



Democracy Reform Oregon

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Accessible politics, accountable government

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What is a Chief Petitioner PAC Doing Giving to Candidates?

Though complying with the letter of the law, contributions from First Class Education chief petitioner committee to candidates violate the spirit of transparency and fail to honor the intent of donors.

Fundraising by First Class Education for Oregon PAC was not included in Democracy Reform Oregon's analysis of recent chief petitioner campaign finance reports

(<http://www.democracyreform.org/files/091307cpreports.pdf>)

because the committee's expenditures focused on contributions to candidates during the 2006 general election and not signature gathering.

In-kind contributions from the First Class Education PAC appeared on candidate campaign finance disclosures during the 2006 general election, but it was impossible to trace the source of that funding until this fall's chief petitioner report deadline.

A First Class Education for Oregon chief petitioner committee formed early in 2006 and spent almost \$60,000. However, no expenditures were coded as being for petition circulators even though their stated goal was to qualify an initiative for that year's general election.

The 2006 First Class Education committee closed out its accounts, making contributions in August 2006 to a committee with the same name whose stated goal was signature gathering for a 2008 petition. The September 2007 report of this PAC, however, again shows that \$119,000 went to support candidates, all Republicans, during last fall's general election with only \$6,000 spent on signature gathering services (the remainder was spent for other purposes).

Since 2001, chief petitioner committees have been required to file up to four reports on contributions and spending on their signature gathering activities. The trigger for filing is having raised or spent more than \$2,000. The first reporting deadline for initiatives headed for the 2008 ballot came this month. In the case of First Class Education, this means their reporting of donors and spending on candidates is only appearing almost a year after the contributions made to influence several 2006 general election races.

"Providing timely information to the public is the goal of Oregon's campaign finance disclosure laws," said Janice Thompson, executive director of Democracy Reform Oregon. "This goal would have been realized by the First Class Education committee directors forming another PAC

with the stated purpose of supporting candidates that would have reported during the 2006 general election.”

Fortunately, because of recent legislation that goes into effect on January 2008, chief petitioner committees will begin reporting using the ORESTAR continuous campaign finance reporting system that resulted from a major campaign finance disclosure upgrade adopted during the 2005 legislative session.

“If future chief petitioner PACs give money to candidates rather than to petition circulators, they will still need to explain that decision to their donors,” commented Thompson. “But at least now the public will be able to see these spending patterns and their contributors in a timely fashion.”

Democracy Reform Oregon (DRO) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit group working to increase accountability and opportunities for participation in politics and governmental decision-making. DRO has been working on democracy reform issues since 1999 and was formerly the Money in Politics Research Action Project.

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