

# The special-interest groups

Austin Bureau of the News

**A**USTIN — Your average citizen doesn't know BOLD from CLOUT, HOPE from HELP, CUT from KISS. But he should, because any one of those special-interest groups might be financing the election of Mr. Average Citizen's public officials.

It's not fun tracking this stuff down, either, but it's an every 2-year exercise and it's also important that voters at least get access to it.

From the top, BOLD isn't as bad as it sounds; it's a group of relatively young Houston black leaders. And CLOUT may sound vicious, even though it's an acronym for Cops for Legislative Organization and Unity in Texas.

HOPE is an optimistic Hispanic political organization, but HELP is the long-standing political arm of the hospital trade association.

CUT stands for Citizens Unjustly Taxed, an Amarillo group whose purpose must be obvious. KISS is less obvious, but it stands for Keep It Simple Simonton, a local organization west of Houston.

Not to belabor the point, but SCORE doesn't refer to the Playboy philosophy. To the contrary, it's the Special Committee on Religion and Ethics. And SCOPE isn't as broad as it sounds, because the contributors all work for a Panhandle utility company.

COPE is not a sedative-selling outfit, either. It's the labor unions' Texas political-giving arm. And it would take a horoscope fan to figure out that PISCES is the political action committee of the seafood industry.

But, no, SWAP is not the pawnbrokers' lobby; SWAP is social workers, while BROPAC is the pawnbrokers.

And don't look for PEACE in your Bible; that's the private employment agencies' political front. PAL may sound friendly, too, if you like pharmacists. And if you want a real LIFT, you'll pay a fee to the trial lawyers.

What are these folks and why are they doing this to us voters?

Mainly, they are political action groups that, for one reason or an-



**Sam  
Kinch Jr.**

other, bank their money and give it out through a state-sanctioned method called a political action committee, or PAC. Why all those acronyms? It's easy, it's legal and it's hard to trace in many cases.

The law is designed to let citizens know who is financing the campaigns of political candidates. But if you see listed on your candidate's campaign finance report just an amount, an acronym and a postal box number, you don't really know, do you?

Nope. But for two consecutive legislative sessions, your lawmakers have not acted to make it more clear what a given PAC represents — or even how to track down the individual who handles the money.

A perfect example is a new outfit called Forces of Goodness and Light, which gives a street address in Georgetown, north of Austin, and the name I.B. Wood. There's no I.B. Wood listed in the telephone book, and his

utilities are in the name of "Bic." At News expense, I tracked down the telephone number, but your average citizen isn't likely to get that curious.

Another sample is a new wrinkle in Texas: BACPAC has that outdoorsy, mountain range touch. But it stands for Businessmen Are Concerned PAC, and it's not a money-giving political group at all. Rather, it is a mechanism through which Austin lobbyist-publicist Jerry Hall collects some of his consultant fees.

LIKEWISE, three innocuous-sounding PACs are listed at the Greenville address of Dr. Robert Mansker. But Mansker is in Washington now, the PACs are inoperative and they are kept alive solely because Mansker wants to keep up with who is soliciting campaign funds from whom.

The point of all this is simple: there's nothing wrong with using PACs, or with taking money from them. But the law should require that candidates reporting those contributions make clear what the interest group behind the money is, just as the PACs themselves should be required to identify themselves by street address and telephone number.

If the idea was to let citizens know who is financing their politicians' campaigns, after all, the law should actually accomplish that.

On the other hand, it sure would mess up a biennial column. How otherwise, for example, would I find out that the ultimate PAC — PAC-PAC, by name — is, in reality, just a group of plumbing and air-conditioning companies?