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Trump Admin. Sued For Allegedly Allowing Private Prison Company To Buy Influence

by Colin Kalmbacher | 4:19 pm, January 10th, 2018

The Federal Election Commission (“FEC”) is allegedly turning a blind eye to influence peddling orchestrated by a private prison company which made illegal contributions to a pro-Trump Super PAC.

In response, non-partisan public interest watchdog, the Campaign Legal Center (“CLC”) filed a lawsuit against the FEC alleging the agency violated federal law by unlawfully delaying enforcement actions against GEO Group, according to a press release issued today.

GEO Group is one of America’s largest private prison contractors. During the 2016 general election, GEO Group contributed \$225,000 to the pro-Trump Super PAC, Rebuilding America Now. In the aftermath of Trump’s election, the president rescinded the Obama-era rule that would have slowly phased out federal private prison contracts. The administration later awarded GEO Group some \$110 million as part of a new federal contract to build and administer a 1,000-bed immigration detention center in Conroe, Texas.

After discovering this apparent violation of federal election law, the CLC filed a complaint on November 1, 2016 alleging an illegal violation of the Federal Election Campaign Act (“FECA”), located at 52 U.S.C. § 30119(a)(1). The CLC supplemented their initial complaint with a letter sent on December 20, 2016.

The initial complaint notes two key bases:

[1]Federal law prohibits a federal contractor from making any “contribution to any political party, committee, or candidate for public office” at any time between the commencement of negotiations for a federal contract and the completion of performance or termination of negotiations for the contract;

[2]GEO Corrections Holdings, Inc. appears to have been performing and/or negotiating federal contracts at the same time that it made its \$100,000 contribution to Rebuilding America Now, based on that political committee’s reports filed with the Commission. Specifically, on the same day the contribution was made, George Zoley—CEO of both GEO Group Inc. and GEO Corrections Holdings, Inc.—told shareholders and reporters that the company was continuing to negotiate a contract extension for a facility operated by GEO Corrections Holdings, Inc., the D. Ray James facility in Georgia.²⁵

Adav Noti, senior director of trial litigation at CLC, and the FEC’s former associate general counsel for policy, said, “The contractor ban is essential to prevent companies from using campaign contributions to buy government contracts, and that ban must be enforced. This is why we need an effective FEC. If the agency sits on its hands, the law is not worth the paper it is printed on.”

The CLC’s Brendan Fischer also noted:

If the FEC doesn't enforce the 75-year-old contractor contribution ban against companies like GEO Group, then taxpayer-funded contracts become an obvious way for politicians to reward their deep-pocketed campaign supporters. As the FEC continues to delay taking action, GEO continues buying influence with illegal contributions. With the 2018 elections quickly approaching, the FEC must make clear that private prison companies and other contractors cannot expect to violate the law and get away with it.

Read the full lawsuit [here](#).

[image via screengrab/Sun-Sentinel]

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