

NAMES IN THE NEWS: GEOFFREY FIEGER

By
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Although his nationwide claim to fame is as the lawyer defending Dr. Jack Kervorkian – a noted assisted suicide advocate – from murder charges in the 1990s, ¹ attorney Geoffrey N. Fieger also has made a name as a force in Michigan politics. He ran for governor in 1998, winning the Democratic nomination but losing in the general election to Republican incumbent Gov. John Engler. In that election, Fieger gave his unsuccessful campaign nearly all of the \$5.7 million he raised. He and his wife have contributed another \$125,400 to candidates and Democratic Party committees in the past eight years.

And recently, Fieger's political activities became the focus of a campaign-finance investigation when he disclosed he provided \$457,000² for anonymous attack ads against sitting Supreme Court Justice Stephen Markman in the 2004 elections. The ads were run by a political committee named Citizens for Judicial Reform, which did not file reports with the Michigan Secretary of State or the Internal Revenue Service until after it missed a filing deadline.³ Previous to his disclosure, the Michigan Bureau of Elections had been unable to determine where Citizens for Judicial Reform received its funding.⁴ In March 2005, the case was referred to the state attorney general's office for further investigation.⁵

Even after the disclosure of Fieger's contribution, the case remained open in part because it appeared all the contact information for the committee was false; the address provided was to a burned-down tire store and the treasurer is suspected to be made up.⁶ In November 2005, current Attorney General Mike Cox, a Republican elected in 2002, accused Fieger of using a marital indiscretion to blackmail him into dropping the investigation.⁷ No charges were filed against Fieger in this case, ⁸ although he currently is the focus of a federal investigation into funds he and his law firm staff gave to 2004 Democratic presidential and vice-presidential nominees John Kerry and John Edwards ⁹

Excluding the millions he gave to his own campaign, the Fiegers have given \$125,400 to state-level candidates and Democratic Party committees. Party committees received the bulk of this money: \$90,100 or 72 percent. Sixteen candidates shared the remaining \$35,300. Most of the Fieger's contributions came during the 2002 election cycle. In Michigan, state Senate candidates are elected every four years, coinciding with the elections for governor and other statewide officials. Thus, 1998 and 2002 provided more opportunities for contributing substantial amounts of money. Democratic candidates and party committees received \$105,700, or 84 percent of the money given by the Fiegers. Nonpartisan candidates for the Supreme Court collected \$18,700.

¹ David Ashenfelter and Joe Swickard, "Fieger: I'm a Victim, Not a Criminal," *The Detroit Free Press*, Dec. 2, 2005, sec. A, p. 1.

² This figure was taken from a May 31, 2005, amendment to the January 31, 2005 Campaign Statement filed with the Michigan Bureau of Elections by The Citizens for Judicial Reform (Committee ID No. 512396-3).

³ Editorial, "Fieger Case: Back to Basics," The Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 27, 2005, sec. C, p. 2.

⁴ David Eggert, "GOP Leaders Deny Partisanship in Fieger Investigation," The Associated Press, Dec. 9, 2005.

⁵ Associated Press, "Attorney General Admits Having Affair," *The Grand Rapids Press*, Nov. 10, 2005, sec. B, p. 6.

⁶ Editorial, "Fieger Case: Back to Basics," The Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 27, 2005, sec. C, p. 2.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Frank Witsil, Bill Laitner, L.L. Brasier, "Fieger Won't Be Charged in Scandal," *Detroit Free Press*, Nov. 16, 2005, sec. A, p. 1.

⁹ Associated Press, "National Briefing Midwest: Michigan: Federal Agents Raid Office of Prominent Lawyer," *The New York Times*, Dec. 2, 2005, sec. A, p. 19.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY GEOFFREY N. FIEGER, 1998-2004*

	то	TO PARTY	
YEAR	CANDIDATES	COMMITTEES	TOTAL
1998	\$0**	\$100	\$1,000
2000	\$10,200	\$0	\$10,200
2002	\$12,300	\$20,000	\$32,300
2004	\$1,000	\$0	\$1,000
TOTAL	\$23,500	\$20,100	\$43,600

^{*} The table above does not reflect contributions Geoffrey and Kathleen Fieger gave jointly to two Supreme Court candidates: \$3,400 to Marilyn Kelly in 1996 and \$1,000 to Carole F. Youngblood in 1998.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY KATHLEEN J. FEIGER, 2000-2004*

	ТО	TO PARTY	
YEAR	CANDIDATES	COMMITTEES	TOTAL
2000	\$3,400	\$0	\$3,400
2002	\$3,000	\$70,000	\$73,000
2004	\$1,000	\$0	\$1,000
TOTAL	\$7,400	\$70,000	\$77,400

^{*} The table above does not reflect contributions Geoffrey and Kathleen Fieger gave jointly to two Supreme Court candidates: \$3,400 to Marilyn Kelly in 1996 and \$1,000 to Carole F. Youngblood in 1998.

The Michigan Democratic Party was the top recipient of Fieger cash; it received \$90,000, all of which came during the 2002 election cycle. The Senate Democratic Fund of Michigan received \$100 in 1998 and was the only other party committee to receive money.

The Fiegers gave \$35,300 to 16 state-level candidates from 1998 to 2004. Of those 16 candidates, one — Lt. Gov. Alma Wheeler Smith — was not running for re-election in 2002, the year the Fiegers contributed \$3,000 to her. Only three of the other 15 candidates receiving contributions won their races. Four of the 16 lost in the primary. Overall, the Fiegers gave to winning candidates only 20 percent of the time.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO MICHIGAN CANDIDATES AND COMMITTEES, 1998-2004

RECIPIENT	PARTY	OFFICE	STATUS	AMOUNT
Michigan Democratic Party	Democrat	Party Committee		\$90,000
Thomas, Edward M.	Nonpartisan	Supreme Court	Lost-General	\$6,800
Bonior, David E.	Democrat	Governor	Lost-Primary	\$3,400
Fitzgerald, E. Thomas	Nonpartisan	Supreme Court	Lost-General	\$3,400
Hollowell, Melvin	Democrat	Secretary of State	Lost-General	\$3,400
Kelly, Marilyn	Nonpartisan	Supreme Court	Won	\$3,400
Robinson, Marietta S.	Nonpartisan	Supreme Court	Lost-General	\$3,400
Blanchard, James J.	Democrat	Governor	Lost-Primary	\$3,300
Smith, Alma Wheeler	Democrat	Lt. Governor	Did Not Run	\$3,000
Apol, Jack	Republican	House	Lost-Primary	\$1,000
Conyers, Monica	Democrat	Senate	Lost-Primary	\$1,000
Schwartz, Michael Alan	Democrat	House	Lost-General	\$1,000

^{**} Figure excludes the money Fieger contributed to his own campaign in 1998

RECIPIENT	PARTY	OFFICE	STATUS	AMOUNT
Youngblood, Carole F.	Nonpartisan	Supreme Court	Lost-General	\$1,000
Basham, Raymond E.	Democrat	Senate	Won	\$500
Weaver, Elizabeth A.	Nonpartisan	Supreme Court	Won	\$400
Drake, Maggie	Nonpartisan	Supreme Court	Lost-General	\$200
Brennan Jr., J. Martin	Nonpartisan	Supreme Court	Lost-General	\$100
Senate Democratic Fund	Democrat	Party Committee		\$100

TOTAL \$125,400

Attorneys who identified themselves on contribution disclosure forms as working at Fieger's law firm, Fieger, Fieger & Schwartz, gave \$89,450 during the same time period. Most of the money went to candidates for Supreme Court seats or for governor. Supreme Court candidates received 66 percent, or \$59,350, of the contributions from lawyers with the firm. Candidates for governor received another \$24,650, or almost 28 percent of the contributions.