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List maker

Lansing man vends voter rolls to candidates

By RALPH R. ECHTINAW
 STAFF WRITER

In baseball you can't tell the players apart without a scorecard, and in politics you can't identify the voters without Mark Grebner.

Grebner, 39, is a decidedly iconoclastic Ingham County commissioner with his hair down past his shoulders and a bumper-sticker slogan that goes, "No worse than the rest."

He's also co-owner of Practical Political Consulting and earns a living by selling voter lists to candidates.

"He has a good reputation," said state Sen. Dave Honigman, R-West Bloomfield. "It's nice to see a public official who doesn't take himself too seriously."

The spotlight of controversy fell on Grebner's business last summer when he refused to sell a voter list to then-candidate for U.S. Congress Alice Gilbert.

But why? Doesn't he need the money?

For one thing, the Marketing Resource Group (which was in the employ of Honigman, who opposed Gilbert) gave Grebner \$5,000 not to deal with Gilbert.

"Unethical"—Gilbert

Gilbert called it unethical, but

POLITICS

Grebner compared it to a developer buying an option on property. The developer may or may not want to build on the property, but with an option he can keep his competitor away from it.

For another thing, Grebner didn't want to work with Gilbert. "She's hard to deal with, and when I talked to her she was bizarre," he said.

For her part, Gilbert laughed when she read the preceding quote. "He's just looking for an excuse for his own poor conduct," she said.

Such is life when you mess around in the seamy world of politics.

Grebner, a Democrat, has been in the voter list business since 1974. It began as a hobby, but grew into a full-blown business by 1980.

He can supply candidates with lists tailored to almost every conceivable need. Sometimes a candidate wants to know all the voters over the age of 60. Grebner can do it. Sometimes they want a list of all the registered voters who regularly cast ballots. Grebner can do it. Typically he charges 3 cents per name.

Joe Knollenberg, who won the Republican primary in which Honigman and Gilbert metaphori-

cally beat each other senseless, bought separate lists from Grebner for door-to-door campaigning, telephone campaigning and campaign mailings, said Carol Morlan, his campaign manager.

It's also helpful to candidates that Grebner's lists don't include voters who have moved or died. This is often a problem that city or township clerks face, and their voter lists are supposed to be continually updated to weed out the dead people and those who have left town.

But clerks don't always perform this function with great accuracy or frequency, Grebner said, making his service all the more valuable.

Lauds Oakland County

"Michigan probably has the worst voter files in the country," Grebner said. "It's a hell of a life, let me tell you, living on the kindness of city clerks."

However, Grebner doesn't include Oakland County in his roster of disorganized governments. He mentioned that Southfield has "always done a good job," and Troy, Birmingham, Rochester Hills and Pontiac are "all pretty well run."

Grebner saved his highest accolade for Farmington Hills, which

"seems to be at the outer edge of competence." Hills officials have moved their voter lists into the hard drives of desk-top computers, as opposed to big mainframe computers or simple typewriter-produced lists. Other communities, mostly out-state, are "kind of stuck in the 19th century," Grebner said, and sometimes try to withhold information that they're required by law to provide upon request. But they usually come across with the material once a lawsuit is threatened or initiated.

Since the primaries concluded Aug. 4, Grebner has begun dealing solely with Democrats, as is his policy leading up to the general election. Consequently, he has sold a list to Knollenberg's Democratic opponent, Walter Briggs.

So in a sense, because he sold a list to Knollenberg in the spring, Grebner is helping two candidates fight each other for the same U.S. Congress seat.

But life remains more predictable and safe if one deals with just one side in a political battle, or a war. So Grebner won't back two candidates at the same time who are running against each other.

"It's like being an arms merchant and dealing with both sides," he said.

Stalking bills help women, politicians

By TIM RICHARD
 STAFF WRITER

Four anti-stalking bills are likely to reach Gov. John Engler's desk in time to benefit both sides of the political side on election day.

Stalking is defined as "malicious harassment which causes substantial mental suffering or distress." It most often occurs in a husband-wife breakup.

The state House of Representatives last week adopted two bills by Rep. Dianne Byrum, a Democrat from Ingham County. She's in a tough re-election battle against the father of Engler's press secretary.

On the House floor, the bills were

pushed by House Judiciary chair Perry Bullard, D-Ann Arbor, who is in a tough campaign for district judge.

House Bill 4532 creates the crime of stalking and provides for a one-year jail term and fine of \$1,000. HB 6038 would allow a warrantless arrest of someone violating an anti-stalking court order. They sailed through the House Thursday on 103-0 votes.

But the House held up action on Senate Bill 619, by Sen. Robert Geake, R-Northville, creating the crime of "aggravated stalking" and making it a five-year felony.

The bill sat in Bullard's commit-

tee since the Senate passed it in May and was reported out only last week. Geake is in a tough battle for Congress.

Geake was unperturbed that the House failed to vote on his bill. "They want the bills to come out together," he said.

Meanwhile, the Senate Judiciary Committee reported out the fourth bill in the package — Geake's SB 1095 would allow civil lawsuits for damages caused by stalking and allow victims to obtain court orders against the stalker.

"This creates the new tort of stalking. It allows exemplary damages, court costs and reasonable at-

torney fees," Geake told the panel.

"Victims of domestic violence are a big percentage of the victims of stalking," said Kathy Hageman of Safe House in Ann Arbor. "They have no remedy until the stalker takes action."

"There are 27,000 domestic crimes a year," said Kate Young of the state Department of Social Services. "They often occur when a victim has fled for safety. We think in the long run this bill will save lives."

The Senate Judiciary Committee reported out the bills to the Senate floor on a 3-0 vote. They are likely to be voted on this week.

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