

Group fined over flier for Thom

Mike Cronin The Arizona Republic Sept. 13, 2006 12:00 AM

An independent political group has been fined more than \$4,000 for violating campaign-finance laws when it sent out a flier supporting former Councilwoman Janie Thom's re-election bid this year.

In a 24-page report, Phoenix investigator and attorney David Pennartz concluded that the Citizens for Responsible Government, a group created by the Home Builders Association of Central Arizona's political action committee, broke three laws when it produced literature supporting Thom.

As first reported Tuesday on *The Mesa Republic* Web site, mesa.azcentral.com, Pennartz cleared the organization of the most egregious charge: Coordinating its campaign efforts with Thom when the law demands those activities remain independent.

Thom lost her District 6 seat to challenger Scott Somers in March, shortly after he filed a campaign-finance complaint.

Pennartz said the first violation occurred when the Citizens for Responsible Government neglected to properly identify what organization paid for campaign fliers created for Thom. That mistake cost the Home Builders Association \$3,627.24, or the amount paid to make and mail the fliers.

"There was never an intent to deceive or be fully upfront with who was funding those materials," said Lauren Barnett, the association's deputy director for municipal affairs and the person who oversaw the production of the fliers. Pennartz agreed.

Thom, who is running for a seat on the Central Arizona Water Board, did not return phone calls to her home phone and cell phone.

The second violation occurred when the group failed to disclose the amount it owed to a consultant who designed the fliers on a document that requires campaign expenditures to be filed. The organization ultimately filed, but 42 days late. The law states that the penalty is \$10 per day, or \$420 in this case, Pennartz said.

The third violation resulted when the group did not identify the Home Builders Association political action committee as its sponsoring organization on a document required by election law. Pennartz ordered a corrected document to be filed, but did not impose a fine for that infraction.

The Citizens for Responsible Government has until Tuesday to fulfill the obligations of Pennartz's orders.