

District Attorneys Study Alleged Vote-Siphon Plan

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Joseph F. Crangle, state Democratic chairman, said party's overdue campaign statement would be filed "in a few days."

The New York and Albany County District Attorneys began their own inquiries yesterday into a suspected Republican scheme to siphon votes from Democrats in Assembly elections.

The moves came as politicians noted the rarity of prosecutions under the state's vague campaign filing laws.

The office of District Attorney Frank S. Hogan declined to comment, even on the question of whether it had clear jurisdiction in the case, which was transferred from the office of Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz.

It was understood from sources familiar with the case that if any laws were violated, they likely would be parts of the election and penal law — all misdemeanors — relating to the proper filing of campaign statements and identification of campaign groups.

Liberal Candidates Aided

The Attorney General's inquiry, which originated with a complaint in the 1972 Assembly election, focused on the question of whether Republican campaign funds were used to help finance the campaign of Liberal candidates so that the Democratic vote was weakened and the Republican majority control of the Assembly preserved. Enough evidence was gathered to require referring the matter to criminal prosecutors.

The Albany District Attorney, Arnold W. Proskin, also declined to comment on the Attorney General's report. He apparently has authority over the matter his district includes the office of Secretary of State John P. Lomenzo, where candidates and committees are required to file campaign financial statements.

The one observation Mr. Proskin would make is that although his office had partial jurisdictional over the bins of filed campaign statements, it had nowhere near the manpower to do an effective job in perusing the forms for violations and omissions.

The office of Mr. Lefkowitz also has investigatory power over the campaign statements, but the Attorney General has insisted in the past that the

current laws are too weak to permit an effective job. Bills Mr. Lefkowitz has sent previously to the Legislature, where they withered, point to some of the loopholes.

One Bill would give the Attorney General power to go to court to compel the filing of a campaign statement where one had not been filed. A group of five citizens has this power now, but observers note very few people are aware of this power.

Responsibility Vague

A second bill would require that local District Attorney and the Attorney General be notified of the failure of candidates and committees to file statements. Again, there is no such mandate and, according to the legislative memo, no state official or department will accept responsibility for insisting on the filing.

The third measure would specify clearly that funds received or spent by politicians or groups in the full calendar year—and not just those used at campaign time—would have to be accounted for. Now, there is no such mandate.

The attitude of many politicians toward the filing requirement was summarized by a member of a prosecutor's staff: "So who files properly?" Past investigations have shown that numerous politicians and organizations routinely ignore the law, which carries a penalty that rarely has been enforced, according to the Attorney General's office.

Republicans see some irony in the fact that they are bearing the brunt of the inquiry in part because they bothered to file last year, and some of the leads in the investigation—several thousands of dollars spent to support "Liberal" programs—were gleaned from their statement.

At the same time, the Democrats have never filed a campaign statement, which would appear to be a misdemeanor. The Attorney General's office has said it will get to that eventually.

Thus the current controversy saw the state Democratic chairman, Joseph F. Crangle,

scoring Republicans again yesterday even as he was promising that his own party's six-month overdue statement would be filed "in a few days."

Republican critics also noted privately that Mr. Crangle, who holds a Democratic Assembly patronage job, was commenting on an alleged scandal in which a Liberal politician—Harold J. Relkin—is suspected of sending out anti-Democratic literature in return for a Republican Assembly patronage job.

"I'm glad to hear Joe's become a moralist," the Assembly Speaker, Perry B. Duryea Jr., Republican of Montauk, L.I., said last week in commenting on Mr. Crangle's statements.

Mr. Crangle noted another flaw in the law, which has been cited by others. This involves limiting an individual candidate's committee to spend about 10 cents for each registered voter. But, politicians routinely set up multi-candidate committee to circumvent the limit.

A clerical employe of the Secretary of State's office recently observed that there were two main purposes served by the campaign statements that are filed. One is that newsmen occasionally poke around in them. The other is that politicians visit Albany and study the lists for what the clerk termed "sucker lists" of potential contributors for future campaigns.