

The Sun

**D. Gelfman's role in ads questioned  
Spouse of candidate for circuit judge works for WJZ-TV  
Station's equipment rented  
Campaign report did not mention ad-making activities  
CAMPAIGN 1996**

by Craig Timberg SUN STAFF The Baltimore Sun

November 1, 1996 Page(s): 1B  
Edition: HOWARD SUN  
Section: METRO  
Length: 1298 words  
Index Terms:  
Howard County

Record Number: BSUN479479

---

Dick Gelfman, one of Baltimore's most prominent television journalists, has emerged in recent months as the media guru of his wife's campaign for Howard County Circuit judge -- using equipment and services rented from his employer, WJZ-TV, to help make her campaign ads.

The practice raises ethical issues for Gelfman and the station, which permitted the rental for campaign use.

It also calls into question the accuracy of a campaign financial disclosure report filed last week, which reflected none of Gelfman's ad-making activity either at WJZ or his home studio, where he says he did most of the work.

State law generally requires such reports to list all expenses and in-kind donations of goods and many types of services -- even from a candidate or spouse. Officials with the campaign of Gelfman's wife, District Judge Lenore R. Gelfman, say they have met all such requirements.

Dick Gelfman and station officials defend his role in the campaign, saying he has acted appropriately as a supportive spouse, carefully separating his identity as a journalist from his campaign work.

"I am first and foremost my wife's biggest supporter," said Gelfman, a consumer affairs reporter on Baltimore television for more than 18 years. "I've not done anything to bring my company in any way in association with the campaign."

But journalism professors -- noting that journalists must protect their credibility as objective reporters -- say Dick Gelfman may have crossed ethical boundaries by crafting the campaign ads and using some station equipment to do so.

"I think it's very poor judgment on the part of station management," said University of Maryland journalism professor Steve Barkin. "There's a need for the news division of a television station to separate the private interests of its reporters from public issues upon which the station is expected to report in a neutral manner."

Judge Gelfman and her running mate, Ellicott City attorney Jonathan Scott Smith, are locked in a bitter fight for two seats on the Howard Circuit Court against incumbent Judges Diane O. Leasure and Donna Hill Staton, appointed by Gov. Parris N. Glendening last fall.

Throughout the race -- one of the most contentious and expensive judges' races in the state's history -- the Gelfman-Smith campaign has worked to downplay publicly Dick Gelfman's role.

For an article in The Sun in February, Lenore Gelfman said she appreciated her husband's "cameo appearances -- bringing coffee, moving tables and being supportive."

But his role quickly grew beyond that.

In the primary, Dick Gelfman -- a self-described video hobbyist as well as television journalist -- began involving himself heavily in

every aspect of ad production, according to the campaign's media consultant at the time, Donald G. Raymond of Pennsylvania.

"He was a dominant player before," said former Gelfman-Smith campaign consultant Herbert C. Smith, who is not related to the candidate. "But it's a leaner, tighter group now. Dick is a very forceful intellect, and he knows what he's doing now."

After the March primary, which left the four candidates vying for two seats, the campaign eliminated all of its paid staff, including Raymond and Smith. Volunteers, including Dick Gelfman, became steadily more involved.

In recent months, Dick Gelfman has campaigned door to door, appeared briefly -- unidentified -- in television ads, was pictured in a printed flier and routinely attended the campaign's strategy sessions.

Dick Gelfman acknowledges he also led a group of volunteers in creating the campaign's four highly polished cable TV ads. This group also included WCBM radio host Frank Luber, Jonathan Smith's father-in-law, who did voice-over work for the TV ads.

Local political TV ads typically cost from \$500 to \$1,500 each, area videographers and campaign consultants say.

The most pointed of the Gelfman-Smith ads focuses on a supposed conflict of interest when Leasure helped plan a fund-raiser for Glendening days before her appointment last fall.

"Diane Leasure helped plan an event that raised \$17,000 for Governor Glendening," a voice says as pictures of Glendening and Leasure appear. "And what did he do for her? Just eight days later, he made her a Circuit Court judge."

Carl Sessions Stepp, another University of Maryland journalism professor and senior editor of American Journalism Review, said Dick Gelfman should have limited his involvement in the campaign and avoided making the TV ads with his station's equipment.

"News people need to be non-partisan and detached from politics to keep your credibility, even if you're not covering a campaign," said Stepp. "At some point, you cross the line from being a supportive spouse to being a campaign manager, and that's a line I think one ought not to cross."

Marcellus Alexander, WJZ general manager, said Dick Gelfman had the station's permission to rent equipment for his wife's campaign.

Alexander said Dick Gelfman has avoided ethical conflicts during the campaign by not displaying WJZ logos while campaigning, by keeping distant from the station's coverage of the race and by promising to pay for the equipment he rented.

"Before the campaign began," Alexander said, "Dick and I discussed the importance of keeping his professional identity as a member of the Eyewitness News Team separate from that of a supportive husband to candidate Lenore Gelfman. In my view, to date, he has effectively done that."

Dick Gelfman's ad-making also raises questions regarding the campaign's latest finance disclosure report, which was filed with the state Oct. 25.

There is no mention on the report of any expense or in-kind donation of services or goods relating to the production of the campaign's TV ads.

In an interview yesterday morning, Dick Gelfman said he rented a camera for several hours and editing equipment for 30 minutes during the campaign. He declined to say from whom he rented the equipment -- though Alexander later said the station had rented the equipment to him.

Dick Gelfman said the equipment's owner had agreed to bill the campaign after the election so that all equipment expenses could be shown in a single bill. He said a finance disclosure report due Nov. 26 will show the costs of the rental.

Dick Gelfman did most of the ad production using his own camera and editing equipment.

The campaign disclosure reports make no reference to Dick Gelfman donating the use of his equipment to the campaign.

State officials yesterday declined to comment on the specific case. But state Assistant Attorney General Jack Schwartz and Assistant State Prosecutor Tom Krehely said the use of equipment is typically regarded as an in-kind donation to a campaign, even if the equipment belongs to a candidate or the spouse of a candidate.

Dick Gelfman and campaign officials said state law would not cover video equipment used by a hobbyist. They said that

NewsBank, inc.

volunteers do not ordinarily record their use of personal equipment, such as computers, as in-kind donations.

"We don't believe there's any violation," said Deborah E. Dwyer, campaign chairwoman. "We're going to review the report again, and if there's anything to correct, we'll correct it. We feel we did file an accurate report."

Pub Date: 11/01/96

Copyright 1996 The Baltimore Sun Company