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December 8, 2004

Lawrence Norton, Esq.
Office of General Counsel
Federal Election Commission
999 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20463

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RECEIVED
FEDERAL ELECTION
COMMISSION
OFFICE OF GENERAL
COUNSEL

Re: *Gleason and Service Employees International Union, MUR No. 5612*

Dear Mr. Norton:

The Nation recently published an article by David Moberg which bolsters the factual allegations in the above complaint. The November 8, 2004, article entitled, "Plotting an Ohio Surprise" is enclosed.

Mr. Moberg reports that the Service Employees International Union "pays workers to take months off their jobs to do political work" for America Coming Together. According to the article, America Coming Together ("ACT") has 2,461 full-time political canvassers. Service Employees International Union paid for an additional 1,100 workers for ACT.

Mr. Gleason's original complaint alleged that the SEIU contributed millions of dollars of dues money to ACT which was used for partisan get-out-the-vote efforts and raising money for the Democratic National Committee to support federal candidates. This article in *The Nation* reports that the SEIU also paid workers to take time off their job to do political work for ACT.

Please consider this additional information in support of Mr. Gleason's complaint.

Very truly yours,

Bruce N. Cameron

BNC/njr
enclosure

cc: Jeff S. Jordan, Supervisory Attorney, FEC
Stephan Gleason
William Messenger

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Plotting an Ohio Surprise

Philosophy student Julian Johannesen and photographer Cosby Lindquist have been encamped in the neighborhoods of Columbus, Ohio, for more than a year. Both were inspired back then after hearing an Al Franken speech on C-SPAN to go through the Camp Wellstone activist training program, developed by the late senator's sons and supporters. Now they knock on doors, show voters a short video about job losses on their Palm Pilots, ask about their issue interests and favored candidate in the election, and track results to download later from their Palm Pilots into central computer files. As part of a \$125 million voter-turnout operation in thirteen key states run by America Coming Together, they returned in mid-October to a poor working-class neighborhood in a swing city of a crucial swing state where ACT had been registering and educating voters.

Johannesen and Lindquist are among the ground troops mobilized by America Votes, a loose coalition of thirty-three national groups—from new formations like ACT and MoveOn.org to well-established institutions like the AFL-CIO and Planned Parenthood—coordinating efforts to register, educate and mobilize voters in unprecedented ways. America Votes and groups like ACT, one of several participating 527 groups—named after the tax-code provision regulating them—are offspring of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform legislation, which bans “soft money” donations but allows donors (from rich individuals like George Soros to labor unions) to channel large contributions to the 527 groups, which cannot coordinate with the Kerry campaign or the Democrats. (Adding to the strategic confusion, a single organization—like the Sierra Club—may have three or four distinct operations, some partisan and some non-partisan, with different rules about funding, advocacy and co-operation.) But America Votes is also the offspring of organized labor's revival, since 1995, of person-to-person politicking at the workplace and in working-class communities, which has greatly boosted labor's share of the vote and shaped even Republican counterstrategies.

“I'm unemployed,” Teana Foggie, a 31-year-old African-American woman explained to ACT's Johannesen, echoing other stories on the street of plants closed and jobs lost. “That's why I'm not voting for Bush.” Down the street, 55-year-old Paul Buchanan, a white former Air Force munitions expert with impressive muttonchops, was equally concerned about the economy and the war in Iraq. “We are the aggressors,” he said. “That's wrong.”

On election day in Ohio, 250 paid ACT canvassers (who claim to have talked to more than a million Ohio voters over more than a year), another 12,000 paid workers, dozens of staff from other America Votes operations, about 5,000 America Votes volunteers and an unprecedented organized labor army of union staff and volunteers will be making sure such voters get to the polls. In a state that Gore lost by 3.5 percent (166,000 votes) after abandoning it, there may be as many as 700,000 new voters, overwhelmingly from strongly Democratic counties (including 160,000 from the Cleveland area, five times the number registered in 2000). ACT claims to have registered 85,000, and

other America Votes partners—including groups focused on youth and minorities—another 215,000. If ACT's experience last year in Philadelphia is a guide, organizers will guarantee that these new voters turn out much as veteran voters do, even though, being younger and poorer, they are statistically less likely to vote.

At the national and state levels, America Votes partner groups tried to reduce duplication and coordinate efforts. In Cleveland there was a master calendar for sending registrars to public events so groups knew who was covering what. While there was no attempt to adopt a common message, discussions of what worked influenced organizational strategies. For example, ACORN, a low-income-community group, changed its message as a result of America Votes discussions to emphasize hopes for regaining a stronger economic future, not just the trauma of past job losses.

“We set out to do specific things that aren't glamorous—share polling, training, build local tables where people would share their work, build an infrastructure for volunteers,” says America Votes president Cecile Richards. “That's what happened. I'm amazed and heartened by how the progressive community did what it had to do to be strategic and effective.”

The actual work is done by the partners, who still occasionally trip over one another but are much more effective than they would be without the cooperation. Nationally ACT has 2,461 full-time canvassers, and another 1,100 from the Service Employees International Union's “Heroes” program, which pays workers to take months off their jobs to do political work. “We set out to build the largest voter-mobilization program in American history,” said ACT chief executive officer Steve Rosenthal. Although the program varies among the states, “we focus heavily on failures of this Administration: The economy stinks, it can't fund healthcare, Iraq is a quagmire.”

“The level of effort in Ohio to register and get out the vote is extraordinary,” says John Green, director of the Bliss Institute at the University of Akron. “We haven't seen anything like this in living memory.” Although Republicans have also expanded their ground game in Ohio, Richards, Rosenthal and progressive organizers there say it pales in comparison with their efforts. “It's not just the earlier effort with more resources” that has yielded results for progressives, says veteran Ohio political strategist Gerald Austin, “but people weren't stepping on each other. It's been successful because of cooperation.”

Whatever the outcome of the election, some participants want the coalition to continue. “It's a way, after the election, to build allies, and hopefully we can work together,” says Sierra Club Midwest representative Glen Brand. Others are more skeptical, but much will depend on decisions by funders. In any case, the experience has taught some lessons. “Regardless of whether this formation goes forward, some of these organizations have fundamentally changed how to do politics and will never go back to the day of doing our thing and hoping it adds up,” Richards says. “There's a fundamental shift in what people realize they can do collectively.”

DAVID MOBERG

David Moberg, a senior editor at In These Times, writes frequently for The Nation on labor issues.