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Group backing Bush, Senate candidate includes Knoxville

By **LUCY MORGAN**, St. Petersburg Times
November 2, 2004

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - An independent political group with secretive backers that includes at least one Knoxville formed a week ago to buy ads in support of President Bush and Republican U.S. Senate candidate Mel Martinez.

"We like to fly beneath the radar," said Steve Truan, identified as a Knoxville businessman. "We are highly supportive of what the president has done and we were willing to put our money where our mouth is and put out ads against negativism."

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Truan is listed as the contact person for the Thanksgiving 2004 Committee, which bought ads in the St. Petersburg Times and Tampa Tribune last week. Jon Petersen of Omaha, Neb., is listed as custodian of the committee's records. He could not be reached for comment.

The Times ad, printed with red headlines, thanked Martinez "for supporting traditional marriage" and gave a New York post office box as an address.

The Tribune ad thanked Bush for keeping America "in safe hands" and listed the names of six couples.

A spokeswoman for the Martinez campaign said it did not see the ads and never heard of the group.

Truan said he and other men in Knoxville who formed the committee "are working with a larger group" he would not identify. He referred questions to Rob Scott of Knoxville, listed as a director of the Thanksgiving committee. Scott did not return telephone calls.

Knox County Republicans, including Chad Tindell, county chairman, and James Haslam II, finance chairman for the statewide Bush-Cheney campaign, said they do not know the men who formed the group. The committee gives a Knoxville map shop as its address, which also has been used by the Truan Family Partnership, according to Knox County records.

The committee is the latest example of independent groups running ads without disclosing who is financing their efforts.

Most of the committees have registered with the Internal Revenue Service in the last few weeks and have yet to file

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reports identifying contributors. The Thanksgiving committee was created Oct. 25, four days after the deadline for filing campaign reports, leaving voters unable to determine the source of the money before today's election.

Political columnist Georgiana Vines contributed to this report.

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