



NEWS RELEASE

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ELEC Timeline Provides Key Background on State's Campaign Finance Enforcement Body

On June 28, 1972, the Republican Secretary of State became the 131st public official in New Jersey indicted for corruption since 1969.

The very next day, a former Democratic Secretary of State was fined and placed on probation for three years for accepting a bribe.

Twelve days earlier, a historic break-in at the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate office complex in Washington DC rocked the nation. It sparked a wave of national and state reform legislation targeting political corruption, partly through the regulation of campaign fund-raising.

One of those new laws created the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC) on April 24, 1973. Its main mission was- and remains- to discourage political wrong-doing by keeping a spotlight on election financing through robust disclosure and penalties on candidates and committees that break its laws.

A historical overview of ELEC, now in its sixth decade, is available at <https://www.elec.nj.gov/aboutelec/timeline.htm>. The timeline recently has been updated and can be downloaded from ELEC's website for those who might find it a useful reference.

“For a small state agency with just 65 employees, ELEC has had a disproportionate influence during its 51-year history,” said Joe Donohue, ELEC's Deputy Director. “We have assembled this chronology to remind citizens why ELEC exists and the important role it has played during its existence.”

The timeline also lists legislation and executive orders that amended the original statute plus many statistical milestones and events of special note.

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Here is a sampling:

1977- A developer contributed the equivalent of \$1.7 million to the gubernatorial primary campaign of former Representative Robert A. Roe. It remains the biggest contribution to a candidate not self-financing.

1977- ELEC chairman Frank P. Reiche resigns to become a member of the Federal Election Commission. He served as chairman in 1982 and was the only one among 35 ELEC commissioner elevated to the agency's national counterpart.

1997- ELEC's first website went online.

2005- During an election in which the two major party nominees both self-financed their campaigns, spending on the governor's race soared to \$141 million in 2024 dollars and remains the record for a New Jersey election.

2016- A proposed ballot question that would have let casinos operate outside of Atlantic City was shot down by voters. It led to record ballot-question spending of nearly \$25 million.

2017- A single New Jersey legislative election cost an estimated \$24.1 million and, at least at the time, was believed to be the most expensive legislation in American history.

2020- Lobbying expenditures reached a record \$105 million as lawmakers enacted scores of bills to address the COVID-19 crisis, marijuana advocates pushed hard for legalization and a major health insurer secured legislation letting it reorganize.

2023- ELEC releases the most comprehensive history of recall elections ever, finding that almost 650 elected officials have been targeted for recall since the first state law was enacted in 1911 but only 96 have been directly removed by voters.

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