



FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20463

June 23, 2005

CERTIFIED MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

ADVISORY OPINION 2005-6

Orville F. Petersen, C.P.A.
Treasurer
Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA
225 North Fifth Street, Suite 401
Grand Junction, CO 81501

Dear Mr. Petersen:

We are responding to your inquiry on behalf of Friends of McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area ("Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA"), and on behalf of former Representative Scott McInnis and Friends of Scott McInnis, Inc. ("the Committee"), concerning the application of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended ("the Act"), and Commission regulations to a donation that the Committee is planning to make to Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA. Because Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA is in the process of applying for tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code ("IRC") and will neither employ nor otherwise compensate former Representative McInnis or any member of his family, the Committee may make a donation to Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA.

Background

The facts of this request are presented in your letters received on April 5 and 29, 2005.

Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA is a not-for-profit organization that is named after former Representative Scott McInnis and is incorporated in Colorado. This organization is in the process of completing its application to qualify under 26 U.S.C. 501(c)(3), which will be filed with the United States Internal Revenue Service. Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA's mission is to support the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area by providing funds and volunteers to do such things as trail

maintenance, habitat improvement, and educational activities. None of the organization's funds will be used to influence any Federal election.

Former Representative McInnis wishes to donate campaign funds from the Committee to Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA. Former Representative McInnis neither serves on Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA's board of directors nor does he have any control over, or financial interest in, the organization. Neither former Representative McInnis nor any member of his family will receive any income from the organization.

Question Presented

May the Committee donate campaign funds to Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA?

Legal Analysis and Conclusions

Yes, the Committee may donate campaign funds to Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA.

The Act provides that campaign funds may be donated to any organization described in 26 U.S.C. 170(c), but may not be "converted by any person to any personal use." 2 U.S.C. 439a(a)(3) and (b)(1); 11 CFR 113.2(b) and 113.1(g)(2). The regulations provide that donations from campaign funds to section 170(c) organizations are not personal use, unless the candidate (former or current) receives compensation from the donee organization before that organization has expended, for purposes unrelated to the candidate's personal benefit, the entire amount donated to it. 11 CFR 113.1(g)(2).

Previous advisory opinions have considered the application of the Act and Commission regulations to factual situations somewhat similar to your circumstances. For example, in Advisory Opinion 1997-1, a former Representative proposed to donate the remaining cash balance of his former principal campaign committee to create a charitable foundation which would make grants solely to various educational, charitable, literary, scientific, and religious organizations. Similarly, in Advisory Opinion 1996-40, a retiring Member of Congress proposed to donate the balance of his campaign funds to an organization that qualified as an educational foundation under section 501(c)(3) of the IRC. In both situations, the Commission determined that the proposed donations were permissible under the Act and Commission regulations.

The Commission considers a number of factors in determining whether a proposed donation of campaign funds is permissible. As a threshold matter, the Commission considers whether the donee organization had obtained or is planning to apply for status as an entity described in section 170(c) of the IRC.¹ See Advisory Opinions 1997-1 and 1996-40. As you indicated in your request, Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA is in the process of applying for tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3)

¹ Charities that qualify for tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the IRC are described in section 170(c) of the IRC.

of the IRC. The Commission cautions you that the conclusion in this advisory opinion is predicated on Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA's successful application for tax exempt status as a 501(c)(3) organization with the Internal Revenue Service. Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA may not rely on this advisory opinion should it fail to obtain or maintain such status.

The Commission also considers whether the current or former Member of Congress or any member of his or her family will receive any compensation from the donee organization. *See* Advisory Opinions 1997-1 and 1996-40. According to your request, Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA will not employ or otherwise compensate former Representative McInnis or any member of his family. In addition, the proposed donation of funds to Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA will not benefit former Representative McInnis in any apparent financial respect. Under these circumstances, the Commission concludes that Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA may accept the planned donation of campaign funds from the Committee.

The Committee is required to report all disbursements of its campaign funds. 2 U.S.C. 434(b)(4), (b)(5); 11 CFR 104.3(b). Its donation to Friends of McInnis Canyons NCA would be reportable as other disbursements. 2 U.S.C. 434(b)(4)(G), 434(b)(6)(A); 11 CFR 104.3(b)(2)(vi) and 104.3(b)(4)(vi).

The Commission expresses no opinion regarding any tax ramifications of the proposed activities because those issues are not within its jurisdiction.

This response constitutes an advisory opinion concerning the application of the Act and Commission regulations to the specific transaction or activity set forth in your request. *See* 2 U.S.C. 437f. The Commission emphasizes that if there is a change in any of the facts or assumptions presented, and such facts or assumptions are material to a conclusion presented in this advisory opinion, then the requestor may not rely on that conclusion as support for its proposed activity.

Sincerely,

(signed)

Scott E. Thomas
Chairman

Enclosures (AOs 1997-1 and 1996-40)