



ISSUE BRIEF: Prohibiting the personal use of campaign funds 73% of Virginians support restricting the personal use of campaign funds.

OVERVIEW

There are no legal restrictions on how candidates spend campaign funds, unlike 47 other states and the federal government. This means it's perfectly legal for candidates in Virginia to use campaign contributions to pay for stays at lavish hotels, make investments, and pay country club dues.

This fact has become even more concerning as the amount of money being poured into state elections has grown substantially in recent years – whereas spending in Virginia's 2017 gubernatorial election totaled \$66 million, spending in the 2021 gubernatorial election skyrocketed to nearly \$138 million. Without a ban on the personal use of campaign funds, there's no guarantee this money is being used solely for purposes related to campaigning.

Virginia is an outlier in permitting the personal use of campaign funds:

- Any use of campaign funds for an expense that wouldn't exist unless running for office or occupying office is prohibited by the Federal Elections Commission.
- Using campaign funds to cover personal expenses in Michigan comes with up to 90 days in jail, a \$1,000 fine, or both.
- In Kansas, the violation can cost offenders \$5,000.

Prohibiting the personal use of campaign funds would help ensure candidates run for office in order to represent the interests of constituents rather than to personally enrich themselves.

Virginia lawmakers' unusual spending habits transcend party and chamber:

- Former GOP Del. Tim Hugo paid his teenage children to clean his office and spent around \$1,700 on meals in the weeks following the 2019 election.
- Former Sen. Steve Martin spent over \$7,000 of campaign funds on tire and auto repair shop visits.
- Former Del. Chris Peace covered a stay at the luxurious Jefferson Hotel in Richmond using campaign funds.