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Home [News Features](#) [DA Is Investigating ASA's Campaign Contributions](#)

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

## DA Is Investigating ASA's Campaign Contributions

Conservatives and new MPS board members caught up in possible illegal activity

By Lisa Kaiser

Two candidates for the Milwaukee Public Schools board of directors won their districts on April 7. But that doesn't mean that their tenure on the board will be drama free. The two new board members -Annie Woodward and David Voeltner-are caught up in an investigation by the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office over possible illegal campaign contributions.

Woodward and Voeltner were recruited and trained by Advocates for Student Achievement (ASA), an anti-union "reform" group co-founded by MPS board member Bruce Thompson.

ASA has the backing of some of the most prominent conservatives in town, including the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC), the Greater Milwaukee Association of Realtors, Michael Grebe of the Bradley Foundation, businessman Richard Pieper, voucher supporters and former conservative MPS board members.

But the district attorney's office apparently isn't intimidated by the high profile of ASA's allies. On April 1-a week before the election-the Milwaukee County Circuit Court issued a subpoena for the bank records of ASA and its related organizations. Associated Bank, where ASA's accounts are held, has already supplied the requested documents.

The subpoena stems from a complaint filed by Citizen Action of Wisconsin against ASA and three candidates for the MPS board-Woodward, Voeltner and ReDonna Rodgers, who lost in a landslide to MPS Board President Peter Blewett last Tuesday.

Citizen Action's complaint alleged that ASA was "illegally providing contributions" to the three campaigns, and that the contributions were not being reported properly by the three candidates' committees.

Investigator Michael Sandvick found that ASA-MKE is registered as a domestic corporation. But Wisconsin law prohibits a domestic corporation from making direct or indirect political contributions.

Sandvick wrote that "I think there is probable cause to believe that ASA-MKE, acting as a corporate entity, provided things of value to the campaigns of candidates for the Milwaukee School board in the form of fund-raising, voter lists and poll results."

The affidavit draws on public documents, campaign finance forms, and ASA's Yahoo! Group e-mails, which could be accessed by the public.

Those e-mails provided details into the workings of ASA and indicated that ASA was deeply involved in the candidates' campaigns. As a corporation, it is illegal for ASA to directly coordinate with a campaign. ASA recruited and trained candidates, held weekly "round-table" meetings with them, supplied voter lists and poll results to its preferred candidates, connected candidates to potential campaign managers, set up a meeting between candidates and the Realtors' PAC, created campaign literature and asked for donations to the candidates' campaigns.

Details can be found on ExpressMilwaukee.com's political blog, the Daily Dose, which broke this entire story on ASA's involvement in the school board races and also broke the news of the subpoena last Wednesday, and will continue to cover this story as it unfolds.

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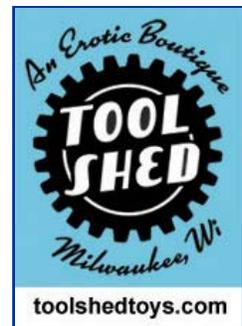
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