



FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20463

VIA FAX (610-692-0877) and FIRST CLASS MAIL

SEP 29 2011

Joel L. Frank, Esq.
Lamb McErlane PC
24 E. Market Street
West Chester, PA 19381

RE: MUR 6418
Republican Committee of Chester County

Dear Mr. Frank:

On November 4, 2010, the Federal Election Commission notified your client, the Republican Committee of Chester County, of a complaint alleging violations of certain sections of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended. On September 27, 2011, the Commission found, on the basis of the information in the complaint, and information provided by your client, that there is no reason to believe the Republican Committee of Chester County violated 2 U.S.C. §§ 433 or 441d. Also on this date, the Commission dismissed, as a matter of prosecutorial discretion, any violation of 2 U.S.C. § 434 by your client. Accordingly, the Commission closed its file in this matter.

Documents related to the case will be placed on the public record within 30 days. See Statement of Policy Regarding Disclosure of Closed Enforcement and Related Files, 68 Fed. Reg. 70,426 (Dec. 18, 2003) and Statement of Policy Regarding Placing First General Counsel's Reports on the Public Record, 74 Fed. Reg. 66,132 (Dec. 14, 2009). The Factual and Legal Analysis, which explains the Commission's findings, is enclosed for your information.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 694-1650.

Sincerely,

Mark D. Shonkwiler
Assistant General Counsel

Enclosure
Factual and Legal Analysis

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FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

FACTUAL AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

RESPONDENT: Republican Committee
of Chester County

MUR: 6418

I. GENERATION OF MATTER

This matter was generated by a complaint filed by Lois Herr. *See* 2 U.S.C.
§ 437(g)(a)(1).

II. FACTUAL AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

A. Factual Background

The Republican Committee of Chester County ("RCCC") is not currently registered as a political committee with the Commission. The RCCC was once registered as an unauthorized qualified party committee, but the Commission accepted its termination report on October 11, 1999, and it has not registered or reported with the Commission since that date. According to its bylaws, the RCCC is "responsible for the general supervision, regulation, and direction of the Republican Party of Chester County." *See* Bylaws for the Republican Committee of Chester County Rule 2.1. Additionally, the Republican Party of Pennsylvania website lists the RCCC as its "headquarters" contact in Chester County. *See* "Chester County: Republican Party of Pennsylvania," <http://www.pagop.org/counties/chester-county/> (last visited August 29, 2011).

In the four months leading up to the 2010 general election, in which Congressman Pitts ran against Democratic challenger Lois Herr, the RCCC posted a series of fifteen short videos on its YouTube channel and the website www.leftwinglois.com. The complaint does not include either transcripts or copies of the videos. According to a local media report, the videos "mock" Ms. Herr's positions on health care and abortion rights. *See* Tom Murse, *Herr Files Complaint with Federal Election Commission*, Lancaster Online, Oct. 27, 2010,

http://lancasteronline.com/article/local/305547_Herr-files-complaint-with-Federal-Election-Commission.html. Although the October 2010 complaint includes the web address for each video, it appears that the videos were removed from the RCCC's YouTube channel and the www.leftwinglois.com website was deactivated sometime after the November 2010 election. Additionally, it does not appear that there are cached or archived versions of the videos online. The following table contains the information available regarding the videos:

Table 1. RCCC Videos

Date Posted	Title	Length
7/15/10	"Rules for Radicals"	1:34
7/23/10	"Howard Dean"	1:35
7/25/10	"How Liberal is Lois?"	1:10
8/3/10	"Barney Frank Healthcare"	2:37
8/14/10	"Breaking the Rules"	1:40
8/22/10	"The Cruise, Part 1"	2:02
8/22/10	"The Cruise, Part 2"	2:25
8/29/10	"Government-Funded Abortion"	1:24
9/8/10	"Marijuana"	1:25
9/8/10	"ACORN"	1:44
9/8/10	"The Earmarks Flip-Flop"	1:36
9/19/10	"Left of Obama"	2:20
10/11/10	"Left of Pelosi"	2:03
10/12/10	"No Plan for Jobs"	1:45
10/24/10	"The Candidate Who Cried Wolf"	1:34

Complainant asserts that the videos "targeted" Ms. Herr, and were produced for the purpose of influencing voters in a federal election to the benefit of Congressman Pitts' campaign committee, Friends of Joe Pitts ("Pitts Committee"). Complaint at 1. Accordingly, Complainant alleges that the RCCC violated 2 U.S.C. §§ 433 and 434 by failing to register with the Commission as a political committee, and also violated 2 U.S.C. § 434 by failing to report the expenditures associated with these videos. Additionally, while each video contains a disclaimer stating that it is, "Paid for by the Republican Committee of Chester County," Complainant alleges that this is an incomplete disclaimer in violation of 2 U.S.C. § 441d.

1 The RCCC does not deny the basic facts set forth in the complaint, but denies any
2 liability related to registering and reporting with the Commission. The RCCC asserts that it did
3 not pay to produce the videos, but instead the videos were produced by a volunteer, and therefore
4 fall within the “volunteer activity on the internet exemption.” RCCC Response at 1. The RCCC
5 states that it only incurred a \$300 expense for hosting the website on which the videos were
6 displayed. *Id.* Accordingly, the RCCC maintains that it was not required to register with or
7 report to the Commission. *Id.* Finally, the RCCC acknowledges that its videos may have
8 included incomplete disclaimers and states that it will inform future volunteers of disclosure
9 requirements. *Id.*

10 **B. Legal Analysis**

11 1. Political Committee Status

12 Under the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended, (“the Act”), a political
13 committee is any committee, club, association, or other group of persons which receives
14 contributions or makes expenditures aggregating in excess of \$1,000 during a calendar year.
15 2 U.S.C. § 431(4)(A). Commission regulations define “local committee” as any organization
16 that by virtue of the bylaws of a political party or the operation of State law is part of the official
17 party structure, and is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the political party at the level
18 of city, county, neighborhood, ward, district, precinct, or any other subdivision of a State.
19 11 C.F.R. § 100.14(b). A local committee of a political party also qualifies as a political
20 committee if it: (1) makes contributions or expenditures aggregating in excess of \$1,000 in a
21 calendar year; (2) receives contributions aggregating in excess of \$5,000 during a calendar year;
22 or (3) makes payments for activity exempted from the definitions of contribution and
23 expenditure aggregating in excess of \$5,000 during a calendar year. 2 U.S.C. § 431(4)(C).

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1 The RCCC appears to qualify as a “local committee” under Commission regulations
2 because it is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Republican Party within Chester
3 County, and the Republican Party of Pennsylvania appears to recognize it as part of the State
4 party structure. *See supra* at 1. There is no information, however, to indicate that the RCCC
5 meets the \$1,000 financial threshold for expenditures required to trigger political committee
6 status under the Act. *See* 2 U.S.C. § 431(4)(C).

7 Under the Act, the value of services provided without compensation by any individual
8 who volunteers on behalf of a candidate or political committee is specifically exempted from the
9 definition of contribution. 2 U.S.C. § 431(8)(B)(i); 11 C.F.R. § 100.74. Additionally, the use of
10 an individual’s real or personal property, when provided in the course of volunteering personal
11 services on his or her residential premises, is excluded from the definitions of contribution and
12 expenditure. 11 C.F.R. §§ 100.75 and 100.135. Commission regulations further provide that an
13 individual’s or group of individuals’ uncompensated internet activity for the purpose of
14 influencing a Federal election – whether undertaken independently or in coordination with any
15 candidate, authorized committee, or political party committee – is exempted from the definitions
16 of contribution and expenditure. 11 C.F.R. §§ 100.94 and 100.155. These regulations
17 specifically exempt the value of an individual’s uncompensated time and the value of any special
18 skills that individual may bring to bear on their internet activities, as well as his use of equipment
19 and services for uncompensated internet activity, regardless of who owns such equipment or
20 where it is located. *Id. See also* Explanation and Justification for Internet Communications,
21 71 Fed. Reg. 18589, 18604-05 (April 12, 2006). The regulations define “internet activity” to
22 include a non-exhaustive list of potential activity, as well as “any other form of communication
23 distributed over the internet.” *Id.*

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1 Based on the RCCC's assertion that it did not pay for the videos, but that they were
2 instead produced by an individual volunteer using his/her own resources, it appears that the
3 production of the videos constitutes "uncompensated volunteer services" specifically exempted
4 from the definitions of contribution and expenditure. *See supra* at 4. Thus, the provision of the
5 videos to the RCCC did not constitute a contribution, and the unknown cost of the videos'
6 production does not cause the RCCC to have made expenditures that result in triggering political
7 committee status. Further, to the extent that the volunteer had a role in posting the videos on the
8 website, it would similarly be "uncompensated internet activity," as asserted by the RCCC.

9 Based on the information provided in the complaint and the response, the only activity
10 that could count towards the relevant financial thresholds for triggering political committee
11 status would be the RCCC's payment to host the website on which videos containing express
12 advocacy were posted. Regardless of whether some or all of the videos contain express
13 advocacy, this \$300 payment falls short of the financial thresholds that would trigger political
14 committee status. *See* 2 U.S.C. § 431(4)(C). Thus, it does not appear that the RCCC was
15 required to register and report as a political committee under the Act. Accordingly, the
16 Commission found no reason to believe that the Republican Committee of Chester County
17 violated 2 U.S.C. §§ 433 and 434.

18 2. Independent Expenditure Reporting

19 Under the Act, every person other than a political committee who makes an independent
20 expenditure in an aggregate amount or value in excess of \$250 during a calendar year shall file a
21 statement or report with the Commission containing certain information about that expenditure.
22 2 U.S.C. § 434(c) and 11 C.F.R. § 109.10. An "independent expenditure" is an expenditure by a
23 person expressly advocating the election or defeat of a clearly identified federal candidate that is

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not made in concert or cooperation with the candidate, the candidate's committee, a political party committee, or any of their agents. 2 U.S.C. § 431(17).

Although the RCCC expended \$300 to host the website on which the videos were posted, neither the complaint nor the responses include any substantial information as to the content of the videos. While the titles of the video and the name of the website on which they were posted (www.leftwinglois.com) indicate that they may have "targeted" Lois Herr, as the complainant alleges, a determination as to which videos, if any, actually constituted independent expenditures would require an investigation. Given that the RCCC spent only \$300 in connection with the website, it does not appear that the use of Commission resources to conduct an investigation is warranted. Accordingly, the Commission exercised its prosecutorial discretion and dismissed any potential violation of 2 U.S.C. § 434(b) by the Republican Committee of Chester County. *See Heckler v. Chaney*, 470 U.S. 821 (1985).

3. Disclaimer Requirements

The Act, as implemented through Commission regulations, requires that all public communications by any person that expressly advocate the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate include disclaimers. 11 C.F.R. § 110.11(a)(2). Commission regulations define "public communication" to exclude all communications over the internet, except for communications placed for a fee on another person's website. 11 C.F.R. § 100.26.

Regardless of the content of the videos, it does not appear that they qualify as "public communications." The videos were displayed on two websites: (1) the RCCC's YouTube channel; and (2) the website www.leftwinglois.com, which the RCCC hosted at a cost of \$300. There is no information indicating that the RCCC paid a fee to place the videos on another person's website. It does not appear, then, that the videos required disclaimers. Accordingly, the

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- 1 Commission found no reason to believe that the Republican Party of Chester County violated**
- 2 2 U.S.C. § 441d.**

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