

Priorities First! blasts 'Statesman' coverage

Firebirds outspending opposition by nearly 6-1 for Oct. 7 election

Battle of Bucks

Here's what the opposing forces
had raised and spent on the bond
election through Sept. 27:

SUPPORTERS OF THE PARK ON THE COLORADO:

Total contributions: \$268,229
All contributions were made by
Professional Sports Inc., dba
Phoenix Firebirds
Total expenditures: \$229,505
Major expenses were:
Weeks-Correa & Co. fees for
consulting & video: \$90,945
Texas Research for identifying
and phoning voters: \$46,500
Dolphin Productions fees for
printing, mailing: \$27,000
U.S. Post Office: \$23,000
J.R. Gonzales Co. fee for buying
Spanish media: \$15,000
Montgomery & Associates fee
for consulting: \$12,500
John Barr fee for contract
services: \$2,500
Edelen Communications fee for
consulting: \$2,000

PRIORITIES FIRST!:

Total contributions: \$45,463
Taxpayers Defense Fund:
\$45,000
Jeffery Heckler: \$223
George Humphrey: \$100
M.H. Crockett Properties: \$100
Total expenditures: \$44,073
Major expenses were:
Emory Young & Associates for
phone banks: \$27,000
C&E Communications for radio
spots: \$11,990
Ace Printing yard signs: \$1,800
Austin Chronicle ad: \$1,305

Source: Committee reports

The *Austin American-Statesman* gave front-page coverage to the fact that the people who want to bring a Double-A franchise to the Cedar Park area contributed money to the **Taxpayers Defense Fund**, which then gave it to **Priorities First!** to oppose passage of \$10 million in bonds to fund the city's portion of a new stadium for the **Phoenix Firebirds**. The *Statesman's* editorials have crowed about the matter as well, and the daily's columnists had a field day, with the tsk, tsk, routine.

Priorities First! returned the favor at a press conference late last Friday afternoon—perfect timing for the evening television news. The coalition members stood in the white-hot circle of TV cameras and slammed the *Statesman* and another corporate sponsor, KLB radio, for alleged bias. Priorities First! leader **Jack Haden** criticized the *Statesman* for “burying” the day’s “big story” on page C4 in the sports section, regarding the defeat of \$325 million in bonds for a new stadium in Seattle. Haden also complained that the *Statesman* has been quoting sources who were Firebird sponsors without identifying the sources’ conflicts of interest. **Linda Curtis** of Priorities First! said she was “livid” about the *Statesman* threatening a lawsuit to get the coalition’s radio advertisement yanked, and with KLB radio host **Paul Pryor** saying he hadn’t been able to reach Priorities First!. Curtis said, “KLB and the *Statesman* wouldn’t know a grass-roots campaign if it bit them on the butt.”

Priorities First! accepted \$45,000 from the Taxpayers Defense Fund, money which came from **Bill Pohl**, who has sought to bring a Double-A team from Shreveport. Far from being ashamed, Haden said he was “pleased” as punch the coalition had money to wage a campaign. At least the money was local, Haden reasoned, whereas every cent of the \$268,000 contributed to get a ‘yes’ vote came from the Phoenix-based Firebirds. Haden vowed that Priorities First! would be just as quick to oppose a government subsidy for any other team, Pohl’s included. “What the *Statesman* doesn’t get...is this is a voter rebellion, and it’s going on all over the country,” Curtis said.

For all the *Statesman's* breathless editorializing about where Priorities First! funds are coming from, there’s nothing unusual about this election, as anyone who’s covered politics for any length of time could attest. Darn near every bond election is proposed and pushed hard by those who stand to gain from it, and darn near every dollar put up to oppose the passage of bonds comes from those who stand to lose, be it angry taxpayers or competing economic interests. That is not to say the *Statesman* should not have reported the facts. But as a corporate sponsor of the baseball initiative, and as a journalistic enterprise that should be sophisticated enough to know how the world of politics works, the *Statesman's* gloating editorials and columns reeked of self interest. Any worthwhile journalistic enterprise, certainly a metropolitan daily newspaper, would agree that a politician who has an economic interest in an enterprise should not take part in the public debate about that enterprise or vote in matters concerning it. Yet the *Statesman* seems incapable of understanding why its coverage of the stadium election is inherently biased by the fact that the *Statesman* is a corporate sponsor. It’s the integrity, stupid. ✱