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Tea Party on the ballot? Some say it's a trick

Activists say it's a veiled attempt to steal GOP votes

BY DAWSON BELL
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LANSING -- Veteran tea party movement activists said that an expensive, secretive campaign that submitted 60,000 petition signatures to the state Wednesday to qualify candidates for office under the banner of the Tea Party is a trick to help Democrats.

The activists said the group that submitted the petitions wants to siphon votes from tea party conservatives running as Republicans.

Mark Steffek, a Tuscola County man who described himself as head of the party that turned in the petitions, issued a statement Wednesday criticizing both major parties and claiming "the tea party is a grassroots movement that belongs to everybody. No one person, click (sic) or party boss owns the tea party."

He could not be reached for comment. His statement contained no phone number, e-mail or other address.

Leaders of tea party groups in Michigan said they have had no contact with Steffek or others linked to the petition drive.

"This is absolutely not legitimate," said Mark Graham, an organizer of a tea party group in Tuscola County.

A spokesman for the Michigan Democratic Party said it had "absolutely nothing" to do with it.

Tea party leaders ticked over official party

A group calling itself the Tea Party submitted an estimated 59,400 signatures to state elections officials, well in excess of the 38,000 needed to qualify it as a minor political party eligible to run a slate of candidates in the November election.

A statement from the enigmatic head of the Tea Party, Mark Steffek of Richville, delivered by untraceable fax Wednesday afternoon, said the political party will allow the tea party "to keep holding these politicians accountable."

But veteran Michigan tea party activists said there are ties between Steffek, the UAW, Democratic politicians and the firm hired to collect signatures for the petition drive, which has worked for the state Democratic Party.

Chetly Zarko, a conservative blogger and consultant who has directed petition drives, estimated the cost of the party petition drive at more than \$120,000.

Steffek was unavailable to comment -- his faxed statement contained no contact information -- and has not responded to multiple inquiries from the Free Press over the last two months.

Spokesman John Tramontana denied that state Democrats were involved in the Tea Party political party.

A similar dispute is under way in Florida, where Republicans and tea party activists have accused Democrats of financing so-called Tea Party candidates for local office in an attempt to dilute the anti-Democratic Party vote.

Most of Michigan's public tea party activists, like those elsewhere in the country, have dismissed the idea of forming an official third-party alternative as counterproductive to their goal of reining in the cost and size of government.

"We don't need another party," said Bill Hollister, chairman of MEDEFECO, a Macomb County-based tea party organization. "The tea party is trying to cleanse the Republican Party."

Hollister said Wednesday's filing was "as bogus as it can get. They don't have support from anybody in the tea party movement in this state."

Official action by the Board of State Canvassers to sanction the new party won't come for weeks to allow for challenges to the petition signatures, which several experts said was unlikely. If approved, the party would be eligible to run candidates for any state office on a slate that would have to be submitted by Aug. 3.

No potential candidates have been identified by the group.

Opponents also could mount a legal challenge in an attempt to derail the new party. Potential complaints could be based on ownership of legal rights to the Tea Party name to who has the legal authority to assume leadership of a tea party political party.

If designated, the Tea Party would become the fifth minor party in Michigan, joining the Green Party, the U.S. Taxpayers Party, the Libertarian Party and the Natural Law Party.

Minor parties nominate candidates by convention and don't participate in primaries. They get on the ballot by attaining the number of signatures that equals 1% of the total votes cast for governor in the last election. That means 38,013 were needed.

A statement from the Tea Party of Michigan arrived at a Free Press fax machine this afternoon, shortly after individuals filed 59,000 signatures with the Secretary of State to add the Tea Party as a third party on Michigan's November general election ballot. Unlike most faxes, this one arrived with no indication of the originating fax number and no phone number or email to contact the sender, Mark Steffek. Earlier this year, Steffek registered the name Tea Party with the state. Free Press attempts to reach him have been unsuccessful.

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Our Comment – Apparently there is no level that Socialist Democrats and Unions will not slime down to in order to keep control of American citizens lives. This ploy is right out of Mark Brewer’s play book. Mark Brewer has never been bound by morals or ethics when it comes to winning elections. Now he claims no part in this; sure Mark, too bad your past behavior and endeavors do not support your “What, Me” position. As a public figure, Mark should enjoy some of the bad press he has maliciously created for anyone he wants to defeat. The fact that he got the UAW to join in on this unethical behavior is an indication of how low they have sunk under their leadership.

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Official's work with Tea Party raises eyebrows

<http://www.freep.com/article/20100729/NEWS06/7290439/1001/News/Officials-work-with-Tea-Party-raises-eyebrows>

BY DAWSON BELL
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Affidavits filed by more than half of the 23 candidates from Michigan's mysterious Tea Party were notarized by the political **director** of the Oakland County Democratic Party, elections records show, providing more fuel for suspicions that Democrats organized the new party to hurt Republican chances in the November election.

The party, which most of the tea party movement's visible leaders in Michigan disavow, also is represented by a Lansing attorney with long ties to state Democrats. And the California-based petition firm hired to collect signatures to qualify the new party for the November ballot was used by Michigan Democrats for another stealth petition **drive** two years.

State Democratic Party officials have denied any ties to the effort, a position reiterated Wednesday by spokesman John Tramontana.

He said he was unaware of the involvement of Oakland County's Jason Bauer in the Tea Party affidavits. Bauer is the county party's operations director and, according to his **Facebook page**, a committed Democrat.

His name appeared on affidavits for 12 of 23 candidates nominated by the **Tea Party** in a convention quietly convened Saturday in Saginaw. Bauer couldn't be reached for comment.

Oakland County Democratic Party Chairman Mike McGuinness said Wednesday that he was unaware of Bauer's involvement and that the county party did not direct or coordinate his efforts, nor contribute resources to it.

Tea Party Chairman Mark Steffek, a retired autoworker and UAW steward who spoke to the Free Press earlier this month but has since declined to be interviewed, would not disclose the source of **funding** for the petition drive, estimated in excess of \$120,000, but said it was not the state Democratic Party or the UAW