



Compliance Notes - Vol. 1, Issue 31

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RECENT LOBBYING, ETHICS & CAMPAIGN FINANCE UPDATES

We read the news, cut through the noise and provide you the notes.

Welcome to *Compliance Notes* from Nossaman's **Government Relations & Regulation Group** – a periodic digest of the headlines, statutory and regulatory changes and court cases involving campaign finance, lobbying compliance, election law and government ethics issues at the federal, state and local level.

Your attorneys, policy advisors and compliance consultants are available to discuss any questions or how specific issues may impact your business.

If there is a particular subject or jurisdiction you'd like to see covered, please let us know.

Until then, please enjoy this installment of ***Compliance Notes***. If you would like to have these updates delivered directly to your in-box, please click below to subscribe to our Government Relations & Regulation mailing list.

Campaign Finance & Lobbying Compliance

On November 18th, the Senate Rules and Administration Committee held a confirmation hearing for nominees to the Federal Election Commission (FEC): Shana Broussard, Sean Cooksey, and Allen Dickerson. If these nominees are confirmed by the Senate, the FEC would regain its quorum, which it has been lacking for most of 2020. (Kenneth Doyle, *Bloomberg Government*)

A coalition of over 170 good government, racial justice, voting rights, environmental and other groups released a report outlining immediate actions the incoming Biden administration should take to bolster

public disclosures and shore up ethics policies. The Declaration for American Democracy listed a number of legislative and executive reforms to increase the government's accountability and transparency, specifically advocating for the next Congress to pass, and the president to sign, the "For The People Act" (known as H. R. 1). H.R. 1 is the massive democracy reform package that the House passed in March 2019 and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell blocked a vote on in October 2019. (Courtney Buble, *Government Executive*)

California: A self-proclaimed "campaign guru," who was previously convicted and sentenced for conspiring with a Mexican billionaire to make nearly \$600,000 in illegal campaign contributions to a pair of 2012 San Diego mayoral candidates, was re-sentenced to one year in federal prison and ordered to pay a \$10,000 fine after an appeals court invalidated one of his convictions. Ravneet Singh was convicted in 2016 of conspiring with Jose Susumo Azano to contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars to Bonnie Dumanis and Bob Filner, despite the fact that Azano's status as a foreign national made such contributions illegal. (City News Service, Fox 5 San Diego)

Washington: In a unanimous ruling, the Washington State Court of Appeals upheld the largest penalty for campaign finance violations ever assessed in Washington State. The court affirmed the \$18 million fine imposed on the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA), finding that the violations were "serious and significant" and "represented an intentional attempt to conceal the identity of companies donating millions of dollars in a contentious ballot campaign." (AP News) The lawsuit goes back to 2013 when GMA was accused of collecting \$14 million dollars from companies such as PepsiCo and Nestle, then contributing \$11 million of that money to the "No on 522" campaign without disclosing where the money came from. The money was listed as coming from GMA, not the actual donors. (Andrew Hammond, *The News Tribune*)

Elections

Since Election Day, the Trump campaign and other Republican groups have mounted 21 legal challenges in local, state and federal courts in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada and Pennsylvania, arguing that states and counties have violated election laws. They have won only one of the 21 cases so far. (Sonam Sheth and Jacob Shamsian, *Business Insider*)

Government Ethics

Massachusetts: Boston Property Ventures, a Quincy real estate development and investment management firm, has paid the state \$250,000 to settle allegations that it made illegal campaign contributions to 11 state and local politicians, including Governor Charlie Baker and Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito. The payment marked the second highest civil forfeiture obtained. (Shelley Murphy and Dugan Arnett, *Boston Globe*)

Nevada: Brig Lawson, a former executive with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA), has agreed to pay \$13,881 for the "surreptitious nature of his acquisition and improper use of LVCVA property for a personal use." He and his domestic partner and his partner's parents used agency-bought airline gift cards for personal trips. (Jeff German, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*)

Ohio: FBI agents arrested Cincinnati City Councilman Jeff Pastor for leading what authorities describe as a brazen bribery scheme involving payoffs for help with city development projects. Federal prosecutors say Pastor, who joined the council in January 2018, began soliciting money from developers within months of taking office and, in some instances, accepted bags of cash in return for his vote or other favorable treatment. (Sharon Coolidge and Dan Horn, *Cincinnati Enquirer*)