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by Kathryn Ross
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From: [Phil Stilton](#)
To: [CELA](#)
Subject: FEC complaint MUR 770 response
Date: Saturday, August 15, 2020 3:08:46 PM
Attachments: [FEC-Complaint MUR770.docx](#)

Attached is

Phil Stilton
editor, Shore News Network
www.shorenewsnetwork.com

The following is a response to MUR 770, a complaint filed with the FEC. Enclosed is my response to this complaint. It is my opinion that no action should be taken because there are multiple inconsistent, false and erroneous claims and assumptions in this complaint.

For each count:

1. I have never been a paid and or volunteer member of any political pac, committee, campaign or organized political activity. Yes, I am a registered member of the republican party and my only political affiliation is that I am indeed an elected member of the Ocean County Republican Committee, voted by general election of the people in 2018. In that capacity I have attended one meeting, regarding the election of county chairman in 2019. I carry no voting power and have never attended any other political campaign meeting, caucus meeting, etc.

Shore News Network is an independent for-profit news organization that publishes community, police, tourism, food dining, sports and yes, political news. We are often characterized as a 'conservative leaning' newspaper (in print and online) and we intensely cover topics that are in opposition to our fundamental freedoms and beliefs, but we do not subscribe to any "party" politics or candidates.

Our news organization creates Facebook social pages often for different topics as a means to break out diverse readerbase into sub-communities where people can talk about news, topics and other issues.

NJ restaurant lovers
Shore Beach Chat
Stop Corruption in OC
Ocean County Sports

Etc.

In 2018, we did create a page called "recall phil murphy" as a discussion forum for our readers as it was a very popular topic that year and we wanted to remove the political back and forth of our readers and create a sort of "Warroom/chatroom" away from people who just don't care about politics.

Ironically, there was then a real effort to recall the governor. When approached by the recall committee to do a news story about their recall (which I did), I told them we have a chat page on facebook and they are more then welcome to engage our readers. By then the page had about 5,000-10,000 followers I believe (we do not keep stats on that).

I never offered anyone in that committee to help anyone register with the NJElec. I would not even know how that is done.

The page was started in late 2018 or January of 2019. The recall petition committee began in March of 2019, three months later.

Once the recall committee failed to achieve their goal, we put notice on our social page that the "recall phil murphy news" page was being renamed in order to allow like minded readers to keep engaging with each other through our platform.

At no time the Recall Phil Murphy Committee have any authority, ownership, access or special privileges on our page. There are 10 reader moderators on that page that have access to remove profane, harassing and threatening posts.

2. There is no entity named Shore News Network LLC. There was no coordination in any way with any entities outside our news company to 'defame' Rik Mehta. Our news stories are all factual, backed up with evidence that deems them factual. All statements provided under 2 are proven factual by the complainant by her own assessment and complaint.
 - a. Rik Mehta served in the FDA during the Obama administration, thus Obama-era is factually accurate.
 - b. Rik Mehta is new to the republican party, voting records showed in 2016 he voted as a Democrat in the Democrat Presidential Primary election. At the time of writing it was a 3 year period, not 5.
 - c. We have audio of Rik Mehta on a facebook campaign meeting saying he will protect america's opioid supply chain.
 - d. Mehta campaigned for removing government oversight from opioid prescriptions.
 - e. Mehta worked for Pfizer by his own admission.
 - f. According to the RNC's official database, at that time, Mehta was listed by the organization as "Hard Democrat" After our story, Mehta petitioned the RNC and they changed him to "Weak Republican". Kate gibbs was a convicted shoplifter running for Congress.
 - g. Mehta had previously supported Democrats Bob Menendez and Cory Booker.
 - h. Mehta staffer was in a video where the sole content of the video was "Nigger Nigger Nigger Nigger Nigger Nigger". We approached Mehta in January about this. He was told by an African American about this at a campaign fund raiser in January. It wasn't until May that he fired the person.
 - i. Rikin Mehta was accused by his opponent of voter fraud, which was loosely backed up the situation with questionable signatures from registered Democrats on his petitions.
 - j. We report what people say. If his opponent said that, he said that.
 - k. We report what people say. If his opponent said that, he said that. Where our pages show in Google search is beyond our control. This is a matter for Google. Our "related links" feature is totally random and computer generator based on keyword algorithms. While Mehta was pushing for easier access to opioids, due to covid-19 pandemic, there was a sharp uptick in opioid overdose deaths in NJ.
 - l. "connected site" not identified, probably not one managed by our company.
 - m. We do not operate the NJ Globe

- n. Mehta is an Obama era registered democrat. Mehta offered ballot assistance to his supporters.
 - o. Story is 100% factual.
 - p. Joe Rullo is a political talking head that comments about lots of political topics. He has an audience of 400,000 followers and his comments are indeed newsworthy.
 - q. Rik Mehta's campaign in Ocean County was on a ticket with a man who is openly anti-homosexual and frequently hosts anti-homosexual rallies and counter protests to "gay pride day" events.
 - r. Mehta was alerted to his staffer's "Nigger Nigger" video in January. He was not fired until April or May and it was done quietly.
3. Hirsh Singh paid for \$5,000 in web banner advertising on our campaign platform in 2019. He did not advertise with us in 2020. The banner stopped running in January of 2020 per our contractual agreement for advertising. Singh did not receive any other compensation or courtesy for his advertising other than his banner ad. All statements in this section are pure conjecture and speculation. Our staff did reported on the election and yes, Hirsh Singh's values and history were attractive to our writers during this period so we did cover his campaign and yes we did write articles about his campaign stops, but in no way am I or anyone with Shore News financially or in any other way connected to the campaign for hirsh singh. No evidence has been produced on this matter. I believe this is a case of sour grapes because the news media liked one guy and really just didn't like the other guy for very valid reason.

In closing all of the exhibits portray a conservative ideal newspaper covering an election between former liberal Democrat and a strong conservative candidate that was well received by our majority conservative leaning reader base.

I believe this complaint to be nothing more than political sour grapes and the entire claim is completely unsubstantiated conjecture and should be immediately dismissed unless the defendant can provide any real evidence that anyone in our company acted inappropriately or in conjunction with a political campaign. We simply exercised our first amendment rights to freedom of speech and freedom of press as afforded by the constitution. At no time as there any personal, political or financial gain or collusion with the Singh campaign in any way and this has not been proven. The fact that these events happened in 2020, after Mr. Singh terminated his advertising agreement with our firm shows further proof that this entire complaint is nothing more than an attempt to defame a news organization.

Furthermore the absence of a complaint from the actual candidate, Rik Mehta further demonstrates that there is no substance to any of this. This is basically a complaint saying "Fox news is committing FEC violations for giving positive news to president trump and unfavorable reporting to Joe Biden."

I do hope the commission will agree.

Sincerely,
Phil Stilton