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COUNSEL
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December 14, 1999

Rosemary C. Smith
Federal Election Commission
999 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20463

RE: Use of the internet for campaign activities

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am writing in response to the notice of inquiry on this issue. I am not a political candidate, nor am I affiliated with one, but am writing as a concerned citizen.

I believe there are two main issues being addressed; the use of the internet by candidates, and political speech by citizens using the internet. It is the latter issue which most concerns me, though I do have some interest in both.

I strongly believe that we should not attempt to control or censor political speech by citizens. Creating a web site out of one's own desire to see a particular candidate elected is a fundamental right guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution. It is similar to wearing a t-shirt proclaiming one's candidate, though albeit with a much larger potential audience. People have a right to express their views.

I urge the commission to to make no rules which abrogate these rights. Barring that hands-off stance, I urge that any rule-making be as liberal as possible. If you must take a position, it would be better to err on the side of lax rules than strict ones.

In the matter of candidates' sites, I believe they should be treated the same as any other campaign-related expense. I see it as no different from radio, print, or TV advertising. Sure, it is usually far less expensive. However, I believe the finance rules' intent is to level the playing field, so that all candidates have an equal chance to be elected. I don't believe this has succeeded, as powerful incumbents still have a far greater favoring.

I see the internet as a powerful way to level the field. It is available to candidates of all types and financial capabilities. Allowing candidates to use it in the same manner as any other advertising will greatly enhance the intent of the campaign finance rules.

Therefore, I also urge you to allow liberal use of the internet, and to treat it like any other form of advertising.

Sincerely,



Carlos A. Alvarez