

**FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
FIRST GENERAL COUNSEL'S REPORT**

MUR: 7761
DATE COMPLAINT FILED: July 8, 2020
DATE OF NOTIFICATION: July 22, 2020
LAST RESPONSE RECEIVED: August 7, 2020
DATE ACTIVATED: October 5, 2021

EXPIRATION OF SOL: July 19, 2025
ELECTION CYCLE: 2020

COMPLAINANT:

Christine Marie Wilson

RESPONDENTS:

Green Party of the United States and Hillary Kane
in her official capacity as treasurer
Howie Hawkins
Howie Hawkins for Our Future and Travis Christal
in his official capacity as treasurer¹
Andrea Merida Cuellar
Green Party of Colorado
Robin Laurain
Brendan Phillips
Michael O'Neil
Kevin Zeese
DC Statehood Green Party
Kansas Green Party
Green Party of Michigan
Green Party of New York State
Robert Edward Smith²

**RELEVANT STATUTE AND
REGULATION:**

52 U.S.C. § 30104
11 C.F.R. § 104.3

INTERNAL REPORTS CHECKED:

Disclosure Reports

FEDERAL AGENCIES CHECKED:

None

¹ This Respondent, which is Howie Hawkins's principal campaign committee, changed its name from Howie Hawkins 2020 to its current name, Howie Hawkins for Our Future, after the 2020 general election. Its treasurer during the relevant time period was David M. Petrovich; it changed its treasurer to Travis Christal on July 21, 2019.

² Robert Edward Smith was the Communications Manager for the Mountain Party, who submitted a Response on behalf of himself and the Mountain Party, although the Mountain Party was not named as a respondent in this matter. Robert Edward Smith Resp. at 1 (Aug. 7, 2020). The Mountain Party, and a person named Erin Fox were included in the caption of the Complaint, but since the complaint made no allegations as to them, we did not notify these persons of the complaint and make no recommendations as to them.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Complaint alleges “potential illegal campaign finance activity” by Howie Hawkins, a Green Party presidential candidate in 2020; Howie Hawkins for Our Future and Travis Christal in his official capacity as treasurer (the “Committee”); the Green Party of the United States (“GPUS”); various state affiliates of the GPUS; and individuals associated with the GPUS in connection with activity that violated the bylaws of the GPUS or its state affiliates. The Complaint specifically alleges that Hawkins became the Green Party presidential nominee after Respondents improperly favored Hawkins over other Green Party candidates.³ The Responses assert that the Complaint does not allege or establish any violation of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended (the “Act”) and that the Federal Election Commission has no jurisdiction over the internal rules of political parties regarding organizational neutrality and purported conflicts of interest.⁴

As set forth below, the Complaint does not allege any specific violations of the Act, nor does it allege facts that would support such violations. Accordingly, we recommend that the Commission find no reason to believe that the Respondents violated the Act or Commission regulations in connection with this matter, close the file as to all Respondents, and send the appropriate letters.

³ Compl. at 2-4 (July 8, 2020). The Complainant has requested that her name be redacted from publicly available information to avoid harassment by named party officials and party members.

⁴ GPUS Resp. at 1 (Aug. 4, 2020); Committee & Howie Hawkins Resp. at 1 (Aug. 6, 2020); Kansas Green Party Resp. at 2 (Aug. 4, 2020); Michael O’Neil Resp. at 1 (Aug. 5, 2020); Green Party of New York State Resp. at 1 (Aug. 6, 2020); Brendan Phillips Resp. at 1 (Aug. 6, 2020); D.C. Statehood Green Party Resp. at 1 (Aug. 6, 2020); Green Party of Michigan and Robin Laurain Resp. at 1 (Aug. 6, 2020); Green Party of Colorado and Andrea Merida Cuellar Resp. at 1 (Aug. 6, 2020); Kevin Zeese at 1 (Aug. 6, 2020); Robert Edward Smith Resp. at 1.

1 II. FACTUAL BACKGROUND

2 GPUS is a party committee and the national committee of the Green Party.⁵ Hillary Kane
3 is the treasurer of GPUS.⁶ GPUS has affiliated state parties, including the Green Party of
4 Colorado, Kansas Green Party, Green Party of New York State, D.C. Statehood Green Party, and
5 the Green Party of Michigan.⁷

6 Howie Hawkins was the 2020 Green Party presidential nominee. Hawkins formally
7 announced his candidacy for the presidency on May 28, 2019,⁸ was formally nominated at the
8 Green Party National Convention on July 11, 2020,⁹ and lost the general election on
9 November 3, 2020.¹⁰ Howie Hawkins for Our Future,¹¹ is the principal campaign committee of
10 Howie Hawkins. Travis Christal is the Committee's treasurer.¹²

⁵ GPUS, Amended Statement of Organization (Aug. 10, 2021). GPUS registered with the Commission as a national political party on November 19, 2001. GPUS, Original Statement of Organization (Nov. 19, 2001).

⁶ GPUS, Amended Statement of Organization (Aug. 11, 2017); GPUS, Amended Statement of Organization (Aug. 10, 2021).

⁷ *See About, State Parties*, GREEN PARTY US, https://www.gp.org/state_parties (last visited Jan 26, 2022).

⁸ Howie Hawkins, Original Statement of Candidacy at 1 (May 28, 2019); Howie Hawkins, Amended Statement of Candidacy at 1 (June 4, 2019). Hawkins also ran as a candidate for the presidency for the Socialist Party USA and won the nomination on October 26, 2019. Ecosocialism, Media Release, Howie Hawkins Wins Socialist Party USA Nomination Green Candidate Seeks To Build Left Unity With Multiple Nominations, H'20 HAWKINS/WALKER GREENS FOR PRES & VP (Oct. 28, 2019), <https://howiehawkins.us/howie-hawkins-wins-socialist-party-usa-nomination-green-candidate-seeks-to-build-left-unity-with-multiple-nominations/> (last visited Jan. 26, 2022).

⁹ *See Howie Hawkins Presidential Campaign, 2020*, BALLOTPEdia, https://ballotpedia.org/Howie_Hawkins_presidential_campaign_2020 (last visited Jan. 26, 2022). 18 individuals filed as 2020 Green Party presidential candidates. Prior to the national convention, state primaries and conventions were held to select the presidential nominating convention delegates. *How to Seek the 2020 Green Presidential Nomination*, GREEN PARTY US, <https://gp.us.org/how-to-seek-2020-green-nomination-2/> (last visited Jan. 26, 2022). The delegates selected the party nominee at the convention by majority vote. *Id.*

¹⁰ FEC, OFFICIAL 2020 PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS (2020), <https://www.fec.gov/resources/cms-content/documents/2020presgeresults.pdf>.

¹¹ Committee, Original Statement of Organization (May 28, 2019). The Statement of Organization has been amended several times. Committee, Amended Statement of Organization (June 20, 2019); Committee, Amended Statement of Organization (July 21, 2019); Committee, Amended Statement of Organization (Nov. 9, 2020).

¹² Committee, Amended Statement of Organization (July 21, 2019); Committee, Amended Statement of Organization (Nov. 9, 2020).

1 According to the Complaint, Hawkins, who ran as a presidential candidate for both the
2 GPUS and the Socialist Party, violated GPUS bylaws, which prohibit a GPUS candidate from
3 running with multiple parties.¹³ The Complaint also alleges that Andrea Merida Cuellar, Kevin
4 Zeese, Robin Laurain, Michael O'Neil, Brendan Phillips, and Robert Edward Smith violated the
5 Green Party's conflict-of-interest rules by serving as officials, members, or employees of the
6 Green Party while also working on the Hawkins 2020 presidential campaign.¹⁴

7 Further, the Complaint alleges that the Respondents improperly promoted Hawkins's
8 2020 presidential campaign over other Green Party candidates for the Green Party presidential
9 nomination, in violation of GPUS's conflict-of-interest rules and state party rules that proscribe
10 Green Party officials from publicly endorsing, advocating for or against, or working on the
11 campaign of any candidate prior to the Presidential Nominating Convention.¹⁵ Finally, the
12 Complaint alleges that certain state Green Party organizations manipulated the primary process
13 to further benefit Hawkins. For example, it alleged that North Carolina Green Party changed its
14 rules to permit dual party affiliation for its candidates and removed all candidates from the ballot,

¹³ Compl. ¶ 7; *id.*, Ex. 2 (stating that a GPUS candidate should not be a registrant or party member of any state or national political party in the individual's primary state, except for a party affiliated with GPUS).

¹⁴ Andrea Merida Cuellar, a member of the GPUS Media Committee and National Co-Chair of the Colorado Green party, was Hawkins's campaign manager. Compl. ¶ 2. Kevin Zeese, a Green Party Media Committee member, was Hawkins's Press Secretary. *Id.* ¶ 4; *id.*, Ex. 10. Robin Laurain, co-chair of the Michigan Green Party, was a community organizer for the Hawkins campaign. Compl. ¶ 17; *id.*, Ex. 11. Michael O'Neil was employed by the GPUS, the Green Party of New York State and the Hawkins campaign at various times during the 2020 primary election. Compl. ¶ 16; *id.*, Ex. 8. Brendan Phillips was Ballot Access Coordinator for GPUS and Ballot Access Consultant Contractor for Hawkins. Compl. ¶ 19; *id.*, Ex. 9. Robert Edward Smith, a coordinated campaign committee member of the GPUS and communications manager for the Mountain Party, was deputy press secretary and media coordinator and consultant for Hawkins. Compl. ¶ 21; *id.*, Ex. 12.

¹⁵ Compl. ¶¶ 2-4, 9-11, 13, 14, 16-21; *id.*, Ex.1.1. (citing Standing Rules of the Presidential Campaign Support Committee ("PCSC") ¶ 2.1 (Conflict of Interest) (requesting that members of the PCSC and the Steering Committee "avoid making public statements that could be interpreted as advocacy for or against any particular presidential candidate" or establishing a contractor relationship with a candidate prior to the Presidential Nominating Convention)); Compl.; *id.*, Exs. 6, 10, 11.

1 except for Hawkins,¹⁶ and that both the Missouri Green Party and Illinois Green Party unfairly
2 provided speaking time to Hawkins at their conventions while not providing the same to the
3 other candidates.¹⁷

4 Howie Hawkins, the Committee, Green Party of Colorado, DC Statehood Green Party,
5 Green Party of Michigan, Kansas Green Party, Phillips, Merida Cuellar, Zeese, and Smith filed
6 responses denying that the allegations establish any violation of the Act and Commission
7 regulations or that the FEC has jurisdiction over the internal rules of political parties regarding
8 organizational neutrality and purported conflicts of interest.¹⁸ The GPUS, Green Party of New
9 York State, and O'Neil also denied the allegations for the same reasons.¹⁹

10 **III. LEGAL ANALYSIS**

11 In past matters, the Commission has determined that it has no jurisdiction in matters
12 alleging that party organizations discriminated against or promoted certain candidates for federal
13 office over others in violation of other statutes. Specifically, the Commission has found no
14 reason to believe that respondents violated any statute within its jurisdiction where the complaint
15 alleged that: (1) a candidate was left out of party meetings and other candidates close to the
16 governor were being favored over that candidate in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 595;²⁰ and (2) a
17 county party organization interfered with a candidate's campaign for federal office, in violation

¹⁶ Compl. ¶ 23.

¹⁷ *Id.* ¶¶ 25, 26.

¹⁸ *See supra* n.4.

¹⁹ In their Responses, the GPUS and O'Neil indicate that O'Neil, the GPUS communications manager, started employment with the GPUS in September 2019 after he had completed independent contractor work for the Hawkins campaign in April and August 2019. GPUS Resp. at 1; Michael O'Neil Resp. at 1.

²⁰ First Gen. Counsel's Rpt. ("First GCR") at 1, MUR 542 & Cert. (Otis R. Bowen) (Mar. 8, 1978) (adopting First GCR's recommendation). 18 U.S.C. § 585 prohibits, in part, interference with the nomination or election of federal candidates by persons employed in any administrative position with the United States, or any State, Territory, or Possession of the United States.

1 of 18 U.S.C. § 595, when it ignored the candidate's request for a place on the speaker's stand at a
2 dinner event sponsored by the organization.²¹ In MUR 678 (Onondaga County Democratic
3 Comm., N.Y.), the Commission found no reason to believe a county party committee violated
4 the Act where the complaint alleged that the committee discriminated against a candidate by
5 promoting certain party candidates over him.²² There, the report concluded, "[t]here is no statute
6 under the . . . Act or regulation that prohibits State and local committees from endorsing some
7 candidates for Federal office over others."²³

8 Similarly, the Commission does not appear to have jurisdiction over the allegations here
9 involving a dispute regarding the internal conflict-of-interest rules of political party
10 organizations or to the management of primary elections by state party committees.

11 Further, the Complaint does not allege a specific violation of the Act, nor does it allege
12 facts that would support such a violation.²⁴ It does not appear that the activities alleged in the
13 Complaint resulted in any in-kind contributions. There is no information that Green Party staff
14 or resources were used to support the Hawkins presidential primary campaign or that
15 pro-Hawkins statements made by Green Party qualified as "contributions" under the Act.²⁵
16 While several Green Party officials also served as paid staff on the Hawkins campaign, there is

²¹ First GCR at 1, MUR 554 & Cert. (G. Robert Kirby, Chairman, Henry County Republican Party)(Mar. 31, 1978) (approving First GCR's recommendation).

²² First GCR at 1, MUR 678 & Cert. ¶ 1 (Onondaga County Democratic Comm., N.Y.) (Aug. 30, 1978) (adopting First GCR's recommendation).

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Unlike in this matter, in MUR 7125 (Wasserman Schultz, *et al.*), the Complaint specifically alleged that the DNC impermissibly used DNC staff and resources to support Wasserman Schultz, DNC Chair and candidate for reelection to the House, in violation of the Act; the Commission dismissed the allegations as a matter of prosecutorial discretion.

²⁵ Even assuming the Green Party made in-kind contributions to Hawkins and the Committee, the Act does not prohibit national parties from making contributions in primary elections. 52 U.S.C. § 30116(a) (imposing a \$5,000 per election contribution limit on multi-candidate committees).

1 nothing in the Act or Commission regulations that would restrict individuals, including a
2 candidate, from serving in a dual capacity within a party organization.²⁶ Further, the Green Party
3 officials that worked on the Hawkins campaign were clearly identified as staff of the Committee
4 and payments for their services to the campaign were disclosed on the Hawkins Committee
5 disclosure reports.²⁷

6 Accordingly, we recommend that the Commission find no reason to believe that
7 Respondents violated the Act and Commission regulations in this matter.

8 **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9 1. Find no reason to believe that Green Party of the United States and Hillary Kane in
10 her official capacity as treasurer; Howie Hawkins; Howie Hawkins for Our Future
11 and Travis Christal in his official capacity as treasurer; Andrea Merida Cuellar; Green
12 Party of Colorado; Robin Laurain; Brendan Phillips; Michael O'Neil; Kevin Zeese;
13 DC Statehood Green Party; Kansas Green Party; Green Party of Michigan; Green
14 Party of New York State; and Robert Edward Smith violated the Act and Commission
15 regulations in connection with this matter;
- 16 2. Approve the attached Factual and Legal Analysis;
- 17 3. Approve the appropriate letters; and

²⁶ See Amended Cert. ¶ 2, MUR 7125 (Wasserman Schultz, *et al.*) (Jul. 13, 2021) (dismissing pursuant to *Heckler v. Cheney*, 470 U.S. 821 (1985), the allegations that a federal candidate who was also Chair of national party committee accepted unreported, excessive contributions from party committee by using committee resources to benefit her campaign).

²⁷ For example, the Committee reported disbursements to Merida Cuellar for services as a campaign manager. See Committee, 2020 Amended Year-End Report at 12 (Jan. 31, 2021) (\$500); Committee, 2020 Amended 30-Day Post-Election Report at 64 (Jan. 28, 2021) (\$1,000); Committee, 2020 Amended 12-Day Pre-Election Report at 55 (Jan. 26, 2021) (\$1,000).

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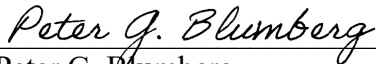
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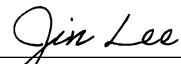
Lisa J. Stevenson
Acting General Counsel

Charles Kitcher
Associate General Counsel for Enforcement

Feb. 2, 2022

Date


Peter G. Blumberg
Acting Deputy Associate General Counsel for
Enforcement


Jin Lee
Acting Assistant General Counsel


Dominique Dillenseger
Attorney