



M U L T I S T A T E

## W.Va. campaign fundraising continues, with big challenges, in this social distancing moment

In an era where campaigning is tricky and pressing the flesh is actually a health risk, two leading Republican candidates for governor don't have much fundraising to show for the past few months but made up the gap with their own personal wealth.

Two leading Democrats, meanwhile, expressed satisfaction with their most recent fundraising efforts despite this moment's challenges.

Campaign [finance reports](#) for the first quarter of 2020 were due to the Secretary of State's office by the end of Tuesday. The fundraising expressed by the reports is one way to judge the relative strength of campaigns and their resources to navigate the final weeks of the Primary Election season.

Of course, this year is like no other in recent memory because of the social distancing necessitated by the spread of coronavirus. That threw a campaign season for a major loop by causing a delay of Election Day to June 9.

West Virginia households are expected to receive applications for absentee ballots in their mailbox within the next couple of weeks. State officials have loosened the qualifications for absentee voting to include anyone with health concerns about the virus.

Incumbent Gov. [Jim Justice](#), a Republican, raised \$94,228 during the reporting period.

But Justice, considered the richest man in West Virginia, loaned his campaign \$526,000.

The Justice campaign reported spending \$619,104 during the period — much of it to pay

off earlier campaign debt — so it has only \$68,306 cash on hand.

“Governor Justice is focused on leading the state’s response to novel coronavirus,” stated Roman Stauffer, spokesman for the incumbent governor’s campaign.

“He requested we stop all fundraising many weeks ago, and we have canceled several fundraisers.”

One of Justice’s top competitors, former state Commerce Secretary [Woody Thrasher](#), reported raising \$84,242.

But Thrasher, a Republican and founder of a prominent West Virginia engineering company, heavily supplemented that out of his own pocket with loans of \$1,045,000.

The campaign spent \$1,193,184 during the period.

The Thrasher campaign has \$42,272 still on hand.

“My campaign has shifted to acts of service to help all West Virginians get through this health crisis because fundraising has understandably been the last thing on anyone’s mind for several weeks now,” Thrasher stated.

“But I do remain honored and energized by the folks who see me as the conservative choice for Governor. These aren’t big corporations but regular West Virginians showing their support for my values and my ideas through campaign contributions. When you take one look at Jim Justice’s donors, it’s clear he’s still part of the corrupt Democrat establishment.”

Another of their competitors, former Delegate [Mike Folk](#), raised almost \$17,000.

But Folk, a Republican, also loaned to his campaign — \$36,000.

Folk has \$30,000 on hand.

Among Democrats, community organizer [Stephen Smith](#) brought in \$200,746.

Despite the challenges of the moment, Smith's campaign submitted a 160-page report representing 3,189 donations.

The Smith campaign has \$184,253 on hand.

The Smith campaign has focused on grassroots efforts and was having regular town hall meetings prior to life changing for everyone.

Smith's campaign, called the West Virginia Can't Wait movement, transformed into a coronavirus response team — recruiting neighborhood field captains responsible for checking in on households in their communities.

"We are ready to govern and prepared to win," stated Smith campaign manager Katey Lauer.

"We're the only campaign that can beat Jim Justice because Stephen is the opposite of Justice: we choose neighbors over lobbyists, small donors over election buying, and action over talk."

Another Democrat, lawyer [Ben Salango](#), raised \$136,625.

The campaign for Salango, a Kanawha County Commissioner, has the most cash on hand among candidates, \$786,614.

The campaign is also pointing toward significant endorsements, including from the state AFL-CIO.

"Ben Salango was the last candidate to enter the race, but he is in the strongest position to win the Democratic primary with significant cash on hand advantage and momentum from endorsements," stated Grant Herring, spokesman for the Salango campaign.

“We are picking up support from all over West Virginia, and while campaigning has changed due to COVID-19, our ability to get our message out to voters hasn’t.”

Another prominent Democratic candidate, state Senator [Ron Stollings](#), raised \$45,380 during the period.

Stollings gained the [endorsement](#) of the West Virginia Education Association last week.

His campaign lists \$119,402 on hand.

Several other candidates also reported bringing in campaign money during the period.

George Douglas Six, a Republican, reported contributions of \$3,200.

Six has \$3,676 on hand.

Democrat Jody Murphy, a community developer in Pleasants County, reported a \$280 contribution and has \$128 on hand.

Libertarian Erika Kolenich reported contributions of \$2,335 and has \$3,534 on hand.