



Compliance Notes - Vol. 4, Issue 8

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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.

Our 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

Jessie Benton was sentenced to 18 months in prison for helping funnel illegal foreign campaign contributions from a Russian national into former President Trump's 2016 campaign. Benton, a former senior aide to Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), was convicted in November of conspiring to solicit and cause an unlawful campaign contribution by a foreign national, effecting a conduit contribution and causing false records to be filed with the Federal Election Commission. According to the Department of Justice, neither Trump nor his campaign were aware of the Russian person's nationality. (Sareen Habeshian, *Axios*)

Georgia: A conservative legal foundation is challenging DeKalb County, Georgia's accounting procedure that allowed officials to receive a private donation for election administration despite the state's ban on so-called "Zucker Bucks." In its complaint filed with the State Board of Elections, Restoring Integrity and Trust in Elections argues it was illegal for DeKalb County's finance department to apply for a \$2 million private grant and then transfer the funds to election officials who are prohibited from directly receiving the grant. The grant money came from the Center for Tech and Civic Life, a group that provided grants primarily to large cities and counties to defray election administration costs. Leading up to the 2020 election, the group received more than \$300 million in donations from Mark Zuckerberg and his wife. (Alex Ebert, *Bloomberg Government*)

Maryland: A former Baltimore County official was charged with stealing more than \$140,000 from two political campaign accounts while serving as their treasurer. Charging documents allege that William Christopher McCollum, the former head of the Baltimore County Ag Center, stole \$111,014.89 from former Councilmember Cathy Bevins's (D) campaign account and \$31,269.63 from a slate controlled by a former county executive. McCollum allegedly took money from the accounts through direct payments to his personal credit card bills, funding travel to Puerto Rico and Florida and wrote checks to purported vendors but deposited them into his bank account. The expenditures were not listed on campaign reports filed with the State Board of Elections, that were signed by McCollum under penalty of perjury. (William F. Zorzi, *Maryland Matters*)

Government Ethics & Transparency

Kansas: The House Elections Committee is considering a bill that would overhaul the Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission and limit its ability to conduct future investigations. House Bill 2391 would end the agency's subpoena power unless it has already established probable cause, a standard the agency said would be nearly impossible to meet without access to key documents. Under the proposed bill, candidates would be able to donate money to a third party and instruct the funds to be routed to another entity. The bill also would make it legal for an individual to contribute in the name of another person or entity, even if it is in an attempt to circumvent donation limits. Proponents of the bill say the agency's investigative activities have had a "chilling effect" on free speech. (Andrew Bahl, *Topeka Capital-Journal*)

Montana: The Senate voted to confirm Chris Gallus to lead the Montana Commissioner of Political Practices office, which enforces state campaign finance law, investigates campaign and lobbying complaints and oversees state ethics standards. Gallus, a longtime attorney and lobbyist for the Montana Chamber of Commerce and conservative-aligned causes, will serve a six-year term. Gallus replaces Jeff Mangan, who resigned last year. (Arren Kimbel-Sannit, *Montana Free Press*)