



FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
1050 FIRST STREET, N.E.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20463

BEFORE THE FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

In the Matter of)
) MUR7330
Mia Love, *et al.*)

**STATEMENT OF REASONS OF VICE CHAIR ALLEN DICKERSON AND
COMMISSIONERS SEAN J. COOKSEY AND JAMES E. “TREY” TRAINOR, III**

The complaint in this matter, filed in February 2018, alleged that Representative Mia Love and Friends of Mia Love (now known as Utah Love PAC) (“the Committee”) accepted an excessive in-kind contribution from the Utah Republican Party (“URP”) when URP paid for political materials that supported Love’s 2016 general election candidacy.¹ The Committee and URP explain that the materials were volunteer materials, the costs of which were exempt from the applicable limits on contributions from URP to the Committee. Considering the state of the law regarding the application of the so-called “volunteer materials exemption” (“VME”),² the age of the conduct at issue, and the best use of Commission resources, we declined to move forward with this matter.³

Essentially, the complaint alleged that URP spent approximately \$120,000 on mailings that supported Love’s candidacy, that the mailings were impermissibly coordinated with the Committee, and that they lacked the proper disclaimer indicating the Committee’s role in their preparation. The complaint relies heavily upon a handful of vague press accounts to support its theory. The Committee’s response explained that the materials were volunteer materials, which may be prepared in cooperation with the candidate. URP, likewise, explained that Love was the state party’s nominee in the 2016 general election for Utah’s Fourth Congressional District when the materials were distributed, and that the state party paid for the materials with permissible funds (that is, from its federal account), included the proper disclaimer, and involved volunteers in the distribution of the materials.⁴

¹ The complaint also alleged that the Committee and URP violated U.S. Postal Service regulations. Compl. at 1-2, MUR 7330 (Mia Love, *et al.*). This allegation is beyond the Commission’s jurisdiction.

² See 11 C.F.R. §§ 100.87 and 100.147.

³ We have called on our colleagues to support initiating a notice and comment rulemaking on the VME, and such a proposal is under consideration.

⁴ URP noted, unsurprisingly, that the individuals who coordinated the volunteer materials program for the party in 2016 were no longer employed by the committee when the response was filed in 2018; however, URP provided

Here, we agreed with our colleagues who recognized the fruitlessness of investigating this matter (in no small part because of the difficulty in being able to get information from the people involved in inherently transient activity nearly five years prior),⁵ but disagreed about whether to move forward with this matter. The disagreement centered around what to do about the fact that, as a result of technical improvements in the production, preparation, and distribution of political materials, state and local political party committees have evolved their practices, thereby rendering the forty-year-old VME framework somewhat outdated. Our view is that the Commission has failed to provide adequate guidance to the public, and therefore moving forward on this matter, especially in light of how much time has passed since the events at issue, would be unfair and not the best use of Commission resources.⁶ Accordingly, we voted to dismiss this matter pursuant to *Heckler v. Chaney*.⁷

There is much water under the VME bridge at the Commission. The exemption dates to the 1979 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended, wherein Congress established an exemption from the definition of “contribution” and “expenditure” for the cost of campaign materials purchased by a state or local political party committee that support a federal candidate who has received the party’s general election nomination and are used by the party committee in connection with volunteer activity. However, over the past forty years, political campaigns have been fundamentally transformed by innovation and technology, and today’s volunteer activity looks a lot different than it did forty years ago. For example, for many election cycles, state and local party committees recruited volunteers to affix address labels and postage to envelopes used to distribute candidate materials, and to sort the mail by zip code for postal preprocessing (colloquially known as “bagging and tagging,” a phase no doubt familiar to those who have been in the trenches with volunteers at party committee offices); however, more recently, those functions have been automated and, in some cases, rendered obsolete.

Unsurprisingly, over the past several election cycles, the Commission has struggled to apply a 1979 law to modern campaigns, resulting in a patchwork of regulatory guidance that fails to provide a clear rule to the public. As far back as 2009, in matter arising from the 2004 election cycle, a bipartisan majority of the Commission has recognized the “complicated history of the volunteer materials exemption” and pledged to “issue more detailed guidance to clarify the volunteer materials exemption and the circumstances in which it applies.”⁸ To date, the

contemporaneous emails demonstrating the participation of volunteers in the distribution of the materials. Resp. (URP) at 2, MUR 7330 (Mia Love, *et al.*).

⁵ Amended Certification (Aug. 31, 2021), MUR 7330 (Mia Love, *et al.*).

⁶ In considering this matter, we also noted that the 2016 coordinated party spending limit, of which none was actually spent by URP, was \$96,200, and that URP could have contributed an additional \$5,000 to the Committee directly; so even assuming *arguendo* that the materials at issue were not exempt under the VME, the amount of any excessive contribution would have been relatively small.

⁷ 470 U.S. 821 (1985).

⁸ Statement of Reasons of Vice Chairman Matthew Petersen and Commissioners Cynthia Bauerly, Caroline Hunter, and Ellen Weintraub, MUR 5598 (John Swallow) at 4.

Commission has been unable to issue such guidance, despite several attempts.⁹ And it would be unfair for the Commission to require state and local party committees to choose between taking advantage of more modern campaign techniques and engaging volunteers in its activities.

Here, the respondents assert that the materials were volunteer exempt materials, and they provided some evidence in support of that assertion (none of which is contradicted). In the absence of a clear rule about the application of that exemption (and disagreement among Commissioners about what it *should* be), and in light of the amount of time that had passed since the activity at issue (and that Love is no longer a federal candidate), we could not support OGC's recommendation to investigate further, including though the use of compulsory process. Nor could we support finding reason to believe that URP and the Committee violated the law (by impermissibly coordinating the materials) and seek a monetary penalty based thereupon. Instead, we voted to exercise the Commission's prosecutorial discretion to dismiss this matter. But we continue to urge our colleagues to join with us in the process of developing a rule that can be fairly enforced going forward.

10/27/2021

Date



Allen Dickerson
Vice Chair

10/27/2021

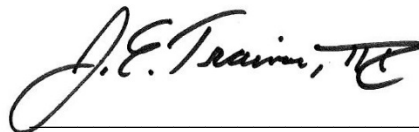
Date



Sean J. Cooksey
Commissioner

10/27/2021

Date



James E. "Trey" Trainor, III
Commissioner

⁹ See Proposed Interim Enforcement Policy (Volunteer Materials Exemption) (2010 and 2012), Agenda Document No. 12-16, Drafts A, B, C, and D, available here: <https://www.fec.gov/legal-resources/policy-other-guidance/> (accessed Oct. 2, 2021).