

News from the FPPC



California Fair Political Practices Commission
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FPPC to Hold Two Informational Hearings on Internet Political Activity *Subcommittee will hear testimony on disclosure of electronic campaign advocacy*

A subcommittee of the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC), the state's independent political watchdog, will hold two informational hearings to discuss the current trends of paid political activity conducted via internet, email and social networking sites. The first hearing will take place in Sacramento on March 17, 2010, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. at the FPPC headquarters located at 428 J Street, Suite 800. The second hearing will convene in Los Angeles on March 24, 2010, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the University of Southern California Law School, located at 699 Exposition Boulevard, Ackerman Courtroom, Room 107.

In 1974, Californians overwhelmingly approved Proposition 9, which created the FPPC and established the rules for disclosing the identity of donors behind political campaigns and the messages they distribute. Despite the tremendous technological advances that were implemented during the past 36 years, the rules requiring political disclosure have changed little—essentially requiring no disclosure of political ads broadcast on the web, sent via email or text messages, or posted on social networking sites.

FPPC Chairman Ross Johnson said, "Today's reliance on the internet and electronic communication to obtain and share information in our work and personal lives will only continue to grow in the political sphere. We must determine if the current laws and regulations of the Commission, which were created in the analog age, can keep pace with the ingenuity and savvy of the digital age."

In an effort to solicit a broad range of opinions on the issues at hand, the panelists invited by subcommittee co-chairs Commissioner Elizabeth Garrett and Commissioner Timothy Hodson include California's Secretary of State Debra Bowen, Federal Elections Commission Chairwoman Ellen Weintraub, representatives from non-governmental organizations, political law experts, and political consultants. At the close of each hearing, there will be a public comment period.

Later this year the subcommittee will present its findings to the full Commission for consideration of whether new rules are necessary to require the disclosure of who is behind electronic messages advocating for or against the election of California's state and local candidates or ballot measures. These changes could require the adoption of regulations by the Commission, or entirely new state laws, which must be adopted as a bill by the Legislature, or as a proposition by a vote of the people.

Johnson emphasized that, "The Commission is not interested in requiring individuals to report as committees when they are merely exercising their First Amendment rights, but if this is paid political speech, then perhaps tighter regulation requiring greater disclosure and transparency is in order."

Information on the work of the FPPC's subcommittee on the Internet and Political Activity, including full agendas of each hearing, can be found on the Commission's website [here](#).

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