 9,157,245
8	Atlantic/Burlington/Camden	2021	\$ 8,543,170	\$ 8,543,170
12	Monmouth	2007	\$ 5,963,939	\$ 7,890,192
2	Atlantic	2021	\$ 7,736,931	\$ 7,736,931
2	Atlantic	2011	\$ 5,806,467	\$ 7,080,906
38	Bergen/ Passaic	2013	\$ 5,910,318	\$ 6,959,479
3	Gloucester/Salem/Cumberland	2003	\$ 4,548,302	\$ 6,780,678
1	Cape May/Cumberland	2007	\$ 4,975,772	\$ 6,582,863
38	Bergen/ Passaic	2011	\$ 5,183,499	\$ 6,321,205

*Believed to be the most expensive state legislative election in US history.

The Second Legislative District has hosted the top race three times since 2001 and ranked in the top five six times.

“One of five candidate dollars, two-thirds of funds spent by independent groups and a third of overall spending were consumed by the two districts alone,” Brindle said. “Among the state’s 40 legislative districts, the top ten most expensive showdowns drew 68 percent of total candidate spending, 71 percent of independent spending and 69 percent of overall spending.”

Table 2
Top Ten Legislative Districts by Spending

District	Candidates	Indies	Totals
8	\$ 4,047,511	\$ 4,495,659	\$ 8,543,170
2	\$ 3,377,671	\$ 4,359,261	\$ 7,736,931
11	\$ 3,887,841	\$ 277,536	\$ 4,165,376
16	\$ 2,767,008	\$ 192,749	\$ 2,959,757
3	\$ 2,916,861		\$ 2,916,861
36	\$ 2,323,349		\$ 2,323,349
21	\$ 1,790,266	\$ 224,027	\$ 2,014,293
25	\$ 1,416,844		\$ 1,416,844
39	\$ 984,817		\$ 984,817
13	\$ 885,943		\$ 885,943
Top 10	\$24,398,110	\$ 9,549,231	\$33,947,341
Top 10 %	68%	71%	69%
Top 2	\$ 7,425,181	\$ 8,854,919	\$16,280,101
Top 2 %	21%	65%	33%
All 40 Districts	\$35,632,252	\$13,542,641	\$49,174,893

Overall, the 2021 legislative general election cost \$49.2 million, including \$35.6 million spent by candidates and \$13.5 million shelled out by independent special interest groups.

While independent spending reached its third highest level in a legislative general election, overall spending ranked seventh dating back to 2001 when factoring in inflation.

Table 3
Top Ten Most Expensive Legislative General Elections Ranked by Inflation Adjusted Totals

RANK	YEAR	CANDIDATES	INDEPENDENT GROUPS	TOTAL SPENDING AT THE TIME	TOTAL SPENDING-INFLATION ADJUSTED
1	2017	\$44,164,473	\$26,562,428	\$70,726,901	\$78,934,996
2	2013	\$43,446,977	\$15,375,071	\$58,822,048	\$69,076,144
3	2003	\$44,990,255	\$ 4,857	\$44,995,112	\$66,759,786
4	2007	\$47,231,847	\$ 165,000	\$47,396,847	\$62,406,466
5	2011	\$44,024,272	\$ 1,835,500	\$45,859,772	\$55,658,891
6	2001	\$32,550,394	\$ 3,166,463	\$35,716,857	\$55,089,317
7	2021	\$35,632,252	\$13,542,641	\$49,174,893	\$49,174,893
8	2015	\$22,632,814	\$10,908,983	\$33,541,797	\$38,634,407
9	2005	\$23,713,193	\$ 3,476	\$23,716,669	\$33,152,697
10	2019	\$21,626,895	\$ 9,283,402	\$30,910,297	\$33,075,712

American Democratic Majority, a federal 527 political organization run by South Jersey Democrats, was the biggest spender in the election, topping \$5.7 million for both the primary and general election. Most of its spending (\$4 million) went to the Eighth Legislative District.

Garden State Forward, a federal 527 political organization run by the New Jersey Education Association, the state’s largest union, spent \$3.8 million. Most of its funds (\$3.5 million) were funneled into the Second Legislative District.

Table 4
Cumulative Spending to Date by Independent Committees on 2021 Legislative Elections

GROUP	PRIMARY	GENERAL	BOTH ELECTIONS
American Democratic Majority	\$ 890,253	\$ 4,830,467	\$ 5,720,720
Garden State Forward (NJEA)	\$ 198,493	\$ 3,568,154	\$ 3,766,647
Working for Working Americans (Carpenters)*		\$ 1,500,000	\$ 1,500,000
Carpenters Action Fund*	\$ 25,000	\$ 1,225,000	\$ 1,250,000
New Jersey Coalition of Real Estate	\$ 533,887	\$ 291,249	\$ 825,136
Women for a Stronger New Jersey	\$ 63,512	\$ 597,054	\$ 660,566
Republican State Leadership Committee		\$ 488,965	\$ 488,965
Stronger Foundations Inc (Operating Engineers)	\$ 276,629	\$ 183,000	\$ 459,629
Turnout Project		\$ 298,705	\$ 298,705
NJ League of Conservation Voters Victory Fund		\$ 296,882	\$ 296,882
Growing Economic Opportunities (Laborers)	\$ 133,161		\$ 133,161
UA Political Action Fund (Plumbers)*		\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
Building the Majority PAC		\$ 85,287	\$ 85,287
Better Days PAC	\$ 30,545	\$ 50,084	\$ 80,629
Building Stronger Communities	\$ 77,535		\$ 77,535
America’s Future First	\$ 23,560		\$ 23,560
NJ Bankers Association		\$ 19,984	\$ 19,984
New Jersey Right to Life		\$ 7,810	\$ 7,810
Totals	\$2,252,576	\$13,542,641	\$15,795,216

*Contributions to American Democratic Majority.

When spending by legislative candidates and independent groups is added together, Democrats, who control both legislative houses, outspent Republicans by nearly a four-to-one overall margin.

Table 5
Candidate and Independent Group Spending by Party

PARTY	CANDIDATES	INDEPENDENT GROUPS	TOTAL
Democrats	\$26,504,169	\$12,145,700	\$38,649,869
Republicans	\$ 9,128,083	\$ 1,396,941	\$10,525,023
Totals	\$35,632,252	\$13,542,641	\$49,174,893

The enormous funding advantage wasn't enough to stop Republicans from picking up seven legislative seats between the two houses, their biggest one-year gain since 1991. All the pickups were made in four of the five top battleground districts- 8, 2, 11 and 3- where spending was heaviest. The party seized 11 of the 12 seats in the four districts.

The GOP added one state senate seat, which will reduce the Democratic majority to 24-to-16 in mid-January. In the lower house, Republicans added six state Assembly seats, which will whittle down the Democratic edge to 46-to-34.

One consolation is that Democratic legislators ended with \$10.4 million in cash reserves, much of which can be rolled into the next election. Republican legislators finished the election with \$1.9 million in the bank.

While more money didn't necessarily prevail in most battleground districts, winners still held a big money advantage over losers in the election.

Table 6
Campaign Finance Activity
Winners Versus Losers

	RAISED	SPENT	CASH-ON-HAND
Winners	\$33,474,680	\$22,413,969	\$11,060,711
Losers	\$14,421,410	\$13,218,283	\$ 1,203,127
Totals	\$47,896,089	\$35,632,252	\$12,263,838

Candidate totals in this analysis are based on 20-day post-election day reports that reflect campaign finance activity through November 19, 2021. Independent spending totals are based on reports filed as recently as November 22.

Reports filed by legislative candidates and independent spenders are available online on ELEC's website at www.elec.nj.gov. A downloadable summary of data from candidate reports is available in both spreadsheet and PDF formats at www.elec.nj.gov/publicinformation/statistics.htm.

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