

Transparency and Campaign Spending in Minnesota*

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October 3, 2018

* This is a project of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. It is supported by a grant from the McKnight Foundation. We are grateful for the contributions of Madeline Salucka and Matthew Motta. The authors are entirely responsible for the content of this report.

Executive Summary

- DFL candidates enjoy a more than 2 to 1 advantage overall when it comes to campaign contributions and independent expenditures.
- The DFL advantage is largely driven by contributions to, and independent expenditures made in support of, gubernatorial candidate Tim Walz.
- Republican state house candidates, however, are benefiting from more independent expenditures on their behalf than their DFL counterparts.
- The majority of money that individuals directly contributed to the gubernatorial campaigns is in the form of contributions of over \$500 (65% of Walz's funds; 72% of Johnson's funds).
- Most of the money spent on Minnesota campaigns so far is coming from Minnesota, only AG candidate Keith Ellison is getting a sizable share of out-of-state money (50%).
- U.S. Senate and U.S. House races are not included because recent federal election spending has not yet been released.

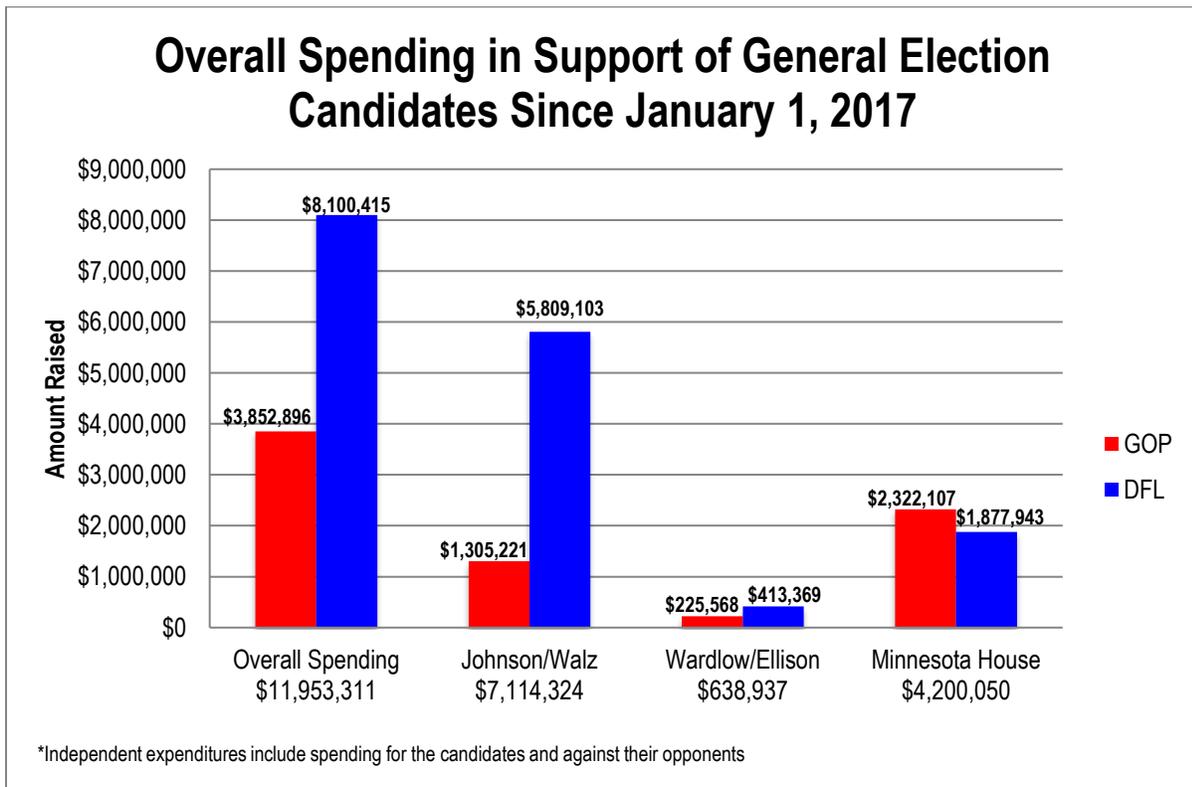
A Lot of Money

DFL candidates enjoy more than double the total amount of campaign support in Minnesota than their Republican counterparts. Since January 1, 2017, Minnesota DFL candidates have received \$8,100,415 from individuals and groups contributing to their campaigns and from outside groups spending independently compared to \$3,852,896 for their Republican counterparts.

Figure 1 shows that the DFL's biggest financial advantage is in the Governor's race: the DFL gubernatorial candidate, Tim Walz, has more than four times the support of his Republican counterpart, Jeff Johnson: \$5,809,103 million compared to \$1,305,221.

Minnesota statehouse races, however, break this pattern. Republican candidates have received more support their DFL counterparts – \$2,322,107 compared to \$1,877,943.

Figure 1. More campaign spending on DFL races

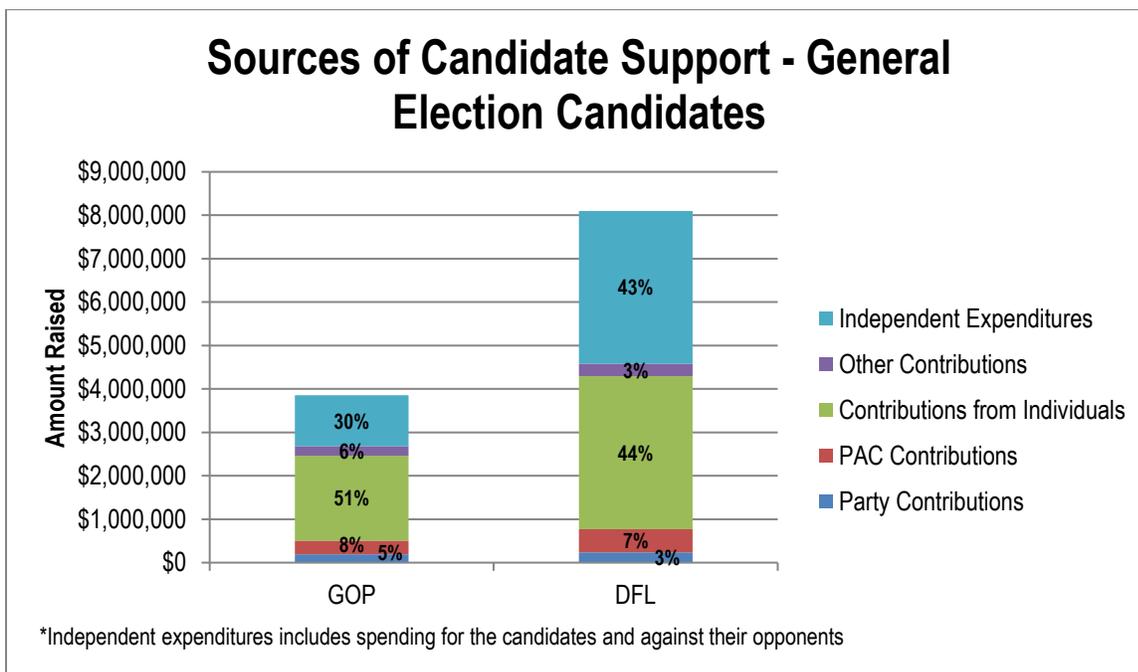


Dark Money and Independent Expenditures

Dark money is seeping into Minnesota elections.

The DFL party is winning the competition for the most independent expenditures. Independent groups spent \$3,522,046 to help DFL candidates who are competing in the general election – either spending for a DFL candidate or against a GOP opponent. By contrast, independent groups spent only \$1,168,779 to help GOP candidates who are competing in the general election (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Independent expenditures and individual campaign contributions are the biggest sources of overall spending in all state races



[Note: Independent expenditures are not given directly to the candidates' campaigns, but rather are funds spent in support of or against candidates.]

It is difficult to track the sources of dark money. Figure 3 lists the biggest sources of independent expenditures among the 43 groups spending in Minnesota state races in 2018. Dark money comes from groups that do not disclose, or only partially disclose, their contributors, as is the case with some of these groups, according to followthemoney.org.

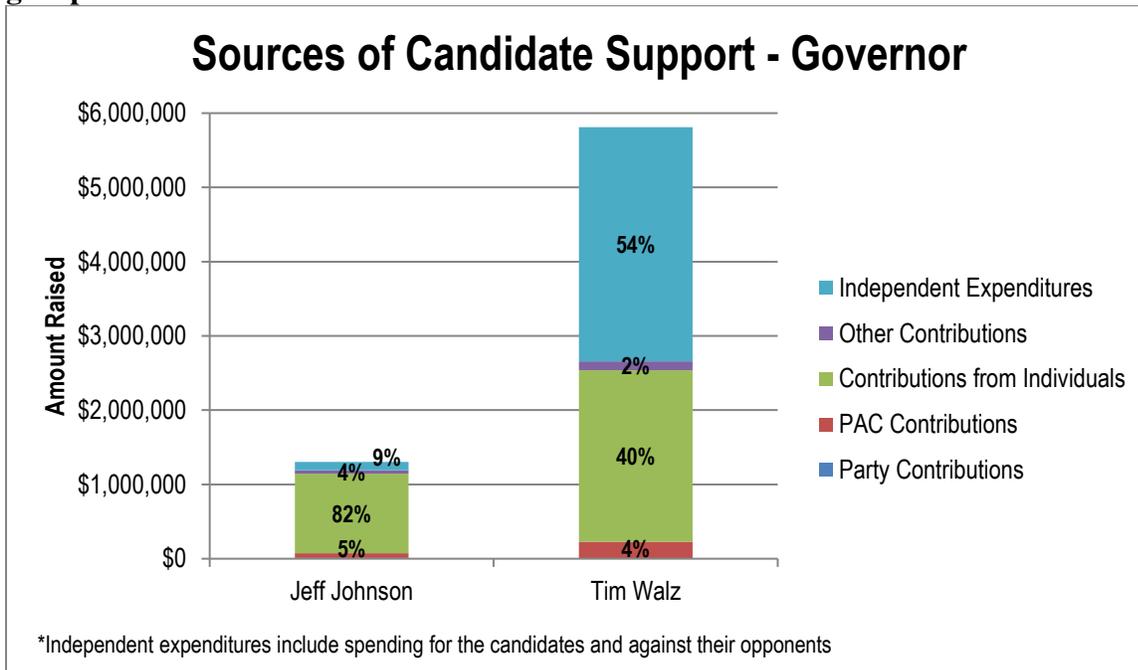
Figure 3. Top groups making independent expenditures

Groups making independent expenditures	
GOP	Total Spent
Coalition of Minnesota Businesses	\$374,688
Pro Jobs Majority	\$222,253
Freedom Club State PAC	\$136,454
MN Action Network IE PAC	\$50,000
MN Jobs Coalition Legislative Fund	\$45,117
DFL	
Alliance for a Better Minnesota Action Fund	\$1,406,587
MN Victory PAC	\$622,947
Planned Parenthood of Minnesota Political Action Fund	\$313,513
MN DFL State Central Committee	\$293,864
MN Association of Professional Employees Political Fund	\$137,500

*This does not include \$90,253 spent by Alliance for Jobs Political Action Committee against Tim Walz (to support Lori Swanson) prior to the primary.

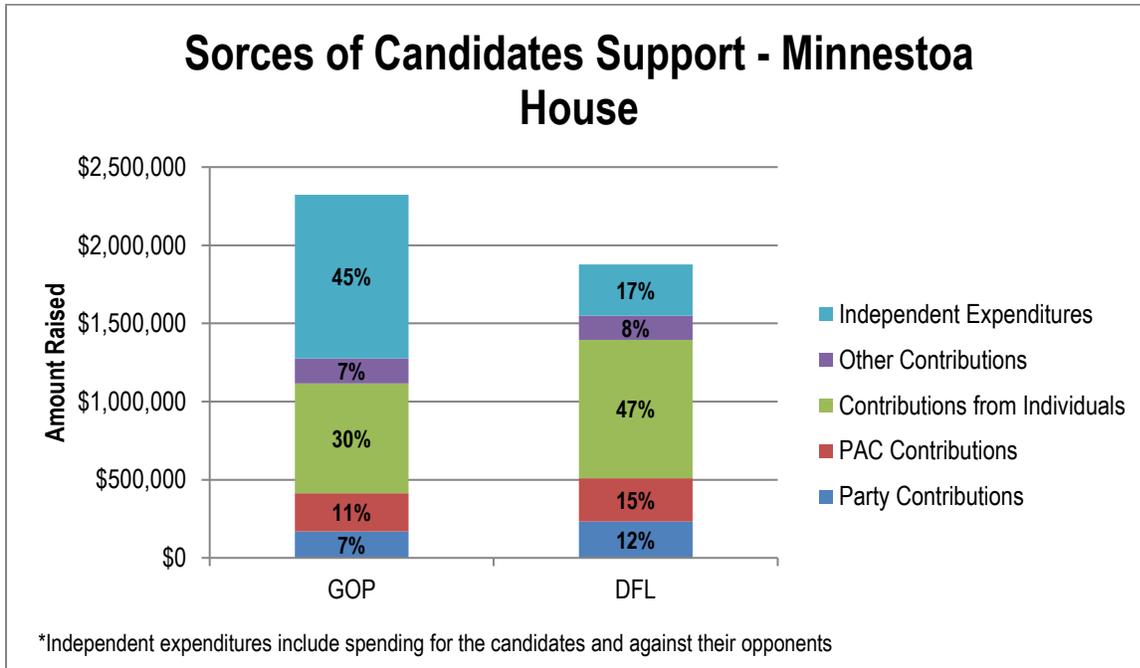
Independent expenditures fuel Walz’s advantage. Figure 4 shows that a bit more than half of campaign spending in support of Walz (54%) is by independent groups, whereas only 9% of Johnson’s spending comes from this source. Walz has also raised more money from individual contributions -- (\$2,310,054, compared to Johnson’s \$1,067,099).

Figure 4. Walz has more support from all sources, especially independent expenditure groups



Republicans have an edge in independent expenditures in statehouse races, driving their overall edge in campaign support for legislative races. Figure 5 shows that 45% of GOP statehouse spending originates from independent expenditures compared to 17% for the DFL. The top groups spending money for and against candidates in each party are listed above in Figure 3.

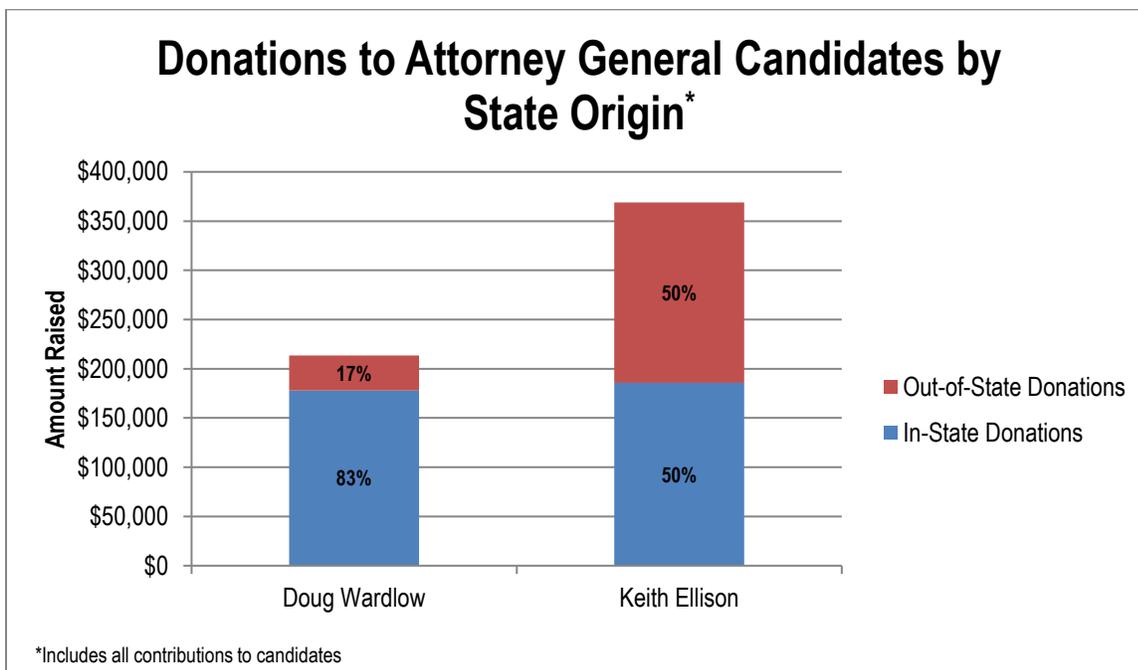
Figure 5. Republicans raising more money for State House campaigns, with most coming from independent expenditures



The Attorney General’s race considerably lags, at this point, behind the other statewide races that we’re tracking in terms of overall spending. Since August 15, the Ellison campaign has raised \$137,820 and Wardlow has raised \$107,936 (excluding independent expenditures). Eighty percent or more of spending for Ellison and Wardlow originate from individual contributions.

The AG race does stand out, however, in one respect: **Nearly half of the spending by DFL candidate, Keith Ellison, comes from sources outside of Minnesota (50% in Figure 6).** By contrast, seven percent of contributions to Tim Walz and six percent of contributions to Jeff Johnson are from outside of Minnesota.

Figure 6. Donations to Ellison draw evenly from in- and out-of-state sources, Wardlow mostly depends on in-states sources.



Big Checks Dominate

State candidates rely on big dollar contributions. Figure 7 shows that two-thirds or more of the money that Walz and Johnson receive from individual donors come from donors making contributions of more than \$500. Donors who give more than \$500 comprise 18% of Walz's donors and 23% of Johnson's donors.

Figure 7. Most of Walz and Johnson's campaign coffers come from individual donations greater than \$500

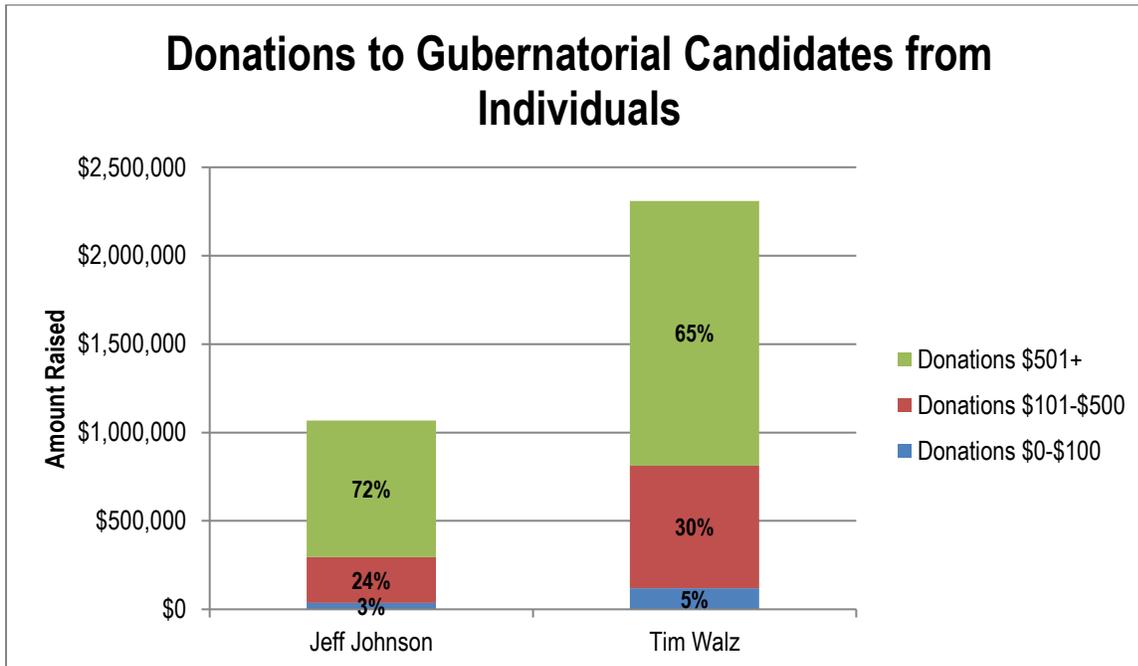


Figure 8 shows that for Ellison, 65% of his total individual coffers are from donations above \$500, coming from 21% of his donors. For Wardlow, the 62% of his coffers comprised of donations of above \$500 come from 20% of his donors.

Figure 8. Most of Ellison and Wardlow’s campaign coffers come from individual contributions greater than \$500

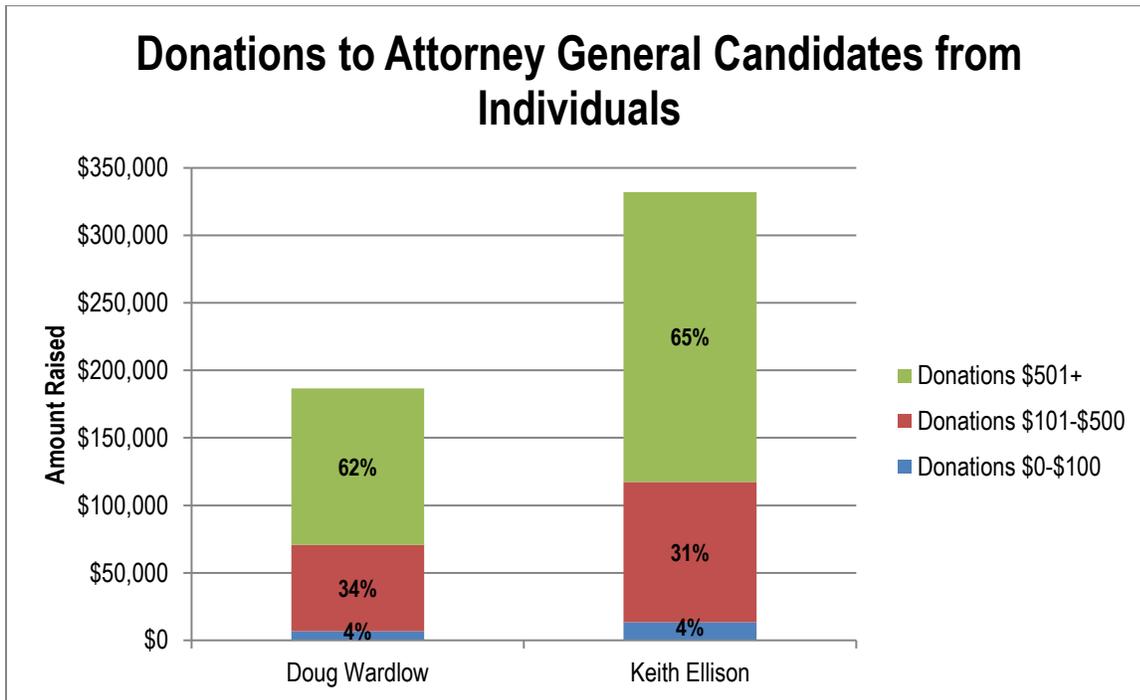
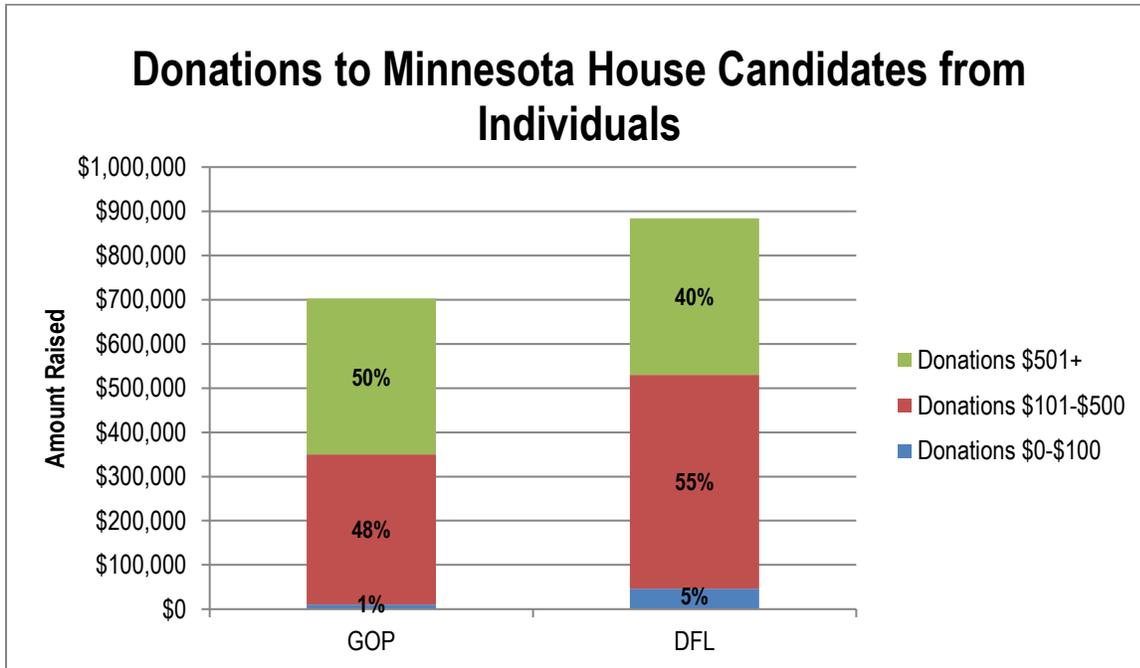


Figure 9 shows that in local statehouse races, GOP candidates receive half of their funds from contributions of over \$500, whereas DFL donations of over \$500 comprise 40 percent of their total. DFL state house candidates' individual contributions of over \$500 come from 14% of their individual donors; 50% of Republican candidates' individual contributions come from 24% of their individual donors.

Figure 9. Half of the money GOP State House candidates raise comes from checks greater than \$500, most of DFL money comes from donations between \$101 and \$500.



About the Study

The data used for this analysis come from Minnesota's Campaign Finance Board (<https://cfb.mn.gov/reports-and-data/self-help/data-downloads/campaign-finance/>) and cover the period of January 1, 2017 through September 18, 2018. The authors analyzed contributions received by candidates from all sources, including individuals, parties, and PACs and the independent expenditures made by parties and groups. Only candidates that won in the August primaries are included.