

State Auditor Keller finds budgetary shortfalls

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SOS election expenses on his radar

SANTA FE – The New Mexico Office of the State Auditor has identified a pattern of chronic budgetary shortfalls related to the state’s election expenses. In a letter to Secretary of State Brad Winter, State Auditor Tim Keller outlined 10 consecutive fiscal years of under-budgeting, which created a need for \$25 million in emergency loans, grants and special appropriations to fund elections.

The letter calls on the Office of the Secretary of State to promptly implement best practices for accurate budgeting of election costs. The current practice creates an unnecessarily high level of financial risk in the state’s ability to regularly and fully fund elections and publicly financed campaigns.

“Repeatedly using emergency funding mechanisms for routine, regularly scheduled elections runs against commonsense budgeting principles,” stated State Auditor Tim Keller. “We know we are going to have elections, we know when we’re going to have them, and we know generally how much they cost. There is no need to use band aids year after year.”

For the past 10 years, from 2008 to 2017, emergency loans or special appropriations were made by the Board of Finance or from the General Fund to cover budget deficits of more than \$24 million representing a 43 percent increase over the SOS’s regular budget.

On multiple occasions, funds dedicated for publicly financed candidates were used to cover regular elections expenses. As a result, the fund balance decreased 80 percent from a high of more than \$2 million in 2010 to a low of nearly \$500,000 in 2015.

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The budgetary constraints that the State of New Mexico is facing in the upcoming fiscal year will be exacerbated if the SOS's pattern of under-budgeting election expenses continues. The OSA has offered to assist with efforts to address the problem, including coordination among county clerks and the SOS.