

1 **FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION**

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3 **FIRST GENERAL COUNSEL'S REPORT**

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5 MUR: 7202
6 DATE COMPLAINT FILED: 12/01/2016
7 DATE OF NOTIFICATION: 12/06/2016
8 LAST RESPONSE RECEIVED: 01/27/2017
9 DATE ACTIVATED: 05/03/2017

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11 ELECTION CYCLE: 2016
12 EXPIRATION OF SOL: 11/15/2021 – 12/13/2021

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14 **COMPLAINANTS:** Republican Party of Wisconsin
15 Mark Morgan

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17 **RESPONDENTS:** Jill Stein for President and Steven Welzer in
18 his official capacity as treasurer
19 Hillary for America and Jose Villarreal in his
20 official capacity as treasurer

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23 **RELEVANT STATUTES** 52 U.S.C. § 30101(8), (9)
24 **AND REGULATIONS:** 52 U.S.C. § 30102(e)(3)(B)
25 52 U.S.C. § 30116(a), (f)
26 52 U.S.C. § 30125(e)
27 11 C.F.R. § 100.52(a)
28 11 C.F.R. § 100.91
29 11 C.F.R. § 100.111(a)
30 11 C.F.R. § 100.151

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32 **INTERNAL REPORTS CHECKED:** Disclosure Reports

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34 **AGENCIES CHECKED:** None

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36 **I. INTRODUCTION**

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38 The Complaint alleges that Jill Stein for President's ("JSP's") petition to the State of
39 Wisconsin for a recount resulted in excessive, in-kind contributions to Hillary for America
40 ("HFA"), Hillary Clinton's principal campaign committee for the 2016 presidential election.
41 The Complaint further alleges that HFA accepted these contributions by coordinating with JSP,
42 and alleges that donors to JSP for the recount who also contributed to HFA may have made
43 excessive contributions to HFA. For the reasons set forth below, we recommend that the

1 Commission find no reason to believe that JSP or its donors made excessive contributions to
2 HFA.

3 **II. FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

4 Jill Stein was the Green Party's candidate for President of the United States during the
5 2016 general election.¹ She received 1.07% of the vote and failed to win any Electoral College
6 votes.² After the election, Stein announced her intention to challenge the presidential election
7 results in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.³ JSP subsequently began raising money to
8 effectuate recounts in those states, and ultimately raised more than \$7,000,000 for the recount
9 effort.⁴ JSP filed a recount petition with the Wisconsin Election Commission ("WEC"), and a
10 recount was conducted in that state.⁵ Although JSP attempted to have recounts conducted in
11 Pennsylvania and Michigan, both of these attempted recounts were stopped by judicial order.⁶

12 The Complaint alleges that JSP's expenditures to further the recount should be
13 considered excessive, in-kind contributions to HFA because Hillary Clinton was the only
14 candidate who had a chance of benefitting from the Wisconsin recount and, as such, the recount

¹ See FEC Form 2, Statement of Candidacy, Jill Stein (July 9, 2015).

² See <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2016/2016presgeresults.pdf>.

³ See Compl. at 5; see also *Greens Demand Recounts in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania*, http://www.jill2016.com/greens_demand_recounts (last visited Feb. 21, 2018) ("*Greens Demand Recounts*, www.jill2016.com").

⁴ See 2016 Year-End Report, Jill Stein for President; see also *Greens Demand Recounts*, www.jill2016.com ("We need your help to make sure your votes were counted accurately on Election Day. Please donate now to help maintain integrity in our elections. This effort to ensure election integrity is in your hands! In true grassroots fashion, we're turning to you, the people, and not big-money corporate donors to make this happen.")

⁵ See Compl. at 2; see also *Jill Stein Files Recount Petition in Wisconsin* (Nov. 25, 2016), <http://www.jill2016.com/recountfilingwi>. JSP disclosed a \$3,499,689 recount filing fee to Wisconsin on November 29, 2016. See 2016 Year-End Report at 298, Jill Stein for President. A separate Complaint alleges that foreign nationals contributed to Stein's recount effort. See MUR 7205, Compl. at 5-7.

⁶ See *Stein v. Cortes*, 223 F. Supp.3d 423, 426 (E.D. Pa. 2016); *Attorney Gen. v. Bd. of State Canvassers*, 318 Mich. App. 242, appeal withdrawn, 500 Mich. 907, 887 N.W.2d 785 (2016).

1 and corresponding activities were done to benefit her.⁷ The Complaint further alleges that JSP
2 and HFA coordinated the Wisconsin recount efforts, and that HFA therefore accepted JSP's
3 excessive contributions.⁸ In support, the Complaint argues that "public interviews and records"
4 show that members of HFA staff met with members of JSP staff, who urged HFA to request
5 recounts.⁹ Lastly, the Complaint alleges that because JSP was conducting the recount for
6 Clinton, contributors to HFA who also gave to JSP for the recount potentially made excessive
7 contributions to HFA.¹⁰

8 JSP did not respond to the Complaint. HFA submitted a Response which denies any
9 coordination with JSP.¹¹

10 III. LEGAL ANALYSIS

11 The Act and Commission regulations define the terms "contribution" and "expenditure"
12 to include any gift, loan, or payment of money or anything of value for the purpose of
13 influencing a federal election.¹² Funds provided for recounts, however, are not contributions
14 because Commission regulations except gifts, loans, or payments made with respect to a recount
15 of the results of a Federal election from the definitions of "contribution" and "expenditure."¹³
16 Accordingly, while recount funds raised by federal candidates are subject to the Act's soft

⁷ Compl. at 1-4.

⁸ *Id.* at 4.

⁹ *Id.* According to the Complaint, the Clinton campaign publicly declared its support for the recount and joined JSP in a lawsuit petitioning the State of Wisconsin for a hand recount. *Id.* at 2. The Complaint does not provide any specific references to court filings or other public records.

¹⁰ *See id.* at 3-4.

¹¹ Hillary for America Resp. (Apr. 27, 2017).

¹² 52 U.S.C. §§ 30101(8)(A)(i), (9)(A)(i); 11 C.F.R. §§ 100.52(a), 100.111(a). The Act prohibits any person from making, and any candidate or committee from knowingly accepting, contributions in excess of the limits. *See* 52 U.S.C. §§ 30116(a), (f). Candidate committees are permitted to contribute a maximum of \$2,000 to other candidate committees. 52 U.S.C. § 30102(e)(3)(B).

¹³ 11 C.F.R. §§ 100.91, 100.151.

1 money provisions and thus the limitations, prohibitions, and reporting requirements of the Act,¹⁴
2 “donations to a Federal candidate’s recount fund will not be aggregated with contributions from
3 those persons to the Federal candidate for the general election.”¹⁵

4 The exceptions for recount funds from the definitions of both “contribution” and
5 “expenditure” are material to each of the allegations here, *i.e.*, that JSP made in-kind
6 contributions to HFA in the form of recount activities, that HFA accepted those contributions,
7 and that HFA accepted excessive contributions from individual contributors via aggregated
8 contributions to both JSP’s recount effort and to HFA. Because donations or disbursements for
9 recount activity are neither contributions nor expenditures, JSP’s disbursements for recount
10 activity do not constitute an excessive contribution to HFA as a result of any of the theories
11 advanced in the Complaint, even if, as alleged, the recount benefited Clinton.¹⁶

12 Further, though the Act provides that expenditures made in coordination with a candidate
13 “shall be considered to be a contribution” to that candidate,¹⁷ under Commission regulations,
14 “expenditures” subject to the coordination rules are limited to those not “otherwise exempted
15 under 11 C.F.R. part 100, subparts C or E.”¹⁸ Because the exceptions from “contribution” and

¹⁴ See 52 U.S.C. § 30125(e)(1)(A) (setting out “soft money” restrictions applicable to candidates); Advisory Op. 2006-24 (NRSC and DSCC).

¹⁵ Advisory Op. 2006-24 at 6 (noting that recount regulations since 1977 are premised on conclusion that recounts are “in connection with” federal elections); *see also* Federal Election Commission Regulations, Explanation and Justification, House Document No. 95-44, at 40 (1977) (recounts, though “related to elections, are not Federal elections”); Advisory Op. 2010-18 (DFL) at n.1 (“Because ‘donations’ to a recount fund are not ‘contributions’ under Commission regulations, such donations are not aggregated with contributions from those same persons....”)

¹⁶ See 11 C.F.R. §§ 100.91, 100.151. Moreover, there is no allegation that, absent aggregation with general election contributions, any individual donor to JSP’s recount efforts exceeded the applicable amount limitations for a recount donation. See 52 U.S.C. §§ 30116(a)(1)(A), 30125(e)(1)(A); 11 C.F.R. § 110.1(b)(1); Advisory Op. 2006-24 at 6 (explaining that soft money restrictions limit donations to candidate’s recount fund or account to the Act’s amount limitations).

¹⁷ 52 U.S.C. § 30116(a)(7)(B).

¹⁸ 11 C.F.R. § 109.20(b); *see also* Coordinated and Independent Expenditures, 68 Fed. Reg. 421, 426 (Jan. 3, 2003) (explaining that, notwithstanding the coordination rule, the exceptions to the definition of “contribution” and “expenditure” “continue to apply”); Advisory Op. 2006-24 at 9 (explaining that a state party committee may “fully

1 "expenditure" for recount activities are among such exemptions "under 11 C.F.R. part 100,
2 subparts C or E," JSP's recount activity could not have constituted a coordinated contribution or
3 expenditure, even if the recount activity was coordinated with HFA as alleged.¹⁹

4 Lastly, because donations for recount activity are not contributions and are not
5 aggregated with general election contributions,²⁰ contributors to HFA who also donated to JSP
6 for the recount could not have made excessive contributions to HFA via those recount donations,
7 as alleged.

8 Accordingly, we recommend that the Commission find no reason to believe that JSP
9 violated 52 U.S.C. § 30102(e)(3)(B) by making excessive contributions or that HFA violated
10 52 U.S.C. § 30116(f) by accepting excessive contributions.

11 **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 12 1. Find no reason to believe that Jill Stein for President and Steven Welzer in
13 his official capacity as treasurer violated 52 U.S.C. § 30102(e)(3)(B) by making
14 excessive contributions;
- 15 2. Find no reason to believe that Hillary for America and Jose Villarreal in his
16 official capacity as treasurer violated 52 U.S.C. § 30116(f) by accepting excessive
17 contributions;
- 18 3. Approve the attached Factual and Legal Analysis;
- 19 4. Approve the appropriate letters; and
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coordinate" recount activities with a candidate because party coordinated spending rules do not apply to recount fund).

¹⁹ In any event, the record does not provide a sufficient basis for believing that JSP and HFA coordinated for purposes of the recount, and HFA expressly denies that such coordination occurred. Hillary for America Resp. at 1-2.

²⁰ See 11 C.F.R. §§ 100.91, 100.151. See also Advisory Op. 2006-24 at 6; Advisory Op. 2010-18 at n.1.

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5. Close the file.

Lisa J. Stevenson
Acting General Counsel

3/1/18
Date

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