

EXHIBIT 8
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HB HB 760

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8500 Senate
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Raiding piggy bank common in legislative races

By The Associated Press

HELENA - Jeff Essmann, like many legislative candidates, reached deep into his pocket last year for a job that comes with long hours and little pay.

The Republican senator from Billings spent about \$24,000 to keep a job paying less than \$20,000 every other year. His colleague, Rep. Roger Koopman, R-Bozeman, spent about \$10,000 of his own money.

"I spent that much? My wife's going to kill me," Koopman said.

In all, 209 of Montana's 302 legislative candidates either spent their own money or borrowed to pay for part of their campaigns, according to Linda Casey of the Institute on Money in State Politics. The Helena-based, nonpartisan group analyzes the economic interests behind candidates nationwide.

Although self-giving historically has been a major source of campaign dollars, Casey said that in the last decade, the amounts spent by some legislative candidates rose dramatically.

The number of self-financed candidates and the average sums they've put into their campaigns has risen steadily since a 1994 Montana ballot initiative imposed some of the country's strictest limits on campaign donations, Casey said.

The low limits were seen as a safeguard against wealthy interests swaying Montana's elections. Currently, individuals can give \$130 to a legislative candidate per election. A bill in the works would allow increases based on inflation.

Casey said the low limit on donations sounds like a good idea, but may exclude from some races people who lack personal money to spend on their campaigns.

"Are we missing out on this citizen legislature ... when normal citizens can't run because they can't afford it?" Casey asked.

Some lawmakers argue limits on campaign donations must increase beyond an adjustment for inflation.

"The donation limit is so low you wind up focusing so much of your attention (while campaigning) on raising money," said Koopman. "I think that's perverse."

Essmann said a small cap on giving is "going to have a long-term negative impact on who can serve."

He argued it would be better to raise the limit and require more frequent and available disclosures of who is paying for political campaigns.

Jonathan Motl, a Helena area lawyer who wrote the 1994 ballot initiative, said those concerns are unfounded and have been disproved by the diversity of the Montana Legislature, which has rich and poor members.

"No system is going to be perfect, but the public good is unquestionably served with campaign contribution limits that are aimed at the very top ... contributors," Motl said. "It keeps contributions in the range of a normal contributor."

Casey pointed out that candidates who forked over large amounts of their own money were not guaranteed a win. Five of the top six self-givers in last fall's legislative races - all of whom spent more than \$10,000 of their own money - lost.

Records show candidates can raise a lot of money without breaking their own banks.

Margie MacDonald raised about \$60,000 from outside sources in her losing bid to Sen. Roy Brown, R-Billings. Raising that much took a great deal of effort, MacDonald said.

"Had I known, going into it, that I would have raised that much money, I don't think I would have filed," she said.

Essmann said he believes it was not his money but his effort to knock on 7,000 doors in his district that decided his race.

The \$24,000 he spent on the election was money well spent, he said.

"I didn't run for the income or benefits," he said. "I ran because I wanted to serve."

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