

MARKETPLACE

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What's Often Enigmatic and Ends In PAC? Oh, About 709 Things

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When it comes to Ratpac, Badpac or ATE PAC, congressional candidates can't tell a political-action committee without a scorecard.

That's why the Federal Election Commission created "Pacronyms," a guide to acronyms, abbreviations and common names of federal PACs. "More and more candidates, as they filed reports, wouldn't know the full name of the PACs that had given them money," explains Kent Cooper, the FEC's assistant staff director for disclosure. "They would just know an abbreviation or acronym. So we put together a guide that would show them."

The new, third edition of the 41-page manual lists 709 pacronyms, and the sponsoring groups aren't always what they seem. Ratpac is the Religion and Tolerance Political Action Committee, while Badpac is the Bridgeton Air Defense Political Action Committee. And the ATE in ATE PAC stands for AsplundhTree Expert Co.

Clinton PAC is no FOB (Friend of Bill). The PAC for Clinton Mills Co., in Clinton S.C., didn't contribute anything to President Clinton's 1992 election bid and has supported some Republican candidates in the past.

On the other hand, the seemingly self-promotional Heluva PAC has no political agenda and has never raised a dollar for any candidate. Heluva, which stands for Higher Education Lovers at the University of Virginia, was created by political-science professor Larry Sabato, who uses it as a teaching tool for his Introduction to American Government class.

Mr. Cooper says confusion arises when a candidate calls a PAC by a nickname that the PAC doesn't recognize, and the FEC then uses that nickname. This might have been the case with the American Frozen Food Institute's PAC. Although listed in the guide as Freepac, a spokesman for the institute says indignantly, "We have never been called Freepac, we are Affipac." Mr. Cooper insists that Freepac is the name the institute chose.

In contrast, Notapac leaves little confusion. Glenn R. Simpson, a writer at the Washington's Roll Call newspaper and Notapac's creator, says he chose the name "as a clue" that his committee isn't a real fund-raising organization. He says he started it mainly to get on mailing lists. "I find it amusing that no one has bumped me off the list" of PACs, Mr. Simpson says. "I have never even set up a bank account."