

## Corzine-Katz e-mail lawsuit costs taxpayers \$54,000, so far

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File PhotoSen. Jon Corzine, Carla Katz, and Bill Michaelcheck, right, in 2002.

The meter is still running, but so far the state has spent more than \$54,000 in staff time to defend Gov. Jon Corzine against a lawsuit seeking public release of e-mails between the governor and state-worker union leader Carla Katz.

Figures provided by the Attorney General's Office show \$54,293 spent on legal staff through June 3. That does not include time spent by Robert Gilson, director of the law division, who is handling the case as the state's top civil attorney, nor by attorneys in the governor's office.

The costs will continue to mount as Corzine appeals a judge's decision that the e-mails must be made public.

If the administration doesn't win the appeal, it will also have to cover the attorney fees for Republican Chairman Tom Wilson, who filed the lawsuit -- which so far amount to \$66,307.

"When all is said and done, this will turn out to be one of the biggest wastes of taxpayers' money in the history of the state," Wilson said. "This is all about nothing. This is a 'Seinfeld' case."

In his lawsuit, Wilson argued the public must be able to judge whether the relationship between Corzine and Katz, Corzine's former girlfriend, "is inappropriately influencing him as governor," particularly in labor relations with the CWA.

Corzine argued the e-mails must be kept out of public view because they are private communications that also are protected by executive privilege -- the doctrine made famous more than 30 years ago when President Richard Nixon invoked it to fend off congressional inquiries into the Watergate break-in.

In May, state Superior Court Judge Paul Innes ruled the e-mails, sent during the first 18 months of Corzine's term, were not merely private discussions between the governor or his staffers and Katz. Instead, Innes said, the relationship with Katz "created a clear potential for conflict" and found most of the hundreds of pages of e-mails and attachments should be released.

The judge stayed his ruling pending appeal, and on Friday signed an order awarding Wilson's legal fees.

Corzine has said the e-mails are "extraordinarily boring" but that he is fighting the lawsuit to protect the power of his office. The governor said last month that if the judge's ruling stands the precedent set on executive privilege could "be an undermining of the powers of not only me but future governors."

Corzine and Katz dated for two years before he ran for governor in 2005. A multimillionaire from his days on Wall Street, Corzine has given Katz millions of dollars in gifts.

Wilson said, "I would hope that the governor, who has seen fit to be infinitely generous when it comes to matters involving Carla Katz, will be similarly generous when it comes to matters involving Carla Katz and the expenditure of tax money, and agree to reimburse the state treasury for all the money he's choosing to waste on this lawsuit."

Wilson's attorney, Mark Sheridan, said that when the cost of appeals are added, the money "spent at the trial court level will seem like peanuts." He estimates his own fees could easily reach \$150,000.

When Wilson first filed suit against Corzine, the case was being handled by then-senior deputy attorney general Patrick DeAlmeida, who spent more than 307 hours on the matter. After DeAlmeida was appointed as a state tax judge, Gilson took over. As director of the Law Division, Gilson earns \$137,735 a year, but his time and pay is not broken down by case.

Corzine spokeswoman Deborah Howlett referred calls about the legal costs to Attorney General Anne Milgram's office. Milgram spokesman Lee Moore declined to comment.