

Patterson denies he knew about donation

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

It's hard to raise campaign funds. But Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson wishes he'd never attracted one large donation.

On the afternoon of a fund-raiser in his honor, Patterson's office Thursday spent two hours explaining \$840 given to his re-election campaign. The donation came June 18 from Farmington Hills auto dealer Bob Saks, who had been questioned earlier by the prosecutor's office during a utility fraud investigation.

Patterson's chief assistant on May 10 decided against charging the dealer.

WHILE ADMITTING he got the June donation, Patterson denied he was aware of it until last week when a television report linked the money to his office's decision not to pursue the utility fraud case. The prosecutor has threatened to sue WXYZ-TV and reporter Vince Wade for slandering his reputation. Pontiac attorney Elbert Hatchett is representing the Patterson.

"Politicians don't have much, but what they do have and earn are their reputations," Patterson said, flanked by his wife and several staff members.

"I built a reputation, and in one night an irresponsible reporter impugned that reputation," he said.

The station said it stood by its story.

PATTERSON'S ANGER was prompted by a television report shown at 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. Wednesday. It dealt with an investigation by the Michigan State Police and Detroit Edison Co. into charges that some area auto dealers allowed their electric meters to be "fixed" to save on energy costs.

Several newspapers have covered the utility fraud investigation of 81 state businesses. Of 32 located in Oakland County, nine of those being investigated were auto dealerships.

"Of 44 target suspects, two were charged in Wayne County," said Richard Thompson, Patterson's chief assistant. One (Robert Gilroy) has the case against himself dismissed in return for being allowed to plead his corporation (Action Olds) guilty. The other (against Saks) is pending trial.

After a year and a half investigation, the Oakland County prosecutor's office decided in May not to proceed with its cases.

The television story said auto dealer Mechling in June contributed \$640 to Patterson's re-election campaign, and eight weeks later the case was dropped by the prosecutor's office.

Using the business name Bob Saks, Mechling bought eight 180 tickets to a Hearns-Duran fight June 15 in the Silverdome's Main Event. The event was a Patterson fund-raiser.

THE TELEVISION report also cited a \$5,000 contribution from the Detroit Auto Dealers Association (DADA) to Patterson's campaign for state attorney general. DADA treasurer is Marvin Tamaroff, a Southfield Buick dealer and also a sub-

ject of the investigation.

Thompson replied: "The DADA contribution was 'in the works a long time' before it was actually received in November of 1982."

In November of 1982 the State Police sought a warrant against informant William H. Jones, 35, of Taylor, but the focus of the investigation didn't shift to auto dealers until later.

"Both the State Police and the prosecutor's office came to the same conclusion: that the individual (Tamaroff) was not guilty."

The \$5,000 gift came from an association, not individuals under investigation. "I don't think being part of an association which happens to support your candidacy is grounds for an apparent conflict of interest," he said.

"The official side of an office does not know what the political side is doing. That is by design. What typically happens is that by accident someone spots a name (on a list of contributors) and says, 'Hey, we're investigating that person.'"

THOMPSON SAID Jones pleaded guilty to a charge of fraud brought by an auto dealer. Circuit Judge George LaPlata placed Jones on probation for two years.

Patterson's assistant said Patterson played no part in the decision not to prosecute.

Thompson said he and Michael A. Izzo, chief of warrants, decided there was insufficient evidence to prove utility fraud. He said that they based their decision on the fact that informant Jones had flunked a polygraph test and that he had pleaded guilty to obtaining money under false pretenses. Jones later passed another polygraph test.

Another factor was a state law which grants amnesty to people involved in utility fraud if they make arrangements to pay their bills.

PATTERSON SAID he was unaware of the campaign contribution from Saks but would have returned it immediately if he'd known the money had come in. The prosecutor said donations from people investigated by his office or other agencies are returned to the donors.

"To suggest that I would risk 12 years in the prosecutor's office and my personal reputation — which up to last night was impeccable — and then suggest I would take a bribe and then document it for all to know," said Patterson, adding that he "wouldn't know him (Saks) if he walked into this room."

"I did absolutely nothing wrong or improper in this case, nor did my staff."

The prosecutor offered to take a lie detector test if Wade would publicly retract the news story and publicly apologize to him, his family and staff.

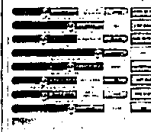
When the reporter said he would report the polygraph results, Patterson said he intends to sue. Asked if he would return the campaign contribution, the prosecutor said he won't because that would admit guilt.

"We will take our lumps on that but don't suggest that had input into any decisions by this office."



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