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CURTIS TAO



FRANK PARISI
Office of Legislative Services
Commission Secretary
(609) 292-9106
(609) 777-2998 fax

New Jersey State Legislature

NEW JERSEY CITIZENS' CLEAN ELECTIONS COMMISSION

STATE HOUSE ANNEX
PO BOX 068
TRENTON NJ 08625-0068

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the New Jersey Citizens' Clean Elections Commission

FROM: Gina Marie Winters
Associate Research Analyst

DATE: September 27, 2005

SUBJECT: Minutes of August 15, 2005 Meeting

The August 15, 2005 meeting of the New Jersey Citizens' Clean Elections Commission took place at the Cherry Hill Public Library in Cherry Hill, Camden County. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Schluter. In addition to the chairman, also present were Vice-Chairman Steven Lenox, Senator Anthony Bucco, Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein, Assemblyman Bill Baroni, Mr. Victor De Luca, Ms. Carol Murphy, and Mr. Curtis Tao.

The Acting Secretary called the roll, and the commission had a quorum. Approval of the June 17 minutes was postponed until the Thursday, August 18 meeting. The chairman then asked the commissioners for opening comments, which they gave. The chairman noted that commissioners cannot advocate on behalf of clean election candidates. He then called Assemblyman Louis Greenwald, a Democratic candidate, to testify.

The Assemblyman noted that, on the whole, members of the public were not in attendance at the meeting. He described the goals and purpose of the clean election legislation, followed by a description of his efforts to collect contributions. These efforts included going door to door, arranging coffee klatches, and reaching out to citizens and communities of interest. He noted the lack of public awareness of the program, and commented on the difficulty of collecting checks instead of cash donations.

Commissioner Tao asked the Assemblyman about the time period for collecting contributions, in particular, he was interested in the “dead periods” and “high-impact periods” for collecting. Assemblyman Greenwald responded that the period around July 4 was quiet and he expected Labor Day to be quiet, but that he also thought the bulk of contributions would come at the end of the qualifying period. He also stated that he thought the dead periods were amplified by a lack of knowledge of the program.

Commissioner Tao then asked the Assemblyman his opinion about the participation of third party advocacy groups or the clean elections commission in encouraging contributions to candidates. The Assemblyman spoke about supporting the legislation generally, and the importance of identifying all candidates to make the program a success.

Assemblywoman Greenstein asked Assemblyman Greenwald whether the threshold for qualifying is too high; he stated that if a candidate works hard and reaches out to people, the threshold is achievable.

Commissioner Murphy then asked the Assemblyman whether he was using his current list of contributors to solicit funds, and Senator Bucco asked whether an incumbent who has a database of supporters has an advantage. Assemblyman Greenwald explained the role of his supporters in the process.

Commissioner De Luca asked about the number of county committee members in the district and the number of primary voters, and noted that there are 220,000 people in the sixth district. Assemblyman Baroni asked Assemblyman Greenwald how many out of every 10 houses he visits contribute; Assemblyman Greenwald responded that about one out of 10 do.

The chairman then called the Republican candidates, Ms. JoAnn Gurenlian and Mr. Marc Fleischer, to testify. First, both candidates stated that they believed in the program. Then Ms. Gurenlian offered her recommendations. She stated that the time period for collecting contributions should be extended. She also suggested that the requirement that both candidates from the same party must qualify to be eligible for funds and the distribution of funds if one group of candidates qualifies and the other doesn't were problematic.

Mr. Fleischer testified that the Republicans were disadvantaged in the 6th district because of the ratio of Democrats to Republicans, and the Republicans don't have the party organization in the district that the Democrats do. He also spoke about the difficulties of collecting door to door contributions in the summer.

Chairman Schluter then asked the commissioners if they had any questions. Senator Bucco discussed door to door campaigning and the distribution of funds if one group of candidates qualifies and the other doesn't. Assemblywoman Greenstein discussed working with communities of interest to get contributions. Ms. Gurenlian commented on the difficulty of doing mass mailings with the limited amount of seed money. Chairman Schluter noted that a political party is a community of interest, and stated in the future the commission should assess how much political parties impacted the process. Commissioner Tao asked about outside groups

advocating for the program as opposed to advocating for a particular candidate. Ms. Gurenlian responded that groups should provide information, including the names of all candidates. Commissioner Murphy asked about endorsements from lobbying organizations; Ms. Gurenlian stated that she asked groups not to make any statements that could be perceived as improper. Commissioner Murphy asked about local newspapers interviewing candidates; Chairman Schluter noted that the *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial board would be interviewing the candidates the next day. Mr. Fleischer stated that, contrary to Assemblyman Greenwald's testimony, he believed that incumbents had an advantage in the process. Commissioner De Luca noted that if the challengers did qualify, they would get more than 10 times the amount any Republican spent in 2001 and 2003 in the sixth district. Ms. Gurenlian then raised the issue of online contributions. Chairman Schluter asked the candidates whether the staff in Trenton and ELEC have been helpful. The candidates stated that the first two weeks were difficult, but since then it had been easier. Assemblyman Baroni asked out of 10 doors knocked on, how many had heard of clean elections. The candidates said no one did. Chairman Schluter stated that even if all candidates don't qualify, the program will be a good learning experience to be built on in the future.

Next to testify was Ms. Marilyn Askin of AARP. She spoke about how AARP is educating voters in the districts. After her testimony, Mr. Nick Naum testified regarding his feelings about the clean election program, including clean elections in other states and the lack of publicity about the New Jersey program.

Mr. Micah Sifry of Public Campaign was then called to testify. He spoke about clean elections in other states, including the experiences of publicly financed candidates in those states. Commissioner De Luca asked if there was a lack of public knowledge in other states about clean election programs. Mr. Sifry responded that in Maine and Arizona, the programs were adopted by initiative, with a statewide campaign and voters authorizing the program. Additionally, there were statewide systems that were implemented over a number of years, and a government body that educated the public about the program. Commissioners then asked questions about thresholds in other states for qualifying and whether other states had pilot programs. Mr. Sifry answered these questions and also noted that his organization publishes materials comparing statutes and legislation in other states. Senator Bucco asked if he could get the legislation and regulations for Maine and Arizona.

Next to testify was Ms. Juanita Howard, South Jersey Organizer for New Jersey Citizen Action. She spoke about Citizen Action's work as a proponent of public campaign financing. Commissioner Tao asked her about the role of third party organizations. She described Citizen Action's work to educate voters. Commissioner Tao asked her if she thought summer was a dead period; she agreed.

Last to testify was Ms. Ingrid Reed of the Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University. She spoke about the academic study group that will be monitoring the program. Commissioner Murphy asked if, after hearing the comments of candidates, there were any items that could be incorporated into the questions being asked, especially the issue of writing a check. Ms. Reed said that she would ask. Commissioner Tao asked if there would be a way to refocus

the survey once the deadline passed to qualify. Ms. Reed stated that certain questions would be the same, regardless of whether or not candidates qualify.

Mr. Sifry then corrected his prior testimony on the number of qualifying contributions needed in Maine and Arizona. The commissioners discussed with Mr. Sifry the amount of funding a clean election candidate receives in Maine once the candidate qualifies.

Ms. Askin asked whether the cost of throwing a coffee party is a campaign contribution, the commissioners responded that it is. The Republican candidates commented that they do their own baking. Mr. Tao commented that he thinks one recommendation to ameliorate this is the creation of safe harbor events for individuals to contribute.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:30 pm.