



jgilhousen@wi.rr.com on 03/30/2004 11:59:20 PM

To: politicalcommitteestatus@fec.gov
cc:

Subject: Public Comment Submission

Attached is my public comment in PDF format, as specified in the Commission's call for same.

Thank you.

The Rev. John-Mark Gilhousen

The following section of this message contains a file attachment prepared for transmission using the Internet MIME message format. If you are using Pegasus Mail, or any other MIME-compliant system, you should be able to save it or view it from within your mailer. If you cannot, please ask your system administrator for assistance.

----- File information -----
File: fec rulechange letter.pdf
Date: 30 Mar 2004, 22:47
Size: 91955 bytes.
Type: Acrobat



. fec rulechange letter.pdf

THE REV. JOHN-MARK GILHOUSEN, OCRM
321 MORRIS STREET, APARTMENT 16
PEWAUKEE, WISCONSIN 53072-4657

PHONE: (262) 695-1201
E-MAIL: JGILHOUSEN@WI.RR.COM

30th March 2004

Ms. Mai T. Dinh
Acting Assistant General Counsel
Federal Election Commission
999 E Street, NW
Washington DC 20463

Re: Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Notice 2004-6)
Political Committee Status
11 CFR Parts 100, 102, 104, 106, and 114

Dear Ms. Dinh:

This letter is in response to the Commission's solicitation of public comment with regard to the captioned Notice. I write as a citizen, and as one who has spent most of my adult life before retirement, more than twenty-five years, as a missionary priest, actively involved in inner-city ministries in several American cities.

During that period I have been assigned to a variety of nonprofit religious organizations providing services to low income individuals and families ranging from very basic services to the homeless, to highly specialized housing programs for the psychiatrically disabled.

In the course of this charitable work, it was not an infrequent occurrence that the principal mission of the agency with which I was associated could not be addressed without engaging in activities to inform the public of how governmental policies, in place or contemplated, impacted on our work. This sometimes involved publicly answering assertions made by political candidates or incumbent public office holders, and/or organizations whose primary purposes were clearly political in nature, or otherwise involving ourselves in the public debate.

Promoting election of particular candidates or influencing specific legislation was a significant activity of **none** of these agencies, and certainly not the principal purpose of any of them. As a matter of fact, existing laws and regulations preclude this without any necessity for a new rule substantially (and I dare say, apparently frighteningly sweeping in its scope) expanding the definition of "political committees" in the sense that term is used in the referenced portions of the CFR.

Ms. Mai T. Dinh
Federal Election Commission
30th March 2004
Page 2.

However, in each instance, public policy issues sometimes involving elections for candidates or ballot measures, or proposed legislation, potentially impacting upon our work so dramatically, demanded that we raise our voices corporately to inform our constituents, and other citizens, of this potential impact.

Examples would include the time when the downtown Mission to which I was assigned in Portland, Maine, joined with the Catholic Archdiocese, a United Methodist and a Baptist congregation, the Salvation Army, and several secular nonprofit organizations to address the fact that no year-round shelters for the homeless existed in that city at the time. The solution involved not only the cooperation of these agencies, but also advocating for changes in the policies of the City of Portland. During the course of this process, individuals organized themselves to hold demonstrations advocating City intervention, and various proposals came before the City Council. We could not have been a part of the ultimate solution had we been forced to ignore these elements of the process, at the risk of having our religious congregation and its affiliated charities declared "political committees."

Nor could we rely on the candidate's committees and the other genuinely political parties, campaign organizations, and political action committees, to consider, let alone inform the public, of the impact of their proposals on our particular constituencies.

It would seem that a principal, though perhaps unintended, consequence of this proposed rule change would be to reduce the voices in public discourse to a few *officially recognized* and regulated campaign organizations, further disenfranchising the marginalized populations among us to whom many of us have committed our lives and careers. This not only runs counter to the basic principles of democracy and freedom of expression so fundamental to our American system of governance, but prevents the religious and charitable institutions upon which we rely to address social ills from effectively serving the most needy among us.

In the interest of economy, I have not burdened the Commission with an extensive recital of examples in which the rule change under consideration would have impeded or outright prevented important charitable initiatives in which I have been involved over the years, opting instead to summarize my concerns. However, I stand ready, should the Commission desire, to provide

Ms. Mai T. Dinh
Federal Election Commission
30th March 2004
Page 3.

further particulars either in writing or in public testimony, or both.

I appreciate your attention, and that of the Commission, and thank you in advance for the careful consideration that I know will be given to the potential consequences of this ill-advised rule change on those least able to bear them.

Respectfully,


Father John-Mark Gilhousen

cc: The Hon. Russ Feingold
The Hon. Herbert Kohl
The Hon. F. James Sensenbrenner