to undermine campaign reform



Willie Brown
. . . Has plans for 'soft money'

In a variation on that theme, Al Pross, the director of the California Medical Association PAC, suggested last spring that his PAC would split into 24 separate entities — one for each of the medical specialties. Last week, Pross said CMA is now awaiting guidance from state officials on just how separate the law requires the separate PACS to be.

"One way or another, the total amount we expend will be similar to what we've done in the past," said a confident Pross, whose PAC gave $1 million to California campaigns last year.

✓ Spending "soft money." Michael Dukakis and George Bush, who operated under contribution and spending rules in their recent presidential campaigns, chose this maneuver: They raised and spent more than $122 million on voter registration and mobilization efforts that did not count against their limits. Although contributors could offer no more than $25,000 each to presidential campaign funds, some wealthy individuals put more than $500,000 each into so-called "soft money" funds.

Vision

Inspired by those efforts, Assembly Speaker Willie Brown talks of transforming the once-weak California Democratic Party into a powerful political engine fueled by soft money. Insiders say this vision inspired former Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr. to bid for the post of party chairman.

✓ Dodging the transfer limits. Assemblyman Johnson insists Proposition 73 will have at least one far-reaching effect. It will forever ban transfers, the process through which legislative leaders shift tens of thousands of dollars from their own campaign funds to chosen races across the state. In hard-fought races like the recent Ted Lempert-William Duplissea Assembly contest in San Mateo County, the bulk of the money came from outside sources, not from local contributors.

But as they considered Proposition 73, several legislators recounted this political two-step from the years before Willie Brown popularized transfers: A candidate seeking campaign funds would go to the office of Speaker Jesse Unruh, to be confronted by a stack of checks, each signed by a particular special interest, but with the payee left blank. If the candidate gained Unruh's favor, he or she got the money to run, but the public never knew of the speaker's influence.

Bell is betting the blank check scheme will recur. "Right now, we (the contributors) are just waiting for the legislative leaders to tell us how they're going to operate."

But he and several other campaign experts offer one caveat: Because accumulating blank checks is more cumbersome than direct payment, they say the influence of legislative leaders may diminish.

With the next round of elections still 18 months away, the wholesale evasion of Proposition 73 has yet to begin. So far, in fact, candidates have spent most of their time fretting over a minor part of the law, which provides that money in campaign treasuries prior to 1989 may not be spent on an election after Jan. 1, unless it was collected in compliance with 73's limits.

That rule has left many politicians with money that can't be spent on a re-election campaign, and has stimulated some notable extravagance. Even though he's considering a run for governor, Controller Gray Davis spent $900,000 to oppose a Los Angeles oil-drilling plan in November.

Assemblyman Tom Bane, D-Van Nuys, dropped $4,600 of his campaign fund on artwork at about the same time.

And Gov. George Deukmejian gave $100,000 to Armenian earthquake relief, although his staff said Proposition 73 didn't influence the contribution.

GRAND JURIES ARE CHOSEN AT RANDOM (more or less) and are exposed to issues in matters pertaining to the public welfare. They have extremely broad powers to subpoena and cross-examine witnesses, call experts and any and all records. They weigh testimony and render judgement. Grand Juries are not then to be confused with "petit" juries that we see so often on television shows.

GRAND JURIES are the representatives of the ethics, values, conscience and beliefs of the people. What's more, they are The People.

While juries have been known to err, so has every individual, group and institution known to man. But it is by this method of consensus that we have chosen to govern ourselves. It is better than any other kind of system yet devised.

Would it not be refreshing therefore if the many PACs, organized domestic and foreign lobbies needed to present their pleas and arguments to this jury made up of the people? Would it not be in the best public interest that multi-billion dollar corporations could no longer finance the political fortunes of our state and federal representatives? Think about that.

A LOTTERY-GENERATED CONGRESS, a "legislative grand-jury" - where one may encounter a homeless person along with a movie-star; a small farmer sitting alongside a shopkeeper, a banker, a trucker, a postman, an office-worker...in short, a transcript of the whole society. Our present legislature cannot be described this way. Indeed, half or more are lawyers. Is it any wonder then that the public does not understand what's going on, what's wrong, or worst of all, just opt out?

Try to imagine a defense contractor among the same jury as a welfare mother, deciding on the merits of a 500 million dollar apiece "Stealth" bomber. Is this the best way to defend his home; hers? Make up your own scenarios. The possibilities are almost endless...but you may understand what is attempted here in this paper.