



FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20463

January 31, 2012

CERTIFIED MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

ADVISORY OPINION 2012-39

Audrey Clement, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, Green Party of Virginia
Green Party of Virginia
P. O. Box 7316
Falls Church, VA 22040

Dear Ms. Clement:

We are responding to your inquiry regarding the status of the Green Party of Virginia as a State committee of a political party under the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended (the “Act”), and Commission regulations. The Commission concludes that the Green Party of Virginia is a State committee of a political party because: (1) the Green Party of the United States is a political party; (2) the Green Party of Virginia is part of the official structure of the Green Party of the United States; and (3) the Green Party of Virginia is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Green Party of the United States at the State level.

Background

The facts presented in this advisory opinion are based on your letter received on December 14, 2012 and other publicly available information.

The Green Party of Virginia is a political committee that is registered with, and reports to, the Commission. In 2001, a representative of the Green Party of Virginia executed on its behalf a document entitled, “Official Affiliation Agreement between the Green Party of Virginia and the Green Party of the United States” (“Affiliation Agreement”). In it, the Green Party of Virginia agreed to affiliate with, and abide by the bylaws of, the Green Party of the United States; to elect delegates from Virginia to represent it on the Coordinating Committee of the Green Party of the United States; to use its best efforts to support ballot access for national candidates nominated by the

Green Party of the United States; and to nominate candidates for State, local and Federal election. More recently, the Secretary of the Green Party of the United States confirmed that the Green Party of Virginia is an affiliate of the Green Party of the United States. *See* Letter To Whom It May Concern, from William Dickinson, Secretary, Green Party of the United States (Dec. 3, 2012) (“Dickinson Letter”). The Commission has recognized the Green Party of the United States as a “political party” since 2001. *See* Advisory Opinion 2001-13 (Green Party of the United States).

In its bylaws, the Green Party of Virginia states that it “shares kinship, common goals and values with other Green Parties and Green organizations.” Bylaws of the Green Party of Virginia (updated Sept. 16, 2012) (“Bylaws”), Art. I. The Bylaws (1) provide for the election of officers¹ and describe their specific responsibilities, *id.*, Art. XIV; (2) detail the organization’s purpose, political practices, relationship with local Green party organizations, and membership practices, *id.*, Arts. III, IV, VI, VII; (3) describe how organizational decisions are made, reviewed, and overturned, *id.*, Arts. VIII, IX, X; and (4) provide for the nomination and endorsement of candidates for local, regional, State, and Federal office, *id.*, Art. XI.

The Bylaws also establish a number of committees to assist the Green Party of Virginia in operating and complying with State law. The Interim Committee is responsible for conducting the organization’s day-to-day business, making decisions on matters that “cannot reasonably be put off” until the next meeting of the Green Party of Virginia, issuing statements on behalf of the organization, and hiring and overseeing the activities of staff. *Id.*, Art. XVII. The Central Committee is responsible for certifying nominations. *Id.*, XVI. The Bylaws also provide for the establishment of standing committees by the organization’s membership. *Id.*, Art. XVIII.

The Green Party of Virginia placed a candidate for President, Ms. Jill Stein, and a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives, Mr. Joe Galdo, Jr., on the 2012 general election ballot in Virginia. Each candidate raised more than \$5,000 for the general election.

Question Presented

Is the Green Party of Virginia a State committee of a political party within the meaning of the Act and Commission regulations?

Legal Analysis and Conclusion

Yes, the Green Party of Virginia is a State committee of a political party within the meaning of the Act and Commission regulations.

¹ These officers are two Co-Chairs, Press Secretary, Treasurer, and Webmaster.

A “State committee” is an organization that, by virtue of the bylaws of a “political party,” is part of the official party structure, and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the political party at the State level. 2 U.S.C. 431(15); 11 CFR 100.14(a). A “political party” is an “association, committee, or organization that nominates a candidate for election to any Federal office whose name appears on the election ballot as the candidate of such association, committee, or organization.” 2 U.S.C. 431(16); 11 CFR 100.15.

The determination as to whether a State party organization qualifies as a State committee of a national political party turns on three elements: (1) the national party with which the State party organization is associated must be a “political party”; (2) the State party organization must be part of the official structure of the national party; and (3) the State party organization must be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the national party at the State level. *See, e.g.,* Advisory Opinion 2012-36 (Green Party of Connecticut); Advisory Opinion 2009-16 (Libertarian Party of Ohio); Advisory Opinion 2008-13 (Pacific Green Party of Oregon). The Commission addresses each of these elements in turn.

(1) Qualification of Green Party of the United States as a Political Party

First, the Commission must assess whether the national party qualifies as a “political party” under the Act and Commission regulations. *See* 2 U.S.C. 431(15), (16); 11 CFR 100.14, 100.15; Advisory Opinion 2012-36 (Green Party of Connecticut); Advisory Opinion 2008-16 (Libertarian Party of Colorado); Advisory Opinion 2008-13 (Pacific Green Party of Oregon).

The Commission has previously concluded that the Green Party of the United States is a political party. *See* Advisory Opinion 2001-13 (Green Party of the United States). The Commission is aware of no new facts that would alter that conclusion.

(2) Status of Green Party of Virginia as Part of Official Structure of the Green Party of the United States

Second, the Green Party of Virginia must qualify as part of the official party structure of the national party, pursuant to 11 CFR 100.14. Under the July 2001 Affiliation Agreement, the Green Party of Virginia agreed, through its representative, to affiliate with, and abide by the bylaws of, the Green Party of the United States; to elect delegates from Virginia to represent it on the Coordinating Committee of the Green Party of the United States; to use its best efforts to support ballot access for national candidates nominated by the Green Party of the United States; and to nominate candidates for State, local, and Federal election. The Bylaws also provide that the Green Party of Virginia may join or affiliate with regional, national, and global “Green organizations”; may send delegates to these organizations; and will endorse and support only those national candidates selected by the Green Party nominating convention. Bylaws, Art. V. In addition, the Dickinson Letter confirms the Green Party of Virginia’s status as an affiliate

of the Green Party of the United States. The Commission thus concludes that the Green Party of Virginia is part of the official structure of the Green Party of the United States. *See* Advisory Opinion 2012-36 (Green Party of Connecticut).

(3) Responsibility of Green Party of Virginia for Day-to-Day Operations of Green Party of the United States in Virginia

Third, the Green Party of Virginia must maintain responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the Green Party of the United States at the State level. 2 U.S.C. 431(15); 11 CFR 100.14. The Commission evaluates this third element by considering:

(a) whether the organization has placed a “candidate” on the ballot (thereby qualifying as a “political party”); and (b) whether the bylaws or other governing documents of the State party organization indicate activity commensurate with the day-to-day functions and operations of a political party at the State level. *See* Advisory Opinion 2012-36 (Green Party of Connecticut); Advisory Opinion 2008-16 (Libertarian Party of Colorado); Advisory Opinion 2008-13 (Pacific Green Party of Oregon).

Ballot placement on behalf of a candidate is required because the requesting organization’s existence as a political party is necessary for State committee status. A State party organization must actually obtain ballot access for one or more “candidates,” as defined in the Act. *See* 2 U.S.C. 431(2), (15), (16); 11 CFR 100.3(a), 100.14(a), 100.15; *see also* Advisory Opinion 2012-36 (Green Party of Connecticut); Advisory Opinion 2009-16 (Libertarian Party of Ohio).

In this instance, the Green Party of Virginia successfully placed two candidates on the State ballot in 2012: Ms. Jill Stein, candidate for President, and Mr. Joe F. Galdo, Jr., candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives. Each individual received contributions in excess of \$5,000, thus qualifying as a “candidate” under the Act and Commission regulations. *See* 2 U.S.C. 431(2); 11 CFR 100.3(a). Accordingly, the Green Party of Virginia is a “political party” under the Act.

The Bylaws indicate activity commensurate with the day-to-day functions and operations of a political party at the State level. They establish the organizational structure of the Green Party of Virginia and describe the election process for, and responsibilities of, party officers. They also establish a Central Committee to certify approved nominations, Bylaws, Art. XVI, an Interim Committee to handle the day-to-day administrative functions of the Green Party of Virginia, *id.*, Art. XVII, and standing committees to handle finances, bylaws and procedures, platform, issue advocacy and candidate exploration, and other party functions.² The Bylaws are consistent with the State party rules reviewed in previous situations in which the Commission has recognized the State committee status of a political organization. *See, e.g.*, Advisory Opinion

² *See* www.vagreenparty.org (last visited January 10, 2013).

2012-36 (Green Party of Connecticut); Advisory Opinion 2009-16 (Libertarian Party of Ohio). Therefore, the Bylaws satisfy the requirements of 2 U.S.C. 431(15) and 11 CFR 100.14(a).

Accordingly, because all three elements of the definition of “State committee” are satisfied, the Commission determines that the Green Party of Virginia qualifies as a State committee of a political party under the Act and Commission regulations.

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. Any person involved in any specific transaction or activity which is indistinguishable in all its material aspects from the transaction or activity with respect to which this advisory opinion is rendered may rely on this advisory opinion. *See* 2 U.S.C. 437f(c)(1)(B). Please note that the analysis or conclusions in this advisory opinion may be affected by subsequent developments in the law including, but not limited to, statutes, regulations, advisory opinions, and case law. The cited advisory opinions are available on the Commission’s website, or directly from the Commission’s Advisory Opinion searchable database at <http://www.fec.gov/searchao>.

On behalf of the Commission,

(signed)
Ellen L. Weintraub
Chair