

## Independent Expenditures and Dark Money in Missouri

In 2018, Eric Greitens [resigned](#) his post as governor of Missouri amid murky campaign finance dealings involving a politically active nonprofit, A New Missouri, that is not required by law to publicly disclose its donors – i.e., a dark money group. A former Greitens campaign aide [estimates](#) that the campaign may have benefited from up to \$6 million in dark money.

MapLight examined independent expenditures in the 2017-2018 election cycle to better understand the landscape of outside spending and dark money in Missouri. **We found that 10% of outside spending affecting candidates came from groups that are not required to disclose their donors to the Missouri Ethics Commission (MEC) – effectively dark money. For ballot measures, 35% of outside spending came from non-disclosing groups.**

### State Candidate Races

Nearly \$10 million of independent expenditures went into state candidate races. Of that amount, \$5.7 million went to Senate races (compared to \$8.2 million raised by candidates themselves). \$4 million flowed into House of Representatives races (compared to \$9.1 million in candidate contributions). About \$300,000 went into the auditor race, which saw \$2.2 million in candidate contributions.

**Outside spending groups embraced negative campaigning.** In state Senate races, 54% of independent expenditures (\$3.1 million) went towards opposing candidates, while 46% (\$2.6 million) was spent supporting candidates. Similarly, in state House races, 58% of outside spending (\$2.3 million) went towards opposing candidates, while 42% (\$1.7 million) was spent in support. In the auditor race, only \$50,000 of the \$300,000 in outside spending went to supporting candidates; the rest was opposition.

Table 1: State Senate races with more than \$100,000 of independent expenditures

Senate District	Support	Opposition	Total
34	\$782,072	\$1,101,748	\$1,883,820
17	\$409,540	\$594,454	\$1,003,994
8	\$517,724	\$323,460	\$841,184
18	\$283,371	\$402,881	\$686,252
22	\$265,914	\$189,548	\$455,462
30	\$162,034	\$191,710	\$353,743
32	\$113,403	\$230,500	\$343,903

**\$1.9 million of independent expenditures went into the contest for Senate District 34. Three quarters of this came from the Missouri Senate Conservatives Fund, which [raised much of its funds](#) from D.C.-based dark money nonprofit U.S. Term Limits, Inc.** The winner, Republican Tony Luetkemeyer, raised \$598,000 in direct contributions and benefited from \$565,000 in independent expenditure support (while facing \$222,000 in opposition). His opponent in the primary, Harry Roberts, raised \$344,000 and contended with \$369,000 of outside spending opposition. The Democratic candidate, Martin Rucker, raised \$147,000 and faced \$511,000 of

outside opposition. Fifty-eight percent of outside spending in this race focused on negative campaigning.

**The Senate District 17 special election also saw over \$1 million in outside spending**, 55% of it opposing Democratic candidate Lauren Arthur, who won the seat. Over \$840,000 of outside spending went into Senate District 8, 8% of which came from groups that do not disclose their donors, while in Senate District 18, there was \$686,000 in independent expenditures. Fifty-nine percent of outside spending in District 18 was oppositional. Districts 22, 30, and 32 also hit the six-figure mark, with nearly a quarter of outside spending in District 32 coming from non-disclosing groups. Two thirds (\$231,000) of the outside spending in District 32 was negative, all of it concentrated against Republican candidate William White, who won the seat.

**Table 2: State House races with more than \$100,000 of independent expenditures**

House District	Support	Opposition	Total
135	\$146,927	\$300,015	\$446,943
44	\$41,711	\$284,507	\$326,218
14	\$2,009	\$319,186	\$321,195
97	\$154,531	\$127,548	\$282,079
47	\$38,872	\$223,088	\$261,961
50	\$101,744	\$120,446	\$222,189
70	\$70,699	\$148,459	\$219,159
65	\$80,171	\$94,053	\$174,224
10	\$33,927	\$119,285	\$153,212

**Nine House races had more than \$100,000 in independent expenditures.** A tenth race, House District 99, came close, with \$99,000 of outside spending. In eight out of these 10 races, the majority of outside spending was negative. In one extreme example, 99% of independent expenditures in District 14 went towards opposing candidates; 91% (\$293,000) opposed Democratic candidate Matt Sain, who unseated Republican incumbent Kevin Corlew.

## Statewide Ballot Measures

**Table 3: Independent expenditures and contributions to statewide ballot measures**

Measure	Independent Expenditures		Direct Contributions	
	Support	Opposition	Support	Opposition
Proposition A	\$3,621,644	\$444,222	\$5,172,472	\$18,894,166
Proposition B	\$1,021,834	\$7	\$6,991,777	\$0
Proposition C	\$5,902	\$1,117	\$1,485,897	\$6,000
Proposition D	\$15,355	\$0	\$5,345,408	\$0
Amendment 1	\$16,568	\$2,889	\$5,634,916	\$343,201
Amendment 2	\$490,088	\$0	\$1,777,322	\$9,700
Amendment 3	\$1,111	\$2,891	\$2,180,366	\$1,715,318
Amendment 4	\$30	\$0	\$5,082	\$0

**More than \$5.6 million of outside spending went into statewide ballot measure contests.**

The priciest contest was Proposition A, which would have upheld a right-to-work law had it passed. **Outside groups spent \$3.6 million to support Prop A, with \$3.4 million (93%) coming from the National Right to Work Committee and other dark money groups, including A New Missouri – the nonprofit associated with Greitens – and American Democracy Alliance.** \$444,000 was spent against it by outside groups, of which \$342,000 (77%) came from non-disclosing groups. Ballot measure committees supporting Prop A received \$5.2 million in contributions, while opposing committees raised \$19 million. Prop A was opposed by labor unions.

**Over \$1 million in independent expenditures supported Proposition B, of which \$774,000 (76%) came from non-disclosing groups.** Prop B, which will increase the state’s minimum wage, also received \$7 million in direct committee contributions. The top contributor to the ballot measure committee supporting Prop B was Sixteen Thirty Fund, a progressive dark money nonprofit. Prop B did not face funded opposition.

**Nearly half a million dollars (\$490,000) in outside spending supported Amendment 2,** which also saw \$1.8 million in ballot measure committee support. This was one of three measures on the ballot concerning medical marijuana and the only one to pass. The ballot measure committee supporting Amendment 2, New Approach Missouri, also opposed Amendment 3. Top contributors to New Approach Missouri included 501(c)(4) nonprofit Drug Policy Action, Seven Points LLC, and Missouri Essentials LLC.

Of the other two medical marijuana measures, Amendment 3 was backed by a single donor (Brad Bradshaw, to the tune of \$2.1 million in committee contributions), and Proposition C saw nearly \$1.5 million in committee contributions. Neither received major independent expenditure support or opposition.

The remaining measures on the ballot also had comparatively little outside spending. Amendment 1 – a successful measure focused on lobbying, campaign finance, and redistricting reform – received under \$17,000 of independent expenditure support and \$3,000 of opposition, compared to the \$5.6 million in direct contributions supporting it and \$343,000 opposing it. Proposition D, which would have increased the gas tax to fund the state highway patrol and created a dedicated fund for freight traffic reduction had it passed, was supported by \$5.3 million in direct contributions, but only \$15,000 of independent expenditures. Amendment 4 (related to state gambling laws) saw \$30 in outside spending and \$5,000 in direct contributions.

## **Lack of Transparency**

Most outside spending came from groups that are required to register as committees and report their donors to the MEC. However, significant amounts came from non-committee filers, who do not disclose their donors to the MEC, effectively making their spending dark money.

**Collecting data on outside spending in Missouri for a single election cycle took our team of campaign finance data experts 65 hours,** much of it spent combing through 160 PDF non-committee filings. The PDFs included handwritten forms and reports that provided incomplete information. This lack of machine-readable data is a significant barrier to understanding the scope of dark money in Missouri’s elections. Where bulk data was available, key information was often missing and required additional research and interpretation.

Moreover, even committees that disclose their contributors to the MEC may obscure their funding sources. They can receive contributions from 501(c)(4)s and LLCs, as with the Missouri

Senate Conservatives Fund and A New Approach Missouri. While the names of those dark money groups would be disclosed, their funding sources would not be.

## **Methodology**

Our analysis of independent expenditures includes data for the 2017-2018 election cycle for committee and non-committee expenditures on candidates and ballot measures. We drew together three different datasets provided by the Missouri Ethics Commission, each representing different forms of independent expenditures. Candidate names, offices, and other data were standardized as part of the analysis.

We used campaign finance data from the [National Institute on Money in Politics](#) for state candidate contributions and [Ballotpedia](#) for ballot measure contributions.