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Total fundraising and spending in legislative races drops in 1996

BOSTON -- Fundraising and spending by state legislative candidates in 1996 decreased considerably from two years before and reached their lowest totals in at least four election years, according to a study released today by the Office of Campaign and Political Finance.

According to the study, *Campaign Finance Activity by Candidates for the Massachusetts General Court in 1996*, Senate and House candidates raised a total of \$8,676,756 in 1996, which was 17 percent less than the 1994 figure. On the spending side, the 1996 figure was \$8,276,953, a drop of 21 percent from 1994. The aggregate figures for each chamber also showed a decrease from 1994 and were the lowest ever recorded since OCPF started issuing its legislative spending reports in 1990.

The low totals were due primarily to a relatively low number of candidates: the 343 candidates who sought a legislative seat in 1996 represented a decline of 16 percent from the 408 who ran in 1994 and the lowest ever recorded in an OCPF report.

While total figures were down in both chambers, the average receipts and expenditures went in two completely different directions. The average Senate candidate raised \$55,727, which was 2 percent less than in 1994, and spent \$50,981, which was 14 percent less. Both 1996 averages reversed steady increases from 1990 to 1994.

On the other hand, the averages rose in the House. The average candidate raised \$18,450, 5 percent more than in 1994, and spent \$18,090, 6 percent more than the

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average 1994 candidate. Viewed over the 1990-1996 period, the latest receipts average reversed a decline in 1992 and 1994 and was the highest ever. The 1996 spending average marks the first time that figure has risen in the four reports compiled by OCPF since 1990.

As in past years, Democrats and incumbents showed significantly more campaign finance activity than their opponents. The top fundraisers and spenders also won at the polls: in 1996, the candidate spending the most money won 71 of the 90 contested races, for a success rate of 79 percent.

There are many possible reasons for the changes in the averages. Each election year brings a varying mix of incumbents and challengers and contested and uncontested races. Another possible reason for the decline in some receipts is the amended campaign finance law that took effect in January 1995 and is reflected for the first time in this report. The amended law reduced the maximum annual contribution from individuals or political action committees to a candidate from \$1,000 to \$500 and limited a candidate's aggregate contributions from PACs for the first time. The drop in the contribution ceilings may have caused some candidates to collect and spend a smaller amount of money -- reducing both the totals and the averages -- though there is no direct causal evidence.

OCPF had previously issued separate reports for the House and Senate, but has combined the two for easier comparisons and reference. An executive summary is also included in the report.

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