

January 23, 2009

AO DRAFT COMMENT PROCEDURES

The Commission permits the submission of written public comments on draft advisory opinions when on the agenda for a Commission meeting.

DRAFT ADVISORY OPINION 2008-20 is available for public comments under this procedure. It was requested by James Bopp, Jr., on behalf of National Right to Life Committee, Inc.

Draft Advisory Opinion 2008-20 is scheduled to be on the Commission's agenda for its public meeting of Thursday, January 29, 2009.

Please note the following requirements for submitting comments:

1) Comments must be submitted in writing to the Commission Secretary with a duplicate copy to the Office of General Counsel. Comments in legible and complete form may be submitted by fax machine to the Secretary at (202) 208-3333 and to OGC at (202) 219-3923.

2) The deadline for the submission of comments is 12:00pm noon (Eastern Time) on January 28, 2009.

3) No comments will be accepted or considered if received after the deadline. Late comments will be rejected and returned to the commenter. Requests to extend the comment period are discouraged and unwelcome. An extension request will be considered only if received before the comment deadline and then only on a case-by-case basis in special circumstances.

4) All timely received comments will be distributed to the Commission and the Office of General Counsel. They will also be made available to the public at the Commission's Public Records Office.

CONTACTS

Press inquiries: Robert Biersack (202) 694-1220

Commission Secretary: Mary Dove (202) 694-1040

Other inquiries:

To obtain copies of documents related to AO 2008-20, contact the Public Records Office at (202) 694-1120 or (800) 424-9530 or visit the Commission's website at www.fec.gov.

For questions about comment submission procedures, contact Rosemary C. Smith, Associate General Counsel, at (202) 694-1650.

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January 23, 2009

A G E N D A I T E M
For Meeting of: 1-29-09

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Commission

FROM: Thomasenia P. Duncan *JPD*
General Counsel

Rosemary C. Smith *RCS*
Associate General Counsel

Robert M. Knop *RMK*
Assistant General Counsel

Neven F. Stipanovic *NFS*
Attorney

Subject: Draft AO 2008-20

SUBMITTED LATE

Attached is a proposed draft of the subject advisory opinion. We request that this draft be placed on the agenda for January 29, 2009.

Attachment

1 **ADVISORY OPINION 2008-20**

2

3 **James Bopp, Jr., Esq.**

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4 **Richard E. Coleson, Esq.**

5

5 **Clayton J. Callen, Esq.**

6

6 **Bopp, Coleson & Bostrom**

DRAFT

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7 **Attorneys at Law**

8

8 **1 South Sixth Street**

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9 **Terre Haute, IN 47807-3510**

10

11 **Dear Messrs. Bopp, Coleson, and Callen:**

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We are responding to your advisory opinion request on behalf of National Right

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to Life Committee, Inc. ("NRLC"), concerning the application of the Federal Election

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Campaign Act of 1971, as amended (the "Act"), and Commission regulations to NRLC's

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request to reimburse its separate segregated fund, the National Right to Life Political

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Action Committee ("NRLCPAC").

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The Commission concludes that NRLC may reimburse NRLCPAC for the costs

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of broadcasting a radio advertisement that the Commission allowed NRLC to finance

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from general treasury funds in Advisory Opinion 2008-15 (National Right to Life

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Committee).

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Background

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The facts presented in this advisory opinion are based on your letter received on

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December 1, 2008, and Advisory Opinion 2008-15, which is related to your present

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request.

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NRLC is a non-stock, not-for-profit corporation, exempt from Federal taxes

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under 26 U.S.C. 501(c)(4). In Advisory Opinion 2008-15, the Commission considered

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whether NRLC could finance the broadcast of two sixty-second radio advertisements

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with general treasury funds. On November 24, 2008, the Commission concluded NRLC

1 could use general treasury funds to finance the broadcast of one of the two
2 advertisements, entitled "Waiting for Obama's Apology #1" ("Apology #1"). Advisory
3 Opinion 2008-15. The Commission did not approve a response for the other
4 advertisement, entitled "Waiting for Obama's Apology #2," and the requestor does not
5 raise any issues here relating to that advertisement.¹

6 On October 28, 2008, NRLC's separate segregated fund, NRLCPAC, began
7 broadcasting the radio advertisement Apology #1. NRLC states that NRLCPAC financed
8 the broadcast out of legal precaution while NRLC awaited the Commission's decision in
9 Advisory Opinion 2008-15. NRLCPAC spent \$69,271.56 broadcasting the advertisement
10 between October 28 and November 24, the date the Commission issued Advisory
11 Opinion 2008-15. NRLC now wants to reimburse NRLCPAC for the funds it spent
12 broadcasting the advertisement Apology #1 between October 28 and November 24.²

13 ***Question Presented***

14 *May NRLC reimburse NRLPAC for the costs involved in broadcasting the radio*
15 *advertisement that the Commission concluded in Advisory Opinion 2008-15 NRLC could*
16 *finance with general treasury funds?*

17 ***Legal Analysis and Conclusions***

18 Yes, NRLC may reimburse NRLPAC for the costs involved in broadcasting the
19 radio advertisement Apology #1 between October 28, 2008, and November 24, 2008.

¹ The Commission described the content of NRLC's proposed advertisements in Advisory Opinion 2008-15 and will not repeat it here.

² The Commission notes that the attachment to NRLC's advisory opinion request, which NRLC claims to transcribe the Commission's October 23, 2008, public meeting, is not an official transcript of the meeting. Thus, the Commission does not vouch for the accuracy of the attachment, nor does the Commission rely on any part of the attachment in this advisory opinion.

1 The Act prohibits a corporation from making contributions or expenditures in
2 connection with any Federal election. 2 U.S.C. 441b(a). The term “contribution and
3 expenditure” is defined to include “any direct or indirect payment, distribution, loan,
4 advance, deposit, or gift of money, or any services, or anything of value . . . to any
5 candidate, campaign committee, or political party or organization” in connection with
6 any Federal election. 2 U.S.C. 441b(b)(2); 11 CFR 114.1(a)(i).

7 The Commission concluded in Advisory Opinion 2008-15 that NRLC could
8 finance the broadcasting of Apology #1 from general treasury funds. NRLC, therefore, is
9 asking to reimburse NRLCPAC for costs that NRLC was permitted to pay directly under
10 the Act.

11 The Commission previously has allowed a reimbursement in an analogous
12 situation. In Advisory Opinion 1979-33 (District 1199-C), a separate segregated fund
13 (“SSF”) of a labor organization paid for a banquet that the labor organization mistakenly
14 believed to constitute political campaign activity. The money, instead, was to be used for
15 non-partisan get-out-the-vote activities, and thus was exempt from the Act’s definition of
16 a “contribution or expenditure” in 2 U.S.C. 441b. The Commission allowed the labor
17 organization to reimburse the SSF because the labor organization could have financed the
18 dinner directly without violating the Act. Although the SSF, under a mistaken belief,
19 initially paid for the dinner, the Commission concluded that it did not change the
20 characterization of the money as a payment for an exempt activity under 441b. In this
21 case, NRLC, like the labor organization in Advisory Opinion 1979-33, could have
22 financed the activity with general treasury funds without violating the Act. The fact that
23 NRLCPAC initially paid for the advertisement broadcast, while NRLC awaited the

1 Commission's advisory opinion, does not change the characterization of the cost as one
2 that NRLC was permitted to pay directly.

3 Similarly, the Commission has allowed a state party committee to transfer funds
4 from a non-federal account to a federal account when the transfer would have been lawful
5 if deposited directly into the federal account. In Advisory Opinion 1990-27 (Connecticut
6 Republican Party), a campaign committee transferred excess campaign funds to a state
7 party, which mistakenly deposited the funds into a state account instead of a federal
8 account in violation of state law. Under a conciliation agreement with a state
9 commission, the funds were moved to an escrow account and the state party then asked
10 the Commission whether those escrowed funds could be transferred to its federal account.
11 The Commission noted that transfers from a state account to a federal account were
12 prohibited by 11 CFR 102.5(a)(1)(i). The Commission, however, allowed the transfer in
13 that particular case because the funds at issue were excess campaign funds of a candidate
14 that could be lawfully transferred to any federal political party committee, so the transfer
15 itself was lawful. Significantly, the funds could have been deposited into the federal
16 account at the time of the transfer.

17 The NRLC could have financed the advertisement broadcast at the time when, out
18 of legal precaution, it decided to use NRLCPAC funds to finance the broadcast. The
19 underlying act, therefore, as in Advisory Opinion 1990-27, would have been lawful. *See*
20 *also*, Advisory Opinion 1990-29 (Joseph E. Seagram & Sons., Inc.) (explaining that the
21 "decision to allow the transfer of non-Federal election funds to a Federal account in
22 specific situations is premised largely on the legality, under the Act, of the transferred

1 funds”); Advisory Opinion 2002-08 (David Vitter for Congress Committee) (allowing a
2 transfer of funds from non-Federal account to Federal account).

3 The Commission’s conclusion in this advisory opinion also is consistent with its
4 statement in a recent public court filing. In a legal memorandum to the D.C. District
5 Court, the Commission noted that a corporation could use its separate segregated fund to
6 finance a disputed communication and then seek permission to reimburse the fund should
7 the corporation prevail in the litigation. See Federal Election Commission’s
8 Memorandum in Opposition to Plaintiff’s Second Motion for Preliminary Injunction at
9 24, *Citizens United v. FEC*, 2008 WL 2788753, No. 1:07-cv-2240-RCL (D.D.C. July 18,
10 2008). The Commission reasoned that this situation was similar to a litigant placing
11 disputed funds into escrow during the pendency of litigation from which they could be
12 paid if they succeeded on the merits.³

13 The NRLC used its separate segregated fund, NRCLPAC, as a precaution against
14 legal liability. To ensure compliance with the Commission’s regulations, NRCLPAC
15 financed the broadcast during the pendency of the advisory opinion process. NRLC is
16 now asking for permission to reimburse costs NRCLPAC spent on the broadcast while
17 NRLC awaited the Commission’s decision in Advisory Opinion 2008-15. The
18 Commission believes NRLC should not be penalized for taking these precautionary
19 measures to comply with the law.

20 For the foregoing reasons, the Commission concludes that, in the unique
21 circumstances presented in this advisory opinion, NRLC may reimburse NRCLPAC for

³ See e.g., *National Treasury Employees Union v. United States*, 927 F.2d 1253, 1256 (D.C. Cir. 1991) (denying injunction in part because the plaintiffs could have placed funds into escrow during the pendency of the litigation).

1 the costs involved in broadcasting the radio advertisement Apology #1 between
2 October 28, 2008, and November 24, 2008.

3 This response constitutes an advisory opinion concerning the application of the
4 Act and Commission regulations to the specific transaction or activity set forth in your
5 request. *See* 2 U.S.C. § 437f. The Commission emphasizes that, if there is a change in
6 any of the facts or assumptions presented, and such facts or assumptions are material to a
7 conclusion presented in this advisory opinion, then the requester may not rely on that
8 conclusion as support for its proposed activity. Any person involved in any specific
9 transaction or activity which is indistinguishable in all its material respects from the
10 transaction or activity with respect to which this advisory opinion is rendered may rely on
11 this advisory opinion. *See* 2 U.S.C. 437f(c)(1)(B). Please note the analysis or
12 conclusions in this advisory opinion may be affected by subsequent developments in the
13 law, including, but not limited to, statutes, regulations, advisory opinions and case law.
14 The cited advisory opinions are available on the Commission's Web site at
15 <http://saos.nictusa.com/saos/searchao>.

16 On behalf of the Commission,
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19
20 Steven T. Walther
21 Chairman
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