



**SUNLIGHT**  
POLICY CENTER  
— OF NEW JERSEY —

**RESEARCH REPORT**

**NJEA PRESIDENT SEAN SPILLER  
VIOLATES THE NJEA'S OWN CONFLICT OF  
INTEREST POLICY**

**A small group of NJEA execs (including Spiller) uses  
millions of teachers' regular dues to back Spiller's vanity  
run for governor**

April 7, 2025

# **NJEA PRESIDENT SEAN SPILLER VIOLATES THE NJEA'S OWN CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) has a clear conflict of interest policy:

No NJEA official shall, directly or indirectly, have any interest or relationship, take any action or engage in any transaction, or incur any obligation which is in conflict with, or *gives the appearance of a conflict* with, the proper and faithful performance of his or her NJEA responsibilities ...[Emphasis added.]

It looks very much like NJEA President Sean Spiller has violated this policy both by his actions and at the very least by the appearance of a conflict of interest.

As NJEA president, Spiller has a fiduciary duty to put the best interests of teachers above his personal interests. NJEA leadership's (including the self-interested Spiller) using \$40 million of teachers' regular, annual dues to back Spiller's run for governor is surely in the best interest of Sean Spiller. But it is not in the best interest of teachers.

Perhaps to insulate himself from accusations of a conflict of interest, Spiller has linked his campaign for governor to the NJEA's Pension Justice campaign: if Spiller promises to enhance pensions, then he can plausibly assert his run is in teachers' best interest. But Spiller cannot simply assert that it's in teachers' best interest to spend \$40 million of their dues backing his run and make it so. He's not the king of the NJEA, he's the president.

As a self-proclaimed representative democracy, the NJEA has institutional mechanisms that allow teachers to express their collective will, including an elected Delegate Assembly and committees made up of delegates. The NJEA's traditional PAC, NJEA PAC, is run by exactly such a committee. These elected delegates can fairly be said to represent teachers' collective will. Furthermore, NJEA PAC's funding comes from voluntary dues, which are, by definition, an expression of their will. So NJEA PAC's activities can fairly be said to reflect teachers' collective will and therefore in their best interests. The NJEA's running of NJEA PAC is commendably free of any conflicts of interest.

But that's not how Spiller is running for governor. NJEA leadership (including Spiller) is using the NJEA's Super PAC, Garden State Forward, to quietly push money to two

"Spiller for Governor" Super PACs, Protecting Our Democracy and Working New Jersey, which exist to promote Spiller's candidacy. Via Garden State Forward, NJEA leadership sent \$5 million to Protecting Our Democracy and plans to send a total of \$35 million to Working New Jersey. But unlike the voluntary dues that fund NJEA PAC, Garden State Forward is funded by teachers' mandatory, annual dues. So that's a jaw-dropping \$40 million of teachers' regular dues backing Spiller.

Unlike NJEA PAC, Garden State Forward is not run by a delegate committee, it is run by a small group of three top NJEA executives, including a self-interested Spiller, in a completely opaque process that has never been fully explained to anyone, let alone teachers. Even worse, NJEA leadership hides the existence of Garden State Forward -- as well as Protecting Our Democracy and Working New Jersey -- from teachers. As a result, few, if any, teachers have any idea their regular dues are backing Spiller's run. Therefore, Garden State Forward's spending on Spiller cannot fairly be said to reflect the will of teachers or be deemed in their best interest.

Spiller is also an extremely weak candidate. He has raised so little money that he is the only one of the six Democratic contenders to fail to qualify for matching funds or the second gubernatorial debate. His campaign has no paid staff. It's clear that New Jersey voters have very little interest in Spiller's candidacy, which makes his whole run look like a personal vanity project.

He's also a deeply flawed candidate due to his failed, single term as Montclair mayor and the ongoing criminal investigation into his misuse of state health benefits, which caused Spiller to plead his 5th Amendment right against self-*incrimination* over 400 times.

Would New Jersey teachers choose to spend \$40 million of their hard-earned dues backing such a flawed, weak candidate? Yet they do not have a choice: their regular dues are mandatory and the decision to spend them on Spiller is being made by a small group of NJEA executives, including the self-interested Spiller. For the third time in his political career, Spiller's conflict of interest is manifest, and for the third time Spiller brazenly ignores it. This time it's his own union, with the complicity of NJEA leadership. It's a major scandal.

## I. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The NJEA has a clear conflict of interest policy:

No NJEA official shall, directly or indirectly, have any interest or relationship, take any action or engage in any transaction, or incur any obligation which is in conflict with, or *gives the appearance of a conflict* with, the proper and faithful performance of his or her NJEA responsibilities ...[Emphasis added.]<sup>1</sup>

In addition, current NJEA staff contracts -- presumably including Spiller's -- contain a conflict-of-interest section, which specifically calls for "avoidance of conflict of interest ..." <sup>2</sup> So in Spiller's case, as president, he cannot take any action that is in conflict with the faithful performance of his duties to his members -- or even appears to create a conflict -- and he has an affirmative duty to avoid a conflict. A look at the facts and the common law principles of conflict of interest indicate that Spiller has breached the NJEA's policy in all three places.

### **1. The Facts**

Here are the facts:

- Spiller is president of the NJEA.
- As president, Spiller is a fiduciary of the NJEA. As a paid executive and fiduciary, Spiller is charged with generally advocating for and pursuing his members' best interests.<sup>3</sup>
- Spiller is also running for governor.
- Spiller's candidacy is being kept afloat almost entirely by the pro-Spiller, NJEA-run Super PAC, Working New Jersey. Via the NJEA's Super PAC, Garden State Forward, the NJEA has sent \$17.25 million to Working New Jersey and plans to spend a total of \$35 million on Spiller's primary run.
- The NJEA also sent \$5 million to Spiller's Super PAC, Protecting Our Democracy, which was the platform for Spiller's gubernatorial ambitions before he officially announced his run, so the combined total will come to \$40 million.
- Garden State Forward is funded by teachers' regular, annual dues, so that's \$40 million of teachers' dues backing Spiller's run.
- NJEA leadership (including President Spiller) hides the existence of the main mechanisms for funneling teacher' dues to back Spiller's run: the NJEA's Super PAC, Garden State Forward, which funds two pro-Spiller Super PACs, Working

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<sup>1</sup> NJEA 2022 IRS Form 990, Schedule O. See Appendix A for screenshot.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for citation and screenshot of the relevant section.

<sup>3</sup> Montclair Kids First vs. Sean Spiller, Superior Court of New Jersey Chancery Division: Essex County Docket No.: ESX-C-59-15, Statement of Undisputed Material Facts in Support of Motion for Summary Judgment, December 14, 2015, p. 3. Hereinafter, "MKF lawsuit."

New Jersey and Protecting Our Democracy, which are actively promoting Spiller. As a result, very few, if any, teachers know that \$40 million of their regular dues are to be spent backing Spiller.

- According to the [Star-Ledger](#), the NJEA executives who decide where and how Garden State Forward spends money are "three top executives -- one of whom is Spiller himself" -- using a "completely opaque" process.

## **2. Common Law of Conflict of Interest**

In common law, a conflict of interest arises when an individual's personal interests compromise their judgment, decisions, or actions in a professional capacity.<sup>4</sup> Common law principles emphasize the importance of ensuring that individuals act in the best interests of those they serve -- in this case NJEA members.<sup>5</sup>

These are not simply abstract concepts. Superior Court Judge Thomas Moore ordered that Spiller be removed from the Montclair Board of School Estimates based on common law conflicts-of-interest law using the concepts presented above.<sup>6</sup>

## **3. Applying the Law to the Facts: Conflict of Interest**

Applying the law to the facts indicates that Spiller has violated the NJEA's conflict of interest policies by his actions, in the appearance of a conflict of interest, and in his failure to avoid a conflict of interest.

With regard to Spiller's actions, as president of the union and as one of only three NJEA executives controlling the NJEA's Super PAC, Garden State Forward, the spending of \$40 million of dues on his own political ambitions without the knowledge or consent of teachers places his own interests above teachers'. There would seem to be no question that, at the very least, this fact-pattern creates the appearance that he is placing his own interests above theirs. Finally, by placing himself at the center of an opaque process as one of three executives with control over Garden State Forward, Spiller has not avoided a conflict of interest but rather embraced one.

All three violate the NJEA's stated policy.

## **II. DO PENSIONS JUSTIFY SPENDING \$40 MILLION IN REGULAR DUES?**

One possible counter to the otherwise clear violations of the NJEA's conflict of interest policy is that Spiller's running for governor is in the best interests of teachers because he is pledging to enhance teachers' pensions. As the "Spiller for Governor 2025" [section](#) on

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<sup>4</sup> Google AI Overview in response to query "common law conflict of interest," accessed March 19, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Google AI Overview Common Law Principles in response to query "common law conflict of interest," accessed March 19, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> MKF lawsuit, Order Granting Plaintiff's Motion for Summary Judgment. See also citation in Footnote 3.

the NJEA website claims: Spiller "is now leading NJEA's growing campaign for pension justice, to ensure that all NJEA members have a strong, secure pension that allows for a dignified retirement." Concurrent with Spiller's campaign, the NJEA is running a Pension Justice [campaign](#), which links to the Spiller campaign page and urges teachers to become Pension Justice advocates. Indeed, on the NJEA's Facebook page, NJEA Vice President Steve Beatty urged teachers to support Spiller's run by explicitly [linking](#) Spiller's run to pension legislation introduced by State Sen. Linda Greenstein. There have also been linkages in NJEA Review<sup>7</sup> and during pension meetings in local school districts.<sup>8</sup>

But even if pensions are important to teachers, how do we know that teachers believe that it's in their best interests to spend \$40 million of their dues backing Spiller's run for governor? Spiller could simply assert that his run is in teachers' best interest -- although to our knowledge, he hasn't -- but he has self-serving reasons for doing so and in any event his assertion would not make it so. Spiller isn't king of the NJEA, he's the president.

But there's a sure way of knowing if a given policy reflects teachers' collective will: the NJEA has established, institutional mechanisms for the expression of teachers' collective will. If a NJEA policy is determined by an expression of teachers' collective will, then it can fairly be said to express their view of their own best interests.

### **III. HOW TEACHERS' BEST INTERESTS ARE EXPRESSED IN THE NJEA - OR NOT: THE CASES OF NJEA PAC AND GARDEN STATE FORWARD**

As a self-proclaimed "[representative democracy](#)," the NJEA does have mechanisms to reflect the collective will of teachers: an elected Delegate Assembly and various committees made up of elected delegates. The actions of these committees can fairly be said to represent the will of teachers and therefore their best interests.

#### **1. NJEA PAC Reflects Teachers' Will and Best Interests**

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<sup>7</sup> In the February 2025 *NJEA Review*, there's a "Spiller for Governor 2025" ad titled "Elect a leader who will fight for your pension!" -- with a QR code linking to Spiller's campaign website. New Jersey Education Association, "Sean Spiller will be a governor for all New Jerseyans," *NJEA Review* 98, no. 7 (February 2025): 20. Pensions are also listed as a top priority of Spiller's campaign in a second *NJEA Review* article supporting Spiller's run. New Jersey Education Association, "Elect a leader who will fight for your pension!" *NJEA Review* 98, no. 7 (February 2025): 14.

<sup>8</sup> There have been [reports](#) of NJEA officers using pension meetings to support Spiller's candidacy and to hand out [cards](#) that explicitly link Spiller's campaign for governor to pensions and push to teachers to get involved in Spiller's campaign directly or as a "Pension Justice Advocate."

The NJEA's traditional PAC, NJEA PAC, is controlled by the [NJEA PAC Operating Committee](#), which is an example of such a delegate committee. It has 125 members, including NJEA officers, elected delegates, county chairs, retired representatives, and others. It has published [guidelines](#) available for all members to see. NJEA PAC Operating Committee is responsible for endorsing candidates, including [endorsing](#) Sean Spiller for Governor. It is also responsible for allocating NJEA PAC funds to the various endorsed candidates.

Importantly, NJEA PAC is funded by separate, voluntary dues. If a teacher wants to contribute to the NJEA's political spending, she can contribute to NJEA PAC and then see how NJEA PAC spends that money. Because it is voluntary, any money spent by NJEA PAC by definition represents the will of teachers, and therefore teachers acting in their own best interest. The same is true of the great majority of teachers who do not choose to contribute to NJEA PAC. They deem it in their own best interest not to contribute.

NJEA PAC's activities are above-board, transparent, and represent the collective will of teachers. As such, they can be fairly said to reflect the best interest of teachers. There are no conflicts of interest suggested by NJEA PAC's activities.

That's likely why NJEA leadership wants to convince teachers that NJEA PAC constitutes the sum-total of the NJEA's political spending. A prime example is a section of the NJEA website containing a list of the "[Top Ten Excuses for Not Giving to NJEA PAC](#)" One of them is: "I already pay union dues" – that is, regular, annual dues. In response, the NJEA states unequivocally: "By law, dues money cannot be used for partisan political campaigns."

That is of course technically true because the NJEA's Super PAC, Garden State Forward, cannot contribute directly to campaigns but must make independent expenditures. But teachers do not know the minutiae of campaign finance law, so a teacher would come away from this education in NJEA political spending thinking that NJEA PAC represents the sum-total of the NJEA political spending. Mission accomplished -- if your mission is to hide the existence of Garden State Forward.

But NJEA PAC is not how NJEA leadership (including Spiller) is funding Spiller's run. They are using the NJEA's Super PAC, Garden State Forward.

## **2. Garden State Forward: The Antithesis of NJEA PAC**

Garden State Forward is the NJEA's Super PAC and serves as the NJEA's vehicle for funding Spiller's run. As a Super PAC, Garden State Forward can spend unlimited amounts of money in support of political candidates, but the expenditures must be independent of the candidates and their political parties. Importantly, unlike NJEA PAC, Garden State Forward is funded by teachers' regular, annual dues, which are

withheld from every teacher's paycheck and flow automatically to the NJEA. This means that every year NJEA leadership can draw from a \$135 million pool of annual dues for their political spending priorities-- including Sean Spiller running for governor.

During Spiller's run, NJEA leadership (including Spiller) has used Garden State Forward as a conduit for millions of teachers' dues to flow to two other pro-Spiller Super PACs, Protecting Our Democracy and Working New Jersey.

- Protecting Our Democracy was launched in October 2022 as the platform for a Spiller gubernatorial run prior to his official announcement of his candidacy in June 2024. The NJEA was Protecting Our Democracy's "[founding donor](#)" and, via Garden State Forward, sent a total of [\\$5 million](#)<sup>9</sup> to Protecting Our Democracy.
- Working New Jersey is the [NJEA-run](#) "Spiller for Governor" Super PAC currently backing Spiller's run. Former-NJEA Executive Director Ed Richardson is the chairman, and former-NJEA Communications Director Steve Wollmer and former-president of the Montclair Education Association Gayl Sheppard are both on the staff. As of December 31, 2024, Garden State Forward had sent [\\$17.25 million](#) to Working New Jersey. Because Spiller has been [unable to raise sufficient funds](#) from the public, it is only the NJEA-funded and -run Working New Jersey that keeps Spiller's candidacy alive.

Via these three Super PACs, NJEA leadership has already spent a total of \$22.25 million of teachers' regular dues and plans to spend a total of \$40 million,<sup>10</sup> an unprecedented sum for a primary election. Yet NJEA leadership hides the existence of all three entities from the very teachers whose dues fund them.

### **3. NJEA Leadership Hides the Spiller Funding Stream from Teachers**

As mentioned above, NJEA leadership tries to deceive teachers into believing that NJEA PAC is the sum-total of the NJEA's political spending and therefore that their regular dues are not spent on politics. To buttress this deception, NJEA leadership also hides the existence of Garden State Forward from teachers.

- Searching the NJEA's website for the words "Garden State Forward" yields [zero](#) results. By contrast, a search for "NJEA PAC" yields [six pages](#) of results.
- Sunlight has studied both the NJEA's monthly magazines for teachers, *NJEA Review* and the now-defunct *NJEA Reporter*, going back decades. We have read every edition of *NJEA Review* since 2013 (when Garden State Forward was created), including all the Delegate Assembly minutes and annual budget

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<sup>9</sup> The linked Politico article says that Garden State Forward actually spent \$8 million on Protecting Our Democracy, but after searching all Garden State Forward's IRS Form 8872 filings, Sunlight could only find evidence of \$5 million spent.

<sup>10</sup> [\\$35 million](#) to Working New Jersey and \$5 million to Protecting Our Democracy.



summaries. There is no mention of Garden State Forward in the budgets<sup>11</sup> or the minutes<sup>12</sup> or anywhere else in these two publications.

- Nor does the NJEA mention Garden State Forward on its Facebook page. We searched the page for "Garden State Forward," but the [only result](#) that mentioned Garden State Forward was a post by Sunlight (we are not sure how it got there). There are two posts from Garden State Forward Facebook page (see below) -- from 2013 -- but a reader would have no idea from these posts that Garden State Forward was the NJEA's Super PAC.
- As mentioned, there is a Garden State Forward [Facebook page](#), but a teacher would have to know of Garden State Forward and its link to the NJEA to look for it. As we have seen, she won't get that from the NJEA. But even if she did know to look for it, she would find that nothing has been posted to the Facebook page *in over seven years*. Clearly, it is not an active Facebook page and is not used by the NJEA to publicize Garden State Forward or any of its activities to teachers. The same is true for the Garden State Forward [X page](#): nothing has been posted *in over seven years*. This account is clearly not being used to publicize Garden State Forward or its activities to teachers either. These are effectively dead social media sites that provide no information to teachers.
- Tellingly, when NJEA Vice President Beatty finally admitted that Garden State Forward is funded by teachers' regular dues, he did so in [New Jersey Globe](#), not in any of the NJEA's main interfaces with teachers. It can be assumed that very few, if any, teachers read the *Globe*, which is a political insider, online news publication. Notably, there are other *Globe* [stories](#) posted by the NJEA on its Facebook page, but not this one.

With regard to Spiller's candidacy in particular, NJEA leadership also hides the existence of pro-Spiller Super PACs Working New Jersey and Protecting Our Democracy.

- The existence of Working New Jersey was uncovered by *Politico* by examining its ELEC filings. NJEA leadership has never directly informed teachers of its existence on any of its main interfaces with teachers. A search for "Working New

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<sup>11</sup> The treatment of Garden State Forward in the budgets suggests deliberate obfuscation. In the budgets, the NJEA's spending on Garden State Forward is disguised as "Organizational Projects." A teacher would never know that this represents Garden State Forward spending. The reason Sunlight knows is because the amounts for Organizational Projects match exactly the amounts for Garden State Forward in the NJEA IRS Form 990s.

<sup>12</sup> The treatment of Garden State Forward in the Delegate Assembly minutes also suggests deliberate obfuscation. For example, the DA minutes for January 4, 2020, published online and in *NJEA Review*, a \$25 million budget transfer to Garden State Forward is described as to "strategic organizing and organizational projects accounts."

Jersey" on the NJEA website yields no mentions.<sup>13</sup> Nor has it ever been mentioned in *NJEA Review*. Nor does a search yield any mentions by the NJEA on its Facebook page.<sup>14</sup>

- The launch of Protecting Our Democracy was announced in *New Jersey Globe*, but not in any of the NJEA's main interfaces with teachers. Again, very few, if any, teachers read the *Globe*. Once again, the search function on the NJEA website for "Protecting Our Democracy" yields no results. Nor has it ever been mentioned in *NJEA Review*. Nor does a search yield any mentions by the NJEA on the NJEA's Facebook page.<sup>15</sup>

The bottom line is that there are no attempts by the NJEA to inform teachers of the existence of any of the three Super PACs on any of the NJEA's main interfaces with teachers, let alone any explanation that they are all funded by teachers' regular dues. This stands in stark contrast to the transparency surrounding NJEA PAC and its funding. As a result, the typical teacher would have no idea that \$40 million of their regular dues will be spent on Spiller's run.

#### **4. Garden State Forward Spending Does Not Reflect Teachers' Will or Best Interests**

While NJEA PAC is run by a Delegate Assembly committee whose activities are publicized and transparent, Garden State Forward is controlled via a "completely opaque" and little understood process that has never been fully explained to anyone, and certainly not to teachers. The *Star-Ledger* pieced together the closest thing we have to an explanation: decisions about Garden State Forward are made by "three top executives - one of whom is Spiller himself." As one of only three top executives making the decisions about Garden State Forward, the appearance of Spiller's conflict of interest is manifest.

Thus, contrary to the voluntary funding of NJEA PAC, teachers are being forced to fund Garden State Forward without their knowledge or consent. This use of their regular dues is not an expression of teachers' collective will and cannot be deemed to be in their best interests. Likewise, Garden State Forward is controlled by a small group of three top NJEA executives, including Spiller, not elected delegates, so the decisions made about Garden State Forward's spending cannot be said to reflect the collective will of teachers and cannot be deemed in their best interests.

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<sup>13</sup> There was one result from the search: an article entitled "Sean Spiller: the clear choice for New Jersey," but there is no mention of Working New Jersey in the article.

<sup>14</sup> Working New Jersey is mentioned in the body of a *Globe article* "Lesniak endorses Spiller; PAC launches ad run for NJEA leader," but a teacher would have to click through to the article to find it and there is no mention that the NJEA's Super PAC, Garden State Forward, is funding Working New Jersey.

<sup>15</sup> The abovementioned *Globe article* announced the creation of Protecting Our Democracy, but it was posted by the Camden County Republican Committee, not by the NJEA. .

#### **IV. SPILLER HAS IGNORED HIS CONFLICTS OF INTEREST IN THE PAST AND IS DOING SO AGAIN**

Spiller has repeatedly ignored his conflicts of interest during his political career. As a councilman, Spiller was [removed](#) from the Montclair Board of School Estimates by a Superior Court for his conflict of interest. As mayor, Spiller was [stripped](#) of the power to appoint the school board by an overwhelming majority of Montclair voters because of his conflict of interest. Yet Spiller told the [Star-Ledger](#) that in neither case did he see any conflict of interest. Notably, despite his duty to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, Spiller has not recused himself from decisions regarding Garden State Forward's role in his gubernatorial run. This is the third time in his political career that Spiller has had a conflict of interest, and the third time he has ignored it. This time it's his own union, with the complicity of NJEA leadership.

#### **V. IF TEACHERS HAD A CHOICE, WOULD THEY SUPPORT A WEAK, FLAWED CANDIDATE LIKE SPILLER WITH \$40 MILLION OF THEIR DUES?**

Even if teachers could conceivably believe that a Governor Spiller was in their best interests because he might be able to enhance their pensions, the reality is that Spiller is such a weak and deeply flawed candidate that any money spent supporting him would likely be wasted.

The most revealing barometer of public support is monetary contributions. Polls can be manipulated but not donations. By this measure, Spiller is an extremely weak candidate. Of the six candidates running for the Democratic nomination, Spiller is the only one not to have qualified for [matching funds](#), which means that Spiller did not even qualify for the [second gubernatorial debate](#). Since he announced his candidacy in June 2024, Spiller only raised [\\$182,000](#), a mere 1% of the \$15.6 million raised by all the gubernatorial candidates. Simply put, by these measures, Spiller is not a realistic candidate to win the Democratic nomination.

Having been removed from the debate stage, even Spiller is now forced to admit this grim reality. In late March, Spiller sent out a fundraising email entitled "Not looking so good," where Spiller implored donors: "Our campaign needs to raise money if we're going to remain competitive."<sup>16</sup> Clearly, given the choice, New Jersey voters are not interested in contributing to Spiller's candidacy.

This is no doubt related to Spiller's scandal-plagued political career in Montclair:

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix B for a screenshot of the Spiller email.

- As a councilman, Spiller was removed from the Board of School Estimates by a Superior Court for his conflict of interest.
- As mayor, Spiller was stripped of the power to appoint the school board by an overwhelming majority of Montclair voters because of his conflict of interest.
- As mayor, Spiller was the subject of a whistleblower lawsuit that accused him of misusing state health benefits, retaliation, and other malfeasance. The town was forced to settle the case for \$1.25 million.
- Spiller remains under ongoing criminal investigation for misusing state health benefits and pleaded his 5th Amendment right against self-*incrimination* over 400 times because of his potential legal jeopardy.
- Spiller is widely viewed in Montclair as a failed mayor, who would have lost badly had he run for re-election.

Is this the kind of candidate teachers would rely on to vindicate their pension interests? Or the kind of candidate they would support with their hard-earned dues? Would they choose to spend an unprecedented \$40 million backing him?

We don't know because NJEA leadership has never asked teachers this question or even permitted them to debate it. NJEA leadership, including the conflicted Spiller, has simply not given them a choice. Given Spiller's very poor showing among voters, his run looks more like a personal vanity project. Spending an unprecedented \$40 million of their dues backing their president's personal vanity project cannot be said to be in teachers' best interests.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The facts show that Spiller has likely violated the NJEA's conflict of interest policy in three ways: by his actions, by the appearance of a conflict of interest, and by his failure to avoid a conflict of interest. They also show that Spiller has a history of ignoring his conflicts of interest, and by not recusing himself, he is doing so again. This time it's his own union.

But Spiller's bad behavior also brings the conduct of NJEA leadership into question. The NJEA's conflict of interest policy disclosure to the IRS also includes the NJEA's attestation that it "regularly and consistently monitor[s] and enforce[s] compliance with the policy."<sup>17</sup> Where was the monitoring as millions of teachers' dues have been spent over several years in ways that violate the NJEA's conflict of interest policy? NJEA leadership has some serious explaining to do.

As NJEA PAC shows, NJEA leadership could have established mechanisms to allow teachers to express their collective will in the running of Garden State Forward, but they

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<sup>17</sup> NJEA 2022 IRS Form 990, Part VI, Section B, 12C. See Appendix A.

didn't. The opaque process of decision-making by a small group of top NJEA executives, including the conflicted Spiller, does not allow for the expression of teachers' collective will. Therefore, using Garden State Forward to spend \$40 million of teachers' regular dues on NJEA President Spiller's vanity run for governor cannot fairly be deemed in their best interest.

Rather, it suggests -- and certainly appears to be -- a misuse of \$40 million of their hard-earned dues for Spiller's benefit. Given Spiller's fiduciary duty to teachers, that constitutes a conflict of interest. Spiller is breaking his own union's rules, and NJEA leadership is letting him do it, so they are breaking the rules, too. It's a major scandal, and Spiller and the rest of the NJEA's leadership should be held accountable for it.

## APPENDIX A

NJEA 2022 IRS Form 990, Schedule O, Supplemental Information to Form 990, p. 31.

FORM 990, PART VI, SECTION B, LINE 12C	THE ORGANIZATION HAS A CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY FOR NJEA OFFICIALS: NO NJEA OFFICIAL SHALL, DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, HAVE ANY INTEREST OR RELATIONSHIP, TAKE ANY ACTION OR ENGAGE IN ANY TRANSACTION, OR INCUR ANY OBLIGATION WHICH IS IN CONFLICT WITH, OR GIVES THE APPEARANCE OF A CONFLICT WITH, THE PROPER AND FAITHFUL PERFORMANCE OF HIS OR HER NJEA RESPONSIBILITIES. A COPY OF THE CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY IS DISTRIBUTED TO ALL NJEA OFFICIALS, ALL CANDIDATES FOR NJEA OFFICE, AND ALL PERSONS WHO BECOME MEMBERS OF NJEA COMMITTEES OR ARE OTHERWISE DESIGNATED TO REPRESENT NJEA EACH YEAR. A REVIEW OF THE POLICY AND ITS RELATED PROCEDURES ARE REVIEWED AND PRESENTED ANNUALLY. THE CURRENT NJEA STAFF CONTRACTS INCLUDES A CONFLICT OF INTEREST SECTION, SPECIFICALLY: AVOIDANCE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST (MONITORED ANNUALLY): NO NJEA EMPLOYEE SHALL ACCEPT IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY MEANS ANYTHING OF VALUE WHICH HE/SHE KNOWS OR HAS REASON TO BELIEVE IS OFFERED TO HIM/HER WITH THE INTENT TO INFLUENCE HIM/HER IN THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS/HER NJEA DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.
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## APPENDIX B

From: "Sean Spiller" <info@seanspiller.com>  
Subject: Not looking so good  
Date: March 27, 2025 at 12:59:59 PM EDT  
Reply-To: info@seanspiller.com



I have to be blunt with you, folks: Our campaign urgently needs to raise money if we're going to remain competitive.

Monday marks the end of the first financial quarter of 2025, so my finance team has been going over the numbers. They let me know that our fundraising has not been where it needed to be over these last few months, and they asked me to reach out.

[Are you able to commit to donating \\$25 \(or any amount that's right for you\) to keep us going through the primary?](#)

[DONATE](#)

Look, I don't have Wall Street billionaires backing me, so I have to ask a lot of grassroots supporters like you. I don't take that lightly. But we're second in the polls, and we're running out of time to close the gap.

Your financial contributions directly support our efforts to get our message out to voters ahead of the primary election.

[We set a goal to raise an additional \\$10,000 before the quarter ends. Anything you can give now will help us keep this campaign going.](#)