



DTE/Blues Open PAC Wallets In '08

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The much-debated "energy bills" and "Blue Cross bills," the two biggest policy initiatives in Lansing this session, are being driven by seven-figure advertising campaigns and more than \$700,000 in political contributions to legislators, according to a Michigan Campaign Finance Network (MCFN) analysis issued today.

Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM) ran a \$1.4 million statewide television ad blitz from mid-January through mid-February touting its proposal to remake the individual health insurance market in Michigan. It has backed that effort with \$352,000 in contributions to legislators and their political action committees (PAC)s so far this election cycle, the MCFN reported.

In the House, 99 of the 110 of the members has recently received BCBSM PAC money, but every member of the House has taken Blue Cross PAC money at some point in their legislative careers (See "Blue Cross PAC Touches Everyone," 12/4/07). In the Senate, all but one member has taken BCBSM PAC money recently. And the one exception has taken a PAC check in the past.

Meanwhile, the Michigan Jobs and Energy Coalition has a \$1.9 million statewide television ad campaign in progress at this time. The ads, which began in early April and will continue through the end of May, promote the coalition's agenda for "comprehensive" energy policy.

DTE Energy and Consumers Energy, the two most prominent members of the Jobs and Energy Coalition, have combined to give legislators and their PACs \$366,000 so far this election cycle. Overall, 92 of 110 House members and 37 of 38 senators have taken money from at least one of the two energy companies PACs in recent months. But every member of the Legislature has taken money from one or both of the utilities at some point in their careers.

MCFN Director Rich ROBINSON said he's not bringing up the donations and spending to slam the proposals. Rather, he said both packages are "mixed bags." He released the disclosures to make the broader point that all of the lobbying money BCBSM and the energy companies cannot be tracked because of the state's loose reporting rules.

Any lobbying done on behalf of the giant companies by multi-client firms are indiscernible because multi-client firms are not required to report how much was spent on behalf of which client or which bill they were advocating. Federal laws and a new Wisconsin law does require such reporting, he said.

"Clearly these are very high stakes efforts to drive public policy," Robinson said. "The health of Michigan's citizens, environment and economy will be affected for years, if not decades to come.

"Michigan's weak lobbying disclosure requirements should be reformed so reporting is more timely and so we can easily identify all lobbying efforts behind any package of bills."

After reviewing Robinson's comments, BCBSM Spokeswoman Helen STOJIC said the company's employee PAC saw its expenditures drop in 2007 when compared to 2006.

"Our PAC contributions represents the collective conscience of more than 2,000 Blues employees and their interest in good public policy," Stojic said. "Our PAC approach has always been nonpartisan and will remain focused on developing sound public policy in Michigan."