

Lloyd Doggett says Austin Tea Party and conservative millionaire "behind" campaign against rail prop

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Austin U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett made a flawed claim about the Austin Tea Party in this October 2014 mailer promoting a city proposition on the November ballot.

U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett's smiling face appears on a mailer sent out by a group advocating voter approval of a City of Austin rail proposition on the November 2014 ballot.

We noticed a not-so-happy message.

"Don't let the Tea Party fool you," says a headline below the photo of the Democratic congressman from Austin on the placard mailed to voters by [Let's Go Austin](#), a group that favors the proposal to spend \$1 billion on a light rail line and roads.

Doggett goes on to say: "Proposition 1 is a smart investment in Austin's future." Below, he extolls the spending plan and then says: "The Austin Tea Party and an ultra-conservative millionaire are behind the misleading campaign against Prop. 1, but don't you buy it."

The mailer doesn't say how opponents have been "misleading." Setting aside that characterization, we wondered if Doggett was right about the Austin Tea Party and a conservative millionaire leading the "no" campaign.

An Oct. 8, 2014, *Austin American-Statesman* [news story](#) on spending by forces for or against the proposal didn't mention tea-party groups while identifying Citizens Against Rail Taxes as the major group working against approval and briefly mentioning Our Rail, which the story described as opposing the proposal and preferring a different rail route. According to the story, Citizens Against Rail Taxes had raised nearly \$279,000 through late September 2014 from 13 donors including the retired high-tech executive serving as the group's treasurer, Jim Skaggs, who the story personally credited with giving \$50,000. Our Rail had raised \$760, the story said

Doggett, asked the basis of his claim, told us via spokeswoman Leslie Tisdale that Skaggs has supported "ultra-conservatives" like Republican U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz and state Sen. Donna Campbell of New Braunfels. "Surely," Doggett also said by email, "the Austin Tea Party doesn't deny its active opposition to Prop. 1."

Lynda Rife, campaign manager for Let's Go Austin, separately confirmed by email Doggett was referring to the Austin Tea Party, which recommended voters oppose the proposition in an Oct. 19, 2014, [online post](#), she pointed out. That post said in part: "This is just another boondoggle thought up by our current corrupt and mismanaged city council."

Before that, Rife noted, Americans for Prosperity, a national group supportive of tea-party efforts, [brought Cato Institute anti-rail activist Randal O'Toole to Austin for September 2014 events](#) promoted by the Austin Tea Party. Also, Rife pointed out, the group has posted multiple messages opposing the proposal on its [Facebook page](#).

Rife said the millionaire in the ad is Skaggs, the retired CEO and board chair of Tracor Inc.

"Skaggs," Rife asserted, "has an extensive history of giving to Republican candidates and organizations in both state and federal elections."

Austin Tea Party

Campaign finance filings with the City of Austin don't show any Austin Tea Party expenditures in the run-up to balloting.

By phone, Dean Wright, the group's organizer, told us the group hasn't spent money opposing Prop. 1. Otherwise, Wright said, it's referred what he estimated to be close to 3,000 individuals in its network to Citizens Against Rail Taxes, which he said has taken "the leadership position." Wright said the Austin Tea Party supports CART's messaging.

We saw several anti-rail-proposition messages in the Austin Tea Party's Twitter posts including a message written Oct. 24, 2014 referring [to Doggett as "Kickback Lloyd"](#) that was linked to its criticisms of Doggett's pro-proposition message.

Jim Skaggs

By email, Skaggs confirmed he's a millionaire. He didn't commit to membership in any party. "I frankly do not frequent the political world and do not really know the definition of 'conservative,'" Skaggs wrote. "I am a common-sense person and dislike some of what all parties do. I was born a Central Texas Democrat."

Our search of campaign finance reports filed with the [Texas Ethics Commission](#) showed [Skaggs making about 100 donations](#) totaling over \$100,000 to state-level Republican candidates or political groups from 2002 to September 2014; the biggest one was \$10,000 given in 2008 to the political arm of the Texas Republican Advisory Council.

Skaggs also has contributed to multiple Republican candidates or groups involved in federal races. In 2013, Skaggs gave donations of \$2,600 to U.S. Reps. Michael McCaul and Roger Williams, both R-Austin, [according to information drawn from federal campaign finance filings by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Responsive Politics](#). In May 2014, the center indicates, Skaggs gave \$300 to the Republican National Committee.

Over earlier years, [another search](#) of the center's database indicates, Skaggs (who lives a few miles from the Texas Capitol in a part of Travis County not in Austin) gave money to Republicans including Cruz (\$1,250); Texas U.S. Sen. John Cornyn (more than \$4,000); President George W. Bush (\$4,000); 2012 Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney (\$4,000); Sen. John McCain, the party's 2008 nominee (\$2,300); and presidential hopefuls Ron Paul (\$1,000) and Herman Cain (\$300).

In the early 1990s, Skaggs contributed to two Democrats, the center's database suggests, then-U.S. Rep. Dave McCurdy of Oklahoma (\$500) and then-U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico (\$250).

Our ruling

Doggett said: "The Austin Tea Party and an ultra-conservative millionaire are behind the" campaign against the city's light-rail proposition.

Skaggs seems wealthy, has supported Republican candidates and is treasurer for the major group battling Prop. 1.

The Austin Tea Party opposes the proposal too. However, the group hasn't spent a dime on the cause and doesn't appear to be a major mover in the anti-Prop. 1 campaign.

We find this statement Half True.