

LOBBY WATCH



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“The Sandbagger Five”

June 21, 2001

False Modesty Lets 5 Lawmakers Dodge Electronic Disclosure

- Legislators Asked To Comply With Spirit of Law.

Sandbagger: [SLANG] one who deceives an opponent, as by deliberately playing poorly.

Five Texas House members appear to have used false pretenses to dodge a law that requires politicians to electronically disclose campaign contributions.

A 1999 law required most state politicians to begin filing their campaign donor and expenditure data in a computerized format last year. These data are much more accessible to the public because the Texas Ethics Commission posts them on the Internet.

Loopholes in the law allow politicians to circumvent electronic disclosure if they swear that they:

- Do “not intend to accept more than \$20,000 in political contributions or spend more than \$20,000” during a calendar year; or
- “Do not use computer equipment to keep current records of political contributions, political expenditures or contributors.”

Texas Ethics Commission records indicate that some lawmakers who claimed that they did not intend to raise more than \$20,000 in calendar year 2000 engaged in false modesty at the public’s expense. Five House members who claimed this exemption raised more than

\$20,000 in 2000—with one member raising more than three times this amount. Five sandbaggers also spent more than \$20,000 last year.

The most deluded sandbagger is Houston Rep. Joe Nixon, who raised \$64,900 in 2000. Henderson Rep. Paul Sadler—who often is asked to solve the House’s toughest problems—failed to meet this modest disclosure challenge. In fact, he and Rep. Nixon covered all their non-disclosure bases by also filing for the no-computer exemption.

The ‘Sandbagger Five’ Shirked Electronic Disclosure Laws

House Member	Calendar 2000		Contributions	2000 Cycle	
	Contributions	Expenditures	Reported Electronically	Contributions	Expenditures
*Joe Nixon (R-Houston)	\$64,900	\$43,016		\$64,900	\$47,353
*Paul Sadler (D-Henderson)	\$58,525	\$22,450		\$79,775	\$49,574
Helen Giddings (D-Dallas)	\$57,270	\$42,718	\$40,870	\$95,160	\$59,942
Peggy Hamric (R-Houston)	\$32,550	\$30,408	\$27,500	\$57,192	\$43,259
Joe Deshotel (D-Beaumont)	\$24,825	\$18,896		\$51,073	\$42,406
TOTALS:	\$238,070	\$157,488	\$68,370	\$348,100	\$242,534

* Also filed for the no-computer "Luddite" exemption.

Dallas Rep. Helen Giddings and Houston Rep. Peggy Hamric claimed low-budget exemptions and then proceeded to electronically disclose most of their contributions.

Last April, Giddings sabotaged another disclosure bill by stripping a provision to make

politicians disclose the occupations and employers of big donors.

Finally, Beaumont Rep. Joe Deshotel exceeded his pledged \$20,000 contribution limit by a little less than \$5,000.

"By raising more money than they said they would, the 'Sandbagger Five' dodged disclosure and misled the public," said Texans for Public Justice Director Craig McDonald. "Now they should obey the spirit of the law by refileing electronically."

For information about politicians who dodged electronic filing by claiming that they do not use computers to track contributors, see "Luddite Lawmakers" at <http://www.tpj.org>.