

ON TARGET

By Bob Fairbanks, Capitol Morning Report

Just about everyone involved with legislative or congressional politics calls it the "California Target Book," but it's not really a book. It's a unique political service that keeps track of campaigns and elections in the state's 120 legislative and 53 congressional districts. It's a book only in the sense that it publishes its findings in separate editions spread over two years, and between times it emails bulletins known as "Hot Sheets."

The publisher is **Allan Hoffenblum**, a retired political consultant who's been working in California politics for 39 years. His publication, he says, is for the people who "give a damn about what's going on in AD43 or CD11 or what have you."

Furthermore, he contends that only the Target Book provides such information in a non partisan, unbiased form. "I'm filling a vacuum there. I'm the only source of information that doesn't have spin," he declares.

The book provides not only routine voting statistics for each district in the state—party registration, ethnicity, and such— but also analyzes each district's political tendencies, its candidates and their supporters and the district's partisan orientation. Is it "safe" for one party or the other?

If it's not "safe," then it's "competitive." And if it's competitive, then **Hoffenblum** takes the next step. Are the Democratic and Republican party leaders who direct the flow of campaign funds going to fight over this district? If his sources tell him they are, then **Hoffenblum** says the district is a "target."

Going into November, he sees seven targeted districts in the Legislature: 12 and 34 in the Senate and 15, 17, 30, 78 and 80 in the Assembly. At the moment, he sees none in Congress, except for a "possible" in the 11th CD (**Pombo**).

But as the days dwindle down through September and October, the situation could change. Party leaders might find that one of their candidates did something awful in the past and they must drop him or her. On the other hand, some candidate in a non-target district might develop issues and create a serious campaign on his or her own. "Believe it or not, there are times when candidates actually do it the old fashioned way. They go out, they raise money and they hire a consultant, And lo and behold, they win," **Hoffenblum** says.

Who wants to know this sort of stuff? **Hoffenblum** says many of his subscribers are big campaign donors, the labor unions and business groups. "If someone comes looking for money, they want to know if he has a chance."

His subscription list also includes political consultants, elected officials, journalists, lobbyists and academics. He says that even slate card vendors subscribe. "They want to know who's running a campaign so they can call them up and try to get them on their cards," he explains.

Hoffenblum prints and mails five editions of the Target Book during each two-year election cycle, two in the off year and three in the election year. In the latter, there is one before the primary, one after the primary and the third (focusing on the target districts) in the fall. Each edition runs about 200 pages (shorter in the fall) and each updates the last.

To keep up with developments between editions, **Hoffenblum** emails "Hot Sheets" to his subscribers. He says he averages three per month, but the pace quickens as election day nears, becoming daily during the last 10 days.

A subscription costs \$1200 a year, or \$2000 for the two-year cycle. At the moment, **Hoffenblum** is charging only \$850 because, he explains, a new subscriber will get only two editions, the post-primary and the one due in the fall.

Hoffenblum won't say publicly how many subscribers he has. "Just say several hundred."

As an example of what the Hot Sheets contain, **Hoffenblum** says he recently learned from two sources that Democratic leaders are thinking of trying to unseat Asm. **Audra Strickland** in AD 37. Since he had listed her seat as safe Republican in his post primary edition, which came out last month, he immediately reported the news in a Hot Sheet to subscribers. He says he can't understand why she might be targeted. After reviewing the data, he still believes the seat is safe Republican.

"I think there may be something involved where if they tie her up it may do some harm to (her husband, former Republican Asm.) **Tony Strickland**, who's running for Controller."

But whatever the reasons, if Democrats target her, then Republican leaders will have to step in "to make sure that Audra is properly funded to defend against the target."

When **Hoffenblum** started the Target Book in 1994, he covered only competitive districts. But more and more people wanted to know about the other districts as well. "What if someone dies of a heart attack? The first question is 'What's the district?'"

Others simply wish to know more about the members, even those in safe seats. "How did **Dan Lungren** get elected to Congress in the first place? How did **Loni Hancock** get the Democratic nomination?" It's all in the Target Book, **Hoffenblum** says.

ON TARGET (Cont.)

The Target Book has four co-editors, including **Hoffenblum**, who is a Republican. Two others, **Al Pross** and **Darry Sragow**, are Democrats who have worked primarily in Democratic campaigns. The fourth, **Tony Quinn**, started as a legislative staffer on the Republican side but specializes now in political trends and demographics.

Hoffenblum says he writes the book and does the analysis. The other three provide "very good information" and oversee what he does "to keep me honest and keep the bias out."

A jovial man, and a rapid fire talker, **Hoffenblum** once wanted to be a lawyer. The year was 1968, he was 27 years old and he'd just returned to LA from a stint in Vietnam as an Air Force intelligence officer. He'd applied to several law schools and was waiting for responses when he walked into the LA County Republican headquarters and asked for a job.

He says he was so ignorant of politics back then that he didn't even know what a precinct was. "But I was a war veteran and all that, and I'm a Republican, so they hired me," he says. And, he adds without sorrow, that he never went to law school and has been in Republican politics ever since.

Hoffenblum started as a field director, working with local Republican groups to register more Republicans and get out the vote. And he was successful enough that by 1972 he was running LA county field operations for the Nixon re-election campaign with 15 directors working for him.

The big change came in 1973 when he was asked to manage a campaign. According to **Hoffenblum**, the situation was this: A Democratic Assemblyman, **Carley Porter**, representing the Bellflower/Downey area had died unexpectedly of a heart attack. A Republican physician, **Robert McLennan**, was running in the special election to succeed him, and **Hoffenblum** was to run the **McLennan** campaign. The opponent was **Frank Vicencia**, a Democrat who had worked as a lobbyist in Sacramento.

"This was right in the middle of Watergate and the district had only 29 percent Republican registration. Nobody thought **McLennan** had a prayer, but I turned that race into Marcus Welby MD [a TV series about a wise and noble family doctor] versus the Sacramento lobbyist. I was able to turn the entire Watergate onto Frank ... We had him writing bills in Frank Fat's," **Hoffenblum** fondly

recalls. It was a sweet victory for **Hoffenblum**, and he also was pleased to note that **Vicencia** later ran successfully for an Assembly seat in another district.

(**Hoffenblum** was asked later about differences in the nature of politics then and now, and he replied that one difference is that there are too many personal attacks these days. Reminded of his **McLennan** campaign, he at first cried "That was a legitimate issue," then chuckled and said "Touché.")

In any case, **Hoffenblum's** McLennan victory got the attention of Assembly Republican leaders in Sacramento, who invited him here to run campaigns for the GOP caucus. He went on and off the state payroll during succeeding years (as both Democratic and Republican campaign workers do), achieved important victories and eventually became chief of the caucus staff.

Hoffenblum left his state job in 1979 to "to put out his shingle" as a political consultant and ran legislative and congressional campaigns for the next 17 years. He retired in 1996, he says, because managing campaigns is hard work, too hard. "I got tired of getting up in the morning with a knot in my stomach wondering whether I'd gotten out the mailers in time."

The target book is the product of a 1993 venture with **Hoffenblum's** now co-editor **Al Pross**, who, in addition to managing Democratic campaigns, served in the 1970s as a staffer for former Assembly Speaker **Leo McCarthy**. **Hoffenblum** says he and **Pross** saw a market for a series of seminars around the state instructing participants in the legislative and congressional election process.

"There are all these people donating and involved in these campaigns, and they really don't know what's going on," **Hoffenblum** recalls saying at the time.

Their seminars ran in San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles and San Diego and were fairly successful, in part because the two men created a small handout for participants that listed what they believed would be the target districts in the next election.

Participants seemed to like the document and many asked **Hoffenblum** if there would be updates. "It got us to wondering if this is something that would sell. All of a sudden I contacted a few people and asked if they'd be willing to subscribe."

And when enough said "yes," the California Target Book was born. Contact: **Hoffenblum** 310 205 8811.