

Did some Proposal A money go to candidates?

By Tom Ferguson
staff writer

State Senate Republicans are rubbing salt in Proposal A backers' wounds by promising subpoenas and a committee probe of possibly illegal campaign spending.

At issue is whether \$35,000 of the \$3.2 million raised by the Promote Michigan Education Committee wound up promoting local government candidates in Detroit. Such use of corporate contributions would be a criminal violation of campaign law.

Senate Democrats call the subpoena threat nothing more than an early salvo in Sen. John Engler's 1990 gubernatorial campaign. And Ann Beser, director of the Proposal A committee, said: "As far as I'm concerned, (the spending) was absolutely legal. This is strictly partisan politics."

But Sen. Doug Cruce, R-Troy, said: "We're not convinced there were necessarily any intentional violations. The committee would determine if violations were worthy of enforcement, or if there was need for a change in the law."

CRUCE CHAIRS a subcommittee of the Government Operations Committee, chaired by Engler, which voted to subpoena Beser and two other officials of the Proposal A campaign. Both officials are aligned with Gov. Blanchard. Cruce said the subpoenas would be issued within a week or two.

The Proposal A committee funneled \$15,000 to the Black Slate, which endorses and campaigns for issues and candidates in Detroit, and \$10,000 each to the political action committees of Detroit's 1st and 13th congressional districts.

"We were not paying to be on a slate, but for distribution of our brochures and to get out the vote," Beser said last week.

Barbara Martin, Black Slate treasurer, said it would be impossible to separate her group's Proposal A efforts from efforts for other issues and candidates. "We could hardly put 150 poll workers out just to work for Proposal A," she said.

Martin said her understanding was that the group was to "distribute 50,000 pieces of Proposal A literature and have the proposal on the slate."

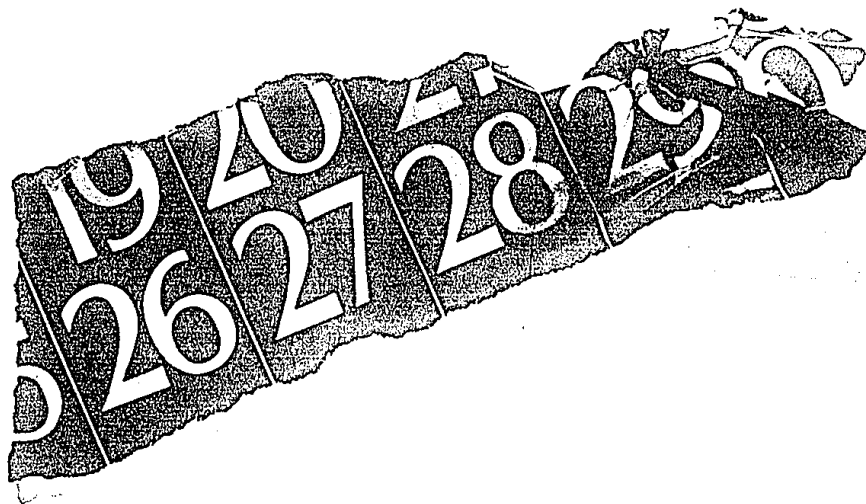
"I didn't go looking for this," Martin added. "They came and asked for our support."

Martin said the Black Slate spent about \$35,000 on the election, including the \$15,000 from Beser's committee. "Coleman Young put in more than they did," she said.

Spokesmen for the 1st and 13th District PAC committees could not be reached for comment. Cruce said it was his understanding that they used Proposal A money to circulate brochures for local candidates.

MEANWHILE, THE state Bureau of Elections asked the Proposal A committee to provide by Dec. 7 a more detailed accounting of how the three Detroit groups spent the \$35,000. Lawrence Owen, attorney for the Proposal A committee and one of the officials expected to be subpoenaed by Engler's panel, asked for a deadline extension.

"We have not received the information from outside parties that is necessary to respond to your inquiry," Owen wrote. He was granted an extension until this week.



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