

# Commissioners request answers on costs of prosecuting Kevorkian

BY PAT MURPHY  
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If you've been wondering how much tax money was spent to take Dr. Jack Kevorkian to trial — twice — you're not alone. Some Oakland County commissioners are wondering too, and they're trying to demand answers — over the objections of their colleagues who suggested their actions were politically motivated.

Republican commissioners decided to ask Oakland Prosecutor Richard Thompson to attend their June 17 caucus and talk about the Kevorkian case.

Thompson doesn't have to accept the invitation, said county chair John P. McCulloch, R-Royal Oak. "But we'd like to hear from him."

Kevorkian, the retired West Bloomfield pathologist who relishes the nickname "Doctor Death," has twice been tried in Oakland Circuit Court on separate charges of violating Michigan law against assisted suicide. Both trials — one starting in February and the other starting in April — lasted four weeks or longer, and both ended in acquittals.

The trials — and the cost — came up Thursday at a caucus of Republican county commissioners prior to the regular meeting of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

"I don't know about you," said commissioner Dan Devine Jr. of Bloomfield Hills, "but a lot of people ask me about the county resources spent prosecuting Kevorkian."

"I'm embarrassed that I don't know," he said.

Devine, an attorney, said he wants prosecutor Richard Thompson to address commissioners and talk about the expense of prosecuting Kevorkian who has been involved in at least 28 assisted suicides.

"He (Thompson) talks to us when he wants more money for a special unit (such as homicide investigation)," said Devine. "He should be willing to talk to us about this too. I want to know."

Commissioner Lawrence R. Obrecht, however, said Devine's comments had the smell of politics.

"Before you start grilling Mr. Thompson," said Obrecht, R-Lake Orion, "shouldn't you (Devine) mention that you're on the campaign committee of the

prosecutor's opponent? Shouldn't you disclose there might be a political motive involved?"

Devine has endorsed David G. Gorceyca, the former assistant prosecutor and current city commissioner in Royal Oak, who is challenging the incumbent in the Aug. 6 GOP primary.

"I'm not on his (Gorceyca's) campaign committee," said Devine. "But I have endorsed him."

"But my questions have nothing to do with politics. I just want to know how much the county spent prosecuting Kevorkian."

Commissioner Donald W. Jensen, R-Birmingham, suggested that trying to demand answers from the prosecutor might be an inappropriate

infringement on his discretionary powers. "He has the authority to decide how to carry out the duties of his office," said Jensen. "We (commissioners) don't ask about the expense of prosecuting a murder charge."

Robert J. Daddow, county director of management and budget, said the prosecutor may not have an accurate breakdown of the costs. "He may not have those kinds of figures broken down," he said.

Devine and other commissioners were not satisfied with that possibility, however. "If Mr. Thompson doesn't have those figures," said Devine, "he should have."

"I'm anxious to see what he says on the 17th," the commissioner concluded.

## A year after millage vote, SMART questions linger

Republican county commissioners were in a somewhat combative mood as they caucused before Thursday's regular county board meeting.

As they normally do, commissioners previewed the agenda and discussed concerns, including whether or not SMART, the area transit system, was living up to its commitment to provide a state-of-the-art system.

Last year at this time Oakland County was preparing for a millage vote to raise additional operational revenue for SMART which was threatening to scale down or discontinue service. As part of the effort to persuade voters to approve the millage, SMART promised changes and improvements.

One commissioner who voiced concern was John Garfield, R-Rochester Hills, who wanted more information

on issues such as a possible merger between SMART (Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation) and DDOT (the Detroit Department of Transportation).

Corporation counsel Gerald D. Polsson assured commissioners a merger wasn't likely.

Garfield's question, however, triggered comments from other commissioners about a general lack of information. Perhaps deputy executive John Grubba, the county's chief liaison with SMART, should be asked to appear before commissioners, they said.

But commissioner Larry Crake of Waterford voiced skepticism. If the deputy county executive did appear, said Crake, "He'd dance around the table until he wore out the carpet."

Grubba Thursday was not available to comment.

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