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By Office of the Commission Secretary at 4:15 pm, Aug 11, 2022



FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20463

August 11, 2022

ADVISORY OPINION 2022-18

Rachel L. Jacobs, Esq.
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Dear Ms. Jacobs and Mr. Peterson:

We are responding to the advisory opinion request that you submitted on behalf of Bridget Fleming for Congress, Jackie Gordon for Congress, Conole for Congress, and Max Rose for Congress (collectively, the “Committees”). The Committees ask whether they may seek to have contributions that were originally designated for New York’s November 2022 general election redesignated for New York’s August 23, 2022, primary election as long as the redesignations are received in writing before August 23, 2022, in light of the Commission’s conclusion in Advisory Opinion 2022-08 (National Republican Congressional Committee) (“NRCC”) that a separate contribution limit applies to the August 23, 2022, primary election. The Commission concludes that the Committees may seek such redesignations as proposed.

Background

The facts presented in this advisory opinion are based on your advisory opinion request received on July 26, 2022 (“AOR”).

Bridget Fleming, Jackie Gordon, Francis Conole, and Max Rose are currently running for nomination in the August 23, 2022, Democratic primary for the U.S. House of Representatives in New York. The Committees are their respective authorized principal campaign committees. The candidates were all candidates in the federal primary election in New York originally scheduled for June 28, 2022.

In late March 2022, a New York state trial court found that the congressional maps to be used in the June 28 election were unconstitutional. That decision was followed by a number of

other judicial decisions in April and May 2022, culminating in the adoption of new congressional district maps and a new primary election scheduled in New York for August 23, 2022.¹

On June 23, 2022, the Commission issued Advisory Opinion 2022-08 (NRCC). In that advisory opinion, the Commission concluded that the litigation had resulted in a “new electoral situation”² for congressional candidates in New York, such that candidates vying for their party’s nomination in the August 23, 2022, primary election were entitled to a contribution limit separate from the limit for candidates in the June 2022 primary election.

Question Presented

May the Committees receive redesignations of November 2022 general election contributions to the August primary election even if the redesignations are received more than 60 days after the Committees’ receipt of the contributions, as long as the redesignations are received in writing prior to August 23, 2022?

Legal Analysis

Yes, the Committees may receive redesignations of November 2022 general election contributions to the August primary election as proposed, even if the redesignations are received more than 60 days after the Committees’ receipt of the contributions.

Under the Federal Election Campaign Act (the “Act”) and Commission regulations, candidates and their authorized committees are entitled to separate contribution limits with respect to “any election for Federal office.”³ For the purposes of the Act and Commission regulations, an “election” includes “a general, special, primary, or runoff election,”⁴ where an individual, “whether opposed or unopposed, seek[s] nomination for election, or election, to Federal office.”⁵ A primary election is an election “held prior to a general election, as a direct result of which candidates are nominated, in accordance with applicable State law, for election to Federal office in a subsequent election.”⁶ Because contribution limits “apply separately with respect to each election,”⁷ “participating in multiple distinct elections can render a candidate

¹ Additional information about the events leading up to the scheduling of the August 23, 2022, primary election can be found in Advisory Opinion 2022-08 (NRCC).

² *Id.* at 5-6.

³ 52 U.S.C. § 30116(a)(1)(A); 11 C.F.R. § 110.1(b).

⁴ 52 U.S.C. § 30101(1)(A).

⁵ 11 C.F.R. § 100.2(a).

⁶ *Id.* § 100.2(c)(1).

⁷ *Id.* § 110.1(j)(1).

eligible for separate contribution limits.”⁸ As the Commission determined in Advisory Opinion 2022-08 (NRCC), candidates in New York’s August 2022 primary election are entitled to contribution limits separate from the contribution limits for New York’s previously scheduled June 2022 primary election.⁹

Commission regulations provide that contributors may designate their contributions “for a particular election.”¹⁰ A designated contribution must not cause the contributor to exceed the Act’s contribution limits with respect to the particular election for which the contribution has been designated. In addition, a political committee may accept contributions designated for an election that has already occurred only to the extent that such contributions do not exceed the committee’s net debts outstanding.¹¹

Commission regulations also provide that the treasurer of an authorized committee may “request a written redesignation of a contribution by the contributor for a different election” in certain circumstances, such as when the contribution was designated for a particular election but received after that election, or when the contribution is excessive either on its face or when aggregated with other contributions from the same contributor.¹² A contribution is considered redesignated if the authorized committee requests a written redesignation and also informs the contributor of the contributor’s right to a refund of the contribution as an alternative to redesignating it, and the political committee receives the redesignation in writing within 60 days after receiving the original contribution.¹³

When the Commission promulgated these regulations, it explained that these procedures would allow political committees to “seek and obtain from contributors redesignations and reattributions of certain contributions that would otherwise be illegal.”¹⁴ The Commission stated that the 60-day period would allow a committee treasurer to “examine the contribution for compliance with the contribution limits, make a written request for redesignation if necessary and receive the written redesignation from the contributor.”¹⁵ The Commission also explained that the 60-day period “represents a balance between the need to establish a realistic deadline, on

⁸ Advisory Opinion 2016-09 (Martins for Congress) at 3; Advisory Opinion 2016-03 (Holding for Congress) at 4.

⁹ Advisory Opinion 2022-08 (NRCC) at 6.

¹⁰ 11 C.F.R. § 110.1(b)(2)-(4).

¹¹ *Id.* § 110.1(b)(1), (3)(i).

¹² *Id.* § 110.1(b)(3)(i), (b)(5)(i).

¹³ *Id.* § 110.1(b)(5)(ii).

¹⁴ Contribution and Expenditure Limitations and Prohibitions; Contributions by Persons and Multicandidate Political Committees, 52 Fed. Reg. 760 (Jan. 9, 1987).

¹⁵ *Id.* at 763.

the one hand, and the need to resolve the problems created by excessive contributions as quickly as possible, on the other hand.”¹⁶

The Commission’s regulations on redesignation of impermissible contributions require that redesignations be received in writing within 60 days of the receipt of the contribution.¹⁷ If the redesignation is not in writing or is not received within the required time frame, the contribution must be refunded.¹⁸

The Commission has made clear, however, that for contributions that are permissible when received and that become impermissible only later due to changes to the election or a candidate’s status, redesignations need not be obtained within 60 days of the committee’s receipt of the contribution. For example, in Advisory Opinion 1992-15 (Russo), the Commission concluded that a candidate who had lost a primary election could obtain the redesignation of general election contributions more than 60 days after receipt of the contributions, because “[i]t is not until the results of the primary election are announced that the treasurer has actual notice of the need to obtain redesignations.”¹⁹ Similarly, in Advisory Opinion 2008-04 (Dodd for President), the Commission concluded that a candidate’s withdrawal from his race “caused the 60-day period for obtaining redesignations and making refunds to commence to run.”²⁰ And, in Advisory Opinion 2009-15 (Bill White for Texas), the Commission reiterated that a political committee could obtain redesignations of contributions more than 60 days after the receipt of the contributions, due to a later event causing the committee to seek the redesignations.²¹ The Commission further noted that, “[a]lthough Commission regulations only specifically address redesignation of excessive contributions, nothing in the Commission’s regulations is intended to suggest that political committees may not seek redesignation of contributions that are *within* the contribution limitations and restrictions.”²² Thus, the Commission has consistently concluded that a political committee may receive redesignations of contributions more than 60 days after the committee’s receipt of the contributions, if there is a later event giving the committee notice of a reason to seek redesignation.

Here, the Committees propose to ask contributors to redesignate for the August 2022 primary election contributions that were originally designated for the November 2022 general election. Under the facts here, the event giving rise to the Committees’ desire to seek the redesignations was the Commission’s June 23, 2022, Advisory Opinion 2022-08 (NRCC)

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ 11 C.F.R. § 110.1(b)(5)(ii)(A)(2).

¹⁸ *Id.* § 103.3(b)(3).

¹⁹ Advisory Opinion 1992-15 (Russo) at 2.

²⁰ Advisory Opinion 2008-04 (Dodd for President) at 4.

²¹ Advisory Opinion 2009-15 (Bill White for Texas) at 7.

²² *Id.* at 6 n.7 (citing 11 C.F.R. § 110.1(b)(5)(i)(A)-(D)) (emphasis in original).

concluding that congressional candidates in New York’s August 2022 primary are entitled to a separate contribution limit from the June 2022 primary. Prior to that advisory opinion, the Committees did not have “actual notice” as to whether and, if so, how much they could ask persons who had contributed to the June 2022 primary election to redesignate for the August 2022 primary election.²³

Accordingly, the Commission concludes that the Committees may receive redesignations of November 2022 general election contributions to the August 2022 primary election as proposed, even if the redesignations are received more than 60 days after the Committees’ original receipt of the contributions.²⁴ This conclusion is consistent with the Commission’s previous advisory opinions.

This response constitutes an advisory opinion concerning the application of the Act and Commission regulations to the specific transaction or activity set forth in your request.²⁵ The Commission emphasizes that, if there is a change in any of the facts or assumptions presented, and such facts or assumptions are material to a conclusion presented in this advisory opinion, then the requestors may not rely on that conclusion as support for their proposed activity. Any person involved in any specific transaction or activity which is indistinguishable in all its material aspects from the transaction or activity with respect to which this advisory opinion is rendered may rely on this advisory opinion.²⁶ Please note that the analysis or conclusions in this advisory opinion may be affected by subsequent developments in the law including, but not limited to, statutes, regulations, advisory opinions, and case law. Any advisory opinions cited herein are available on the Commission’s website.

On behalf of the Commission,



Allen J. Dickerson
Chairman

²³ Advisory Opinion 1992-15 (Russo) at 2.

²⁴ The Committees did not ask, and the Commission does not determine, whether the 60-day deadline to receive redesignations of contributions that become illegal after receipt would apply here. Even if it did apply, however, the Commission notes that the Committees’ receipt of written redesignations “prior to August 23, 2022,” as proposed, would be within 60 days after the Commission issued Advisory Opinion 2022-08 (NRCC).

²⁵ *See* 52 U.S.C. § 30108.

²⁶ *See id.* § 30108(c)(1)(B).