Whose Money Determined the District 7 State Senate Election?

(PACtions speak louder than words)

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NC State Senate District 7 held a contested race in which Democrat Marcia Morgan ran to unseat Republican incumbent Michael Lee. Lee represented District 7 from 2014-2018 until Democrat Harper Peterson narrowly ousted him in 2020. Since the district is a swing district, Lee had a strong chance at regaining his old seat, and Morgan had a sincere opportunity to replace Peterson and continue District 7’s blue wave.

Lee and Morgan raised over a million dollars each, with Lee at about $1.3 million and Morgan at around $1.5 million. The Democratic party contributed over 300 thousand dollars more to this race than their Republican counterparts, suggesting the Democratic party cared more about winning this swing district. Morgan received almost 2,000 separate donations, compared to Lee’s low 259. If people speak with their money, there are significantly more people rooting for Morgan.

Although Morgan had more party support and more support from the public, she lacked support in the most crucial area: her voters. Only 35% of Morgan’s non-party donations came from within District 7, totaling about $90,000. On the other hand, Lee had 43% of his non-party donations coming from within District 7, totaling almost $150,000. That’s over 1.5 times more than Morgan’s in-district donations.

Lee’s in-district donations came mainly from PACs representing professional groups in the area, such as bar owners, farm agents and realtors. Almost all of Morgan’s PAC donations came from outside of the district, and she had less than half as much PAC money as Lee. Morgan’s in-district donations came instead mainly from individuals. PACs represent the interest of many people, furthering Lee’s advantage.

Lee narrowly won reelection, beating Morgan by 2% of the vote. Lee had less total money and fewer donations, but he had the support of his voters through PACs and his incumbent advantage.