RALEIGH, N.C. — People put more than $30 million into North Carolina political campaigns over the last six months of 2019.

A million of it came from the Democratic Governors Association in preparation for the spending spree to come as Republicans and Democrats across the country battle over the North Carolina governor’s mansion and control of the General Assembly.

Jim Goodnight, the co-founder of SAS and a long-time Republican donor, was the biggest individual donor in-state, giving $500,000 to GOP committees that accept unlimited donations.
Gov. Roy Cooper got donations from NBA commissioner Adam Silver and Ralph Lauren, the famous fashion designer. He and Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Forest are gearing up for a fight: Cooper's spending $7,500 a month on office space alone.

Forest's rent runs $6,400 a month.

Forest's competition in the March 3 Republican gubernatorial primary, state Rep. Holly Grange, New Hanover, raised just over $106,000 in the last half of last year. Cooper and Forest both have access to millions, with the Democratic governor sitting on the state’s largest war chest by far: $8.2 million in his main campaign account alone.

Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger continued to use his campaign account to buy himself a home in Raleigh, renting a place to stay during legislative sessions from a company he owns. He and House Speaker Tim Moore both paid their personal law firms four figures a month to rent campaign space in their districts.

The $30 million-plus total is a conservative tally of what rolled into campaign accounts during the second half of last year, the period covered by reports due to the state late last week. WRAL News worked to back out double counts, removing money that simply moved, for example, from a legislator’s campaign account to a political party’s.

The tally covers only groups that file with the State Board of Elections, not the congressional, U.S. Senate and presidential campaigns that will dominate state airwaves ahead of the 2020 elections. Nor does it include the dark money groups, named for sections of the U.S. tax code, that can accept unlimited money, often from anonymous donors, and spend it on advertising.

Michael Weisel, a Raleigh attorney who specializes in Democratic politics and has a license plate that reads “DRK MONEY,” created three of those groups in 2019 alone.

The money reinforces 2020’s massive stakes, according to Bob Hall, a semi-retired campaign watchdog. Hall said it looks like a 30 percent increase from the last six months of 2017.

"That big jump largely reflects the big stakes in 2020 – intense campaigns for governor, General Assembly and other offices, plus control over the next round of redistricting
following the 2020 census," Hall said in an email. "It also reflects the increased intensity of the business of campaigning – more professionals and campaign staff raising and spending more money sooner ... more national operatives who view North Carolina as a pivotal purple state."

What follows is a breakdown of some of this activity. It is not nearly exhaustive.

**Governor's race**

Forest's main campaign account spent more than it brought in over the second half of 2019, and even Republican campaign veterans were surprised by the burn rate.

But Forest's campaign account – Friends of Dan Forest – is just part of the story. He chairs a second group, which accepts unlimited donations, called the Republican Council of State Committee. This group has more than $1 million on hand, and it's subsidizing the Forest campaign by covering rent at his headquarters.

Forest also has a super PAC called Truth & Prosperity that he's not allowed to coordinate with on spending, though he's publicly acknowledged raising money for it. Indicted North Carolina financier Greg Lindberg is the largest donor for this group as well as the Republican Council of State, putting $2.4 million into them in the past.

Truth & Prosperity looks like a substantial funding vehicle this cycle, with $1.7 million on hand. During the second half of last year it accepted donations of $25,000 or more from 14 people or companies, including Phil Drake, of Drake Software, and Clifton Benson of Raleigh.

Put the three groups together, and Forest had more than $3.5 million on hand at the end of 2019.

Cooper's financial picture isn't simple either. His campaign said in a press release that 90 percent of its donors are from North Carolina and that more than three-quarters of the contributors gave $100 or less. But that's because the big out-of-state money flowed through another group: the North Carolina Democratic Leadership Committee.

This, like the Republican Council of State Committee, is one of four affiliated committees in North Carolina. These groups function a lot like the state political parties, taking in unlimited donations and spending to help elect either Republicans or Democrats.
The Democratic Leadership Committee had eight donors who gave $100,000 or more this period: the Democratic Governors Association, the Democratic Attorneys General Association, David Isaac Cohen of Simcah Capital Management in Charlotte, Timothy Sullivan, the chairman of Ancestry.com in Utah, Karla Jurvetson, a doctor in California, Clay Kenan Kirk, of New York, and Nabil Nachawati II of Dallas.

Like Forest with the Republican Council of State Committee, Cooper uses the Democratic Leadership Committee to subsidize his campaign.

Cooper also has at least one dark money group to support him this year: Moving NC Forward. Doubtless whoever the Republican nominee ends up being, they will have one or more as well.

**Affiliated committees**

- For the record, there are at least five of these groups in North Carolina:
- The aforementioned Republican Council of State and N.C. Democratic Leadership Committee
- The NC Senate Majority Fund, which backs Republicans for the state Senate
- The NC House Republican Campaign Committee, which does the same thing in the House
- Take the Majority, formerly called Independents Forward, a little-used committee for Senate Democrats
- **Update:** Initially Take the Majority was not included here. A source pointed it out after this story posted.

**General Assembly races**

Democrats focused last week on fundraising through the state Democratic and Republican parties, where the totals show their side with a massive funding advantage.

But Republican legislative leaders tend to hold money in their campaign accounts or in the affiliated committees, while Democrats pool more of their money in the state party's fund, making comparisons difficult without going race by race through 170 legislative races on the ballot this year.

The NC House Republican Campaign Committee hasn't been hugely active. It took in $35,000 in the second half of 2019, mostly from the NC Beer and Wine Wholesalers PAC ($10,000) and the Resident Lenders of NC ($15,000). House Republicans also
have a dark money group, the Carolina Leadership Coalition, which doesn't have to report its donors.

The Senate Majority Fund took in $572,000, mostly from Goodnight ($250,000) and conservative businessman Robert Luddy ($100,000).

Democrats haven't put much money into affiliated committee efforts focused on the House or Senate. They started a new 501c4 group last year though, called the Alliance for Balanced Government. It's got a VIP reception and policy briefing for donors next month and lists former state party director Kimberly Reynolds and former House Democratic Caucus Director Maggie Barlow as contacts.

As usual, legislative leadership brought in big hauls. Moore, R-Cleveland, had more than $720,000 on hand at year's end, and Berger, R-Rockingham, had just over $935,000.

**The parties**

- The North Carolina Democratic Party brought in $1.3 million over this period, doubling the North Carolina Republican Party's haul.
- The Democratic Party also had much stronger cash on hand at year's end: nearly $1.5 million to the GOP's $232,500.
- Mark Kuhn, a Durham investment adviser, was the Democratic Party's biggest donor this period, at $150,000. Eric Schmidt, Google's former executive chairperson, was No. 2 at $103,400.
- Goodnight was the state GOP's biggest donor. Other top funders include the North Carolina Farm Bureau PAC, the North Carolina Healthcare Facilities Association PAC, the State Farm Agents & Associates PAC and Reynolds American's PAC.

**The Supreme Court**

Expect another expensive partisan fight for control of the state judiciary this year.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley, a Democrat, raised more than $300,000 in the second half of last year. She spent more than $115,000.

Justice Paul Newby, Beasley's Republican challenger for the chief justice seat, raised $122,000. But he had more cash on hand at the end of the year: $440,000.

Newby's latest filing didn't list professions or employer names for any of his donors. His campaign said that information is being added.
Top 10 donors
These are the top donors in North Carolina politics for the second half of 2019:

- Democratic Action (aka the Democratic Governors Association): $1 million
- Foundation for the Carolinas: $550,000*
- Jim Goodnight: $506,400
- Thrive Arts Fund at Foundation for the Carolinas: $500,000*
- Timothy Sullivan: $255,400
- Christine Mumma: $253,834**
- David Isaac Cohen: $250,000
- Democratic Association of Attorneys General PAC: $250,000
- North Carolina Democratic Leadership Committee: $227,937***
- Brent D. Barringer: $165,000

* In support of a sales tax referendum in Mecklenburg County
** Donated to her own campaign for attorney general
*** In-kind donations to Cooper's campaign

Top 10 fundraisers
These committees pulled in the most money from over the final six months of 2019:

- Cooper for North Carolina: $3.97 million
- NC Democratic Leadership Committee: $2.9 million
- Partnership for a Better Mecklenburg: $1.66 million
- Josh Stein for Attorney General: $1.63 million
- Friends of Dan Forest: $1.41 million
- NC Democratic Party: $1.3 million
- NC Republican Party: $640,964
- Truth & Prosperity: $634,519
- NC Senate Majority Fund: $572,000
- Philip E. Berger Committee: $467,683

Correction: This Top 10 fundraisers chart was initially based on data that left out several donation types in an effort to eliminate double counts as money moves, for example, from one legislator's campaign into another's. This methodology was flawed due to differences in the ways committees code transactions, and the list has been replaced with a top 10 that does not attempt to back out transfers. More information on the methodology change is available here, on Twitter.Twitter thread on Top 10 Fundraisers methodology

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