



FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION Washington, DC 20463

2008 AUG 19 P 2: 25

AGENDA ITEM for Meeting of: 08-21-08

SUBMITTED LATE

MEMORANDUM

TO:

The Commission

FROM:

Thomasenia P. Duncan Ach General Counsel

Rosemary C. Smith RCS Associate General Counsel

Amy L. Rothstein All Assistant General Counsel

Jessica Selinkoff

Attorney

Subject:

Draft AO 2008-07

We have been asked to circulate the attached proposed draft of the subject advisory opinion. Please place this draft on the agenda for August 21, 2008.

Attachment

| 1 | ADVISORY OPINION 2008-07 |
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| 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 | Jan Witold Baran, Esq. Caleb P. Burns, Esq. Wiley Rein, LLP 1776 K Street, NW Washington, DC 20006 |
| | Dear Messrs. Baran and Burns: |
| 10 | We are responding to your advisory opinion request on behalf of Senator David |
| 11 | Vitter and David Vitter for U.S. Senate (the "Committee") concerning the application of |
| 12 | the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended (the "Act"), |
| 13 | 2 U.S.C. 431 et seq., and Commission regulations to the use of campaign funds for the |
| 14 | payment of certain legal fees and expenses incurred by Senator Vitter in connection with |
| 15 | a criminal proceeding against a third party, Ms. Deborah Palfrey. |
| 16 | Background |
| 17 | The facts presented in this advisory opinion are based on your letter received on |
| 18 | July 3, 2008, your telephone conversations with Commission staff, your email of July 9, |
| 19 | 2008, and publicly available information. |
| 20 | Senator David Vitter of Louisiana is a candidate for reelection in 2010. The |
| 21 | Committee is the principal campaign committee of Senator Vitter. |
| 22 | Ms. Palfrey was indicted by a Federal grand jury in March, 2007 on criminal |
| 23 | charges, including money laundering and racketeering. Media reports in the months |
| 24 | following Ms. Palfrey's indictment indicated that Ms. Palfrey had threatened to identify |
| 25 | her high-profile clients. Senator Vitter's telephone number was in Ms. Palfrey's |
| 26 | telephone records. Because of a perception that Ms. Palfrey had a "strategy of dragging |

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1 public figures into her legal proceedings," Senator Vitter retained counsel ("Subpoena

2 Counsel") in April, 2007 to monitor the Palfrey criminal proceedings.

On July 5, 2007, the court lifted its prohibition against Ms. Palfrey's release of

4 her telephone records. Media reports indicate that Ms. Palfrey posted her telephone

records on the Internet on July 9, 2007. That same day, Senator Vitter issued a public

statement concerning the presence of his telephone number in Ms. Palfrey's records.

On July 19, 2007, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington requested

that the Senate Select Committee on Ethics ("Senate Ethics Committee") investigate

9 Senator Vitter for possible violation of the Senate Rules of Conduct by allegedly

soliciting for prostitution. Senator Vitter retained separate counsel ("Ethics Counsel") to

defend himself against the Senate Ethics Committee complaint. Subpoena Counsel

periodically consulted with Ethics Counsel and informed Ethics Counsel about the

Palfrey criminal proceeding, to assist Ethics Counsel in representing Senator Vitter

before the Senate Ethics Committee. The Senate Ethics Committee dismissed the

complaint without prejudice on May 8, 2008.²

On November 13, 2007, Ms. Palfrey subpoenaed Senator Vitter to testify at a pretrial hearing. You state that Senator Vitter and another potential witness were the only witnesses subpoenaed for this hearing whose involvement in the case was limited to the

19 presence of their telephone numbers in Ms. Palfrey's records. Subpoena Counsel

The Ethics Counsel's fees are not the subject of this advisory opinion request.

The Senate Ethics Committee declined to exercise its jurisdiction further over the matter, noting that the complaint alleged: (1) conduct that occurred before Senator Vitter's 2004 Senate candidacy and service; (2) conduct that did not result in criminal charges against Senator Vitter; and (3) conduct that did not involve the use of public office or status for improper purposes. Letter from Senate Ethics Committee to Sen. David Vitter (May 8, 2008), available at http://ethics.senate.gov/downloads/pdffiles/vitter_050808.pdf (last viewed July 28, 2008).

- 1 attempted to quash the subpoena. Ultimately, Senator Vitter never had to testify because
- 2 the court cancelled the hearing.
- On March 3, 2008, Ms. Palfrey again subpoenaed Senator Vitter, this time as a
- 4 trial witness. Although efforts by Subpoena Counsel to quash this second subpoena
- 5 were unsuccessful, Ms. Palfrey did not call Senator Vitter as a witness. In the attempts to
- 6 quash both subpoenas, Subpoena Counsel's work included consulting with government
- 7 attorneys and appearing in court.
- 8 In addition to work related to monitoring the trial, quashing the subpoenas, and
- 9 consulting with Ethics Counsel, Subpoena Counsel also consulted with Senator Vitter and
- 10 his public relations professional. Senator Vitter also incurred legal fees through
- 11 Subpoena Counsel's review of press releases.
- Media coverage of the Senator's involvement with Ms. Palfrey was extensive.
- 13 The media coverage included scrutiny of Senator Vitter's political and policy positions as
- 14 a U.S. Senator.³ The press demanded that Senator Vitter address the matter publicly.⁴
- 15 The press also discussed the possible effects of Senator Vitter's involvement in the
- 16 Palfrey criminal proceeding on his candidacy in 2010.⁵

One article asserted that Senator Vitter "faces perhaps more scrutiny than many politicians because he's made family issues a key component of his political career." Vitter on "D.C. Madam" List: Senator Says He's Sorry for "Very Serious Sin in My Past," New Orleans Times Picayune, July 10, 2007, at 1; see also Mike Hasten, Vitter's Statement Raises More Questions, Shreveport Times, July 17, 2007, at B4; Editorial, Can this Senator's Career be Saved?, New Orleans Times Picayune, July 12, 2007, at 7; John Hill, Commentary, Debate Rages on Whether to Force Vitter Resignation, New Orleans City Business, July 11, 2007.

⁴ See, e.g., Editorial, Incomplete Answers, New Orleans Times Picayune, July 17, 2007, at 6.
⁵ See, e.g., Stephanie Grace, Editorial, Vitter's Problems Aren't Going Away, New Orleans Times Picayune, Apr. 15, 2008; Vitter Avoids "Madam" Testimony: Palfrey's Attorneys Call No Witnesses, New Orleans Times Picayune, Apr. 15, 2008, at 1; Bill Walsh & Bruce Alpert, "Madam's" Trial Opens with Vitter on List: Attorney Says Senator Will Invoke Fifth Amendment if Questioned, New Orleans Times Picayune, Apr. 8, 2008, at 1; Mike Hasten, Vitter is Spared Embarrassing D.C. Testimony: Judge Cancels Hearing on Escort Service, New Orleans Times Picayune, Nov. 22, 2007, at 4; Hasten, supra note 3; Hill, supra note 3.

25 2 U.S.C. 439a(b); 11 CFR 113.2.

| 1 | To date, Subpoena Counsel has billed approximately \$85,322 in legal fees for |
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| 2 | work relating to quashing the subpoenas; \$31,341.25 in legal fees for Subpoena |
| 3 | Counsel's "consultations with the Senator and his advisors," including Ethics Counsel |
| 4 | and a public relations professional; \$75,212.75 in legal fees for monitoring the Palfrey |
| 5 | criminal proceeding; and \$15,301.50 for miscellaneous expenses such as transportation |
| 6 | and photocopying. Senator Vitter has personally already paid \$70,000 to Subpoena |
| 7 | Counsel. You anticipate that Senator Vitter may incur additional legal fees and expenses |
| 8 | related to consultations regarding media relations if the Palfrey criminal proceeding again |
| 9 | comes up in the press as Senator Vitter's 2010 reelection campaign progresses. |
| 10 | Question Presented |
| 11 12 13 14 15 | May the Committee use campaign funds to pay Subpoena Counsel for legal services rendered in connection with the Palfrey criminal proceeding and reimburse Senator Vitter for amounts he has already paid for legal services rendered in connection with the Palfrey criminal proceeding? |
| 16 | Legal Analysis and Conclusions |
| 17 | For the reasons discussed below, the Committee may use campaign funds to pay |
| 18 | for, and reimburse Senator Vitter for his prior payment of, some of the legal services |
| 19 | rendered in connection with the Palfrey criminal proceeding, but not for others. |
| 20 | The Act identifies six permissible uses of contributions accepted by a Federal |
| 21 | candidate, including otherwise authorized expenditures in connection with the |
| 22 | candidate's campaign for Federal office; ordinary and necessary expenses incurred in |
| 23 | connection with the duties of the individual as a holder of Federal office; and any other |
| 24 | lawful purpose that is not "personal use." See 2 U.S.C. 439a(a); see also |

Contributions accepted by a candidate may not be converted to personal use by 1 2 any person. 2 U.S.C. 439a(b)(1); 11 CFR 113.2(e). "Personal use" is "any use of funds 3 in a campaign account of a present or former candidate to fulfill a commitment, 4 obligation or expense of any person that would exist irrespective of the candidate's 5 campaign or duties as a Federal officeholder." 11 CFR 113.1(g); see also 6 2 U.S.C. 439a(b)(2). The Commission analyzes, on a case-by-case basis, whether the use 7 of funds in a campaign account for the payment of legal fees and expenses constitutes 8 personal use. See 11 CFR 113.1(g)(1)(ii)(A). 9 The Commission has long recognized that if a candidate "can reasonably show 10 that the expenses at issue resulted from campaign or officeholder activities, the Commission will not consider the use to be personal use." Final Rule and Explanation 11 12 and Justification, Personal Use of Campaign Funds, 60 Fed. Reg. 7,867 (Feb. 9, 1995) 13 ("1995 Personal Use E&J"). Legal fees and expenses, however, "will not be treated as 14 though they are campaign or officeholder related merely because the underlying 15 proceedings have some impact on the campaign or the officeholder's status." Id. at 16 7,868. The Commission has identified legal expenses associated with a divorce or 17 charges of driving under the influence of alcohol as examples of expenses that are 18 personal, rather than campaign or officeholder related. Id. 19 Consulting with Ethics Counsel 20 Senator Vitter seeks to use campaign funds to pay legal fees for Subpoena Counsel's consultations with Ethics Counsel, including informing Ethics Counsel about 21 22 the Palfrey criminal proceeding and advising Ethics Counsel in connection with the 23 Palfrey criminal proceeding.

1 The Commission has previously concluded that efforts to respond to the House 2 Committee on Standards of Official Conduct ("House Ethics Committee") are directly 3 related to an individual's duties as a Federal officeholder, and that legal fees and 4 expenses incurred in responding to a House Ethics Committee inquiry or investigation are ordinary and necessary expenses incurred in connection with the duties of a Federal 5 6 officeholder. See Advisory Opinions 2006-35 (Kolbe) and 1998-01 (Hilliard). 7 Accordingly, the Commission has concluded that political committees may use campaign 8 funds to pay legal fees and expenses incurred in responding to inquiries by the House 9 Ethics Committee, even if the allegations before the House Ethics Committee concerned 10 activities unrelated to candidacy and the duties of an officeholder and predated candidacy 11 and holding office. See Advisory Opinion 1998-01 (Hilliard); see also Advisory Opinion 12 2006-35 (Kolbe). 13 The Commission concludes that legal fees incurred in responding to the Senate 14 Ethics Committee should be treated no differently. Just as the Committee could use 15 campaign funds to pay Ethics Counsel for representing Senator Vitter before the Senate 16 Ethics Committee, the Committee could also use campaign funds to pay Subpoena 17 Counsel for assisting Ethics Counsel in that endeavor, particularly given the nexus 18 between the Senate Ethics Committee inquiry and the Palfrey criminal proceeding. 19 Accordingly, the Commission concludes that the Committee may use campaign funds to 20 pay Subpoena Counsel for legal services described above in connection with the Senate 21 Ethics Committee inquiry. Such use would not be a conversion to personal use because 22 these legal fees would not exist irrespective of Senator Vitter's duties as a U.S. Senator. 23 See Advisory Opinions 2006-35 (Kolbe) and 1998-01 (Hilliard).

Quashing the Subpoenas

Senator Vitter seeks to use campaign funds for work relating to quashing the subpoenas in the Palfrey criminal proceeding. This work included consulting with government attorneys and appearing in court.

The Commission has previously concluded that a candidate's authorized committee may not use campaign funds to pay legal fees and expenses incurred in representing a candidate or Federal officeholder before a non-congressional investigation or legal proceeding regarding allegations not directly related to a candidate's campaign activity or duties as a Federal officeholder. *See* Advisory Opinions 2006-35 (Kolbe) (may not use campaign funds to pay for legal representation in Department of Justice inquiry if allegations are unrelated to campaign activities or duties as a Federal officeholder), 2005-11 (Cunningham) (may not use campaign funds to pay for legal representation in Federal grand jury investigation if allegations are unrelated to campaign activities or duties as a Federal officeholder), 2003-17 (Treffinger) (may not use campaign funds to pay for portion of legal representation in Federal criminal trial pertaining to allegations that do not directly relate to campaign activity); *see also* Advisory Opinion 1996-24 (Cooley).

Senator Vitter asserts that Ms. Palfrey would not have focused her criminal defense strategies on him, and would not have subpoenaed him, but for his status as a U.S. Senator. Even assuming that to be true, in determining whether a candidate's authorized committee may use campaign funds for legal fees incurred in representing the candidate before courts, the Commission has looked to the nature of the underlying

- 1 allegations, and not to a third party's litigation strategy. 6 The Commission has looked,
- 2 for example, to whether the inquiry concerns information known to or acquired by the
- 3 officeholder in the course of conducting his or her official duties, whether the inquiry
- 4 concerns actions taken by the individual as an officeholder, and whether the allegations
- 5 relate to conduct that would have occurred irrespective of the candidacy or the
- officeholder's duties. See Advisory Opinions 2006-35 (Kolbe), 2005-11 (Cunningham),
- 7 and 2003-17 (Treffinger).

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Here, Senator Vitter's need for legal representation to quash Ms. Palfrey's subpoenas stemmed from his role as a potential witness in Ms. Palfrey's trial and was not

- 10 related to information known to or acquired by Senator Vitter during the course of his
- candidacy or in the performance of his duties as a U.S. Senator. Moreover, Senator
- 12 Vitter's obligation as a witness to comply with a valid subpoena would exist irrespective
- of Senator Vitter's campaign or duties as a U.S. Senator. Cf. Advisory Opinion 1996-24
- 14 (Cooley) (obligation to comply with legal requirements exists irrespective of status and
- even if proceeding was based on press attention). Accordingly, the Commission
- concludes that the use of campaign funds to pay legal fees and expenses related to

The requestor's reliance on Advisory Opinion 2001-09 (Kerrey) is misplaced. Advisory Opinion 2001-09 (Kerrey) concerned the use of campaign funds by a former candidate and officeholder to pay public relations expenses in responding to media inquiries, not to pay for legal representation in a court proceeding on matters unrelated to his candidacy or officeholder duties. Extending Advisory Opinion 2001-09 (Kerrey) to the latter situation would not be appropriate, particularly in light of the explicit limitation on its use as precedent. See Advisory Opinion 2001-09 (Kerrey) ("The Commission notes that this is a unique situation... This opinion does not establish any general rule regarding the use of campaign funds by former candidates or Federal officeholders for public relations expenses."). Moreover, if a third party's motivations for focusing on a candidate or Federal officeholder in litigation were a relevant consideration, then a candidate might be able to use campaign funds to pay legal fees for defending the candidate against charges of driving under the influence, for example, if the prosecutor had brought the case to trial in order to make a name for himself or herself. This result would be inconsistent with prior statements by the Commission that such legal expenses are personal, rather than candidacy or officeholder related. See 1995 Personal Use E&J at 7,868.

1 quashing the subpoenas in the Palfrey criminal proceeding would be an impermissible

2 personal use.

duties as a Federal officeholder."

This conclusion derives from the statutory and regulatory definition of "personal use," as well as the Commission's Final Rule and Explanation and Justification on the definition of personal use. See 2 U.S.C. 439a(b)(2); 11 CFR 113.1(g); 1995 Personal Use E&J ("[L]egal expenses will not be treated as though they are campaign or officeholder related merely because the underlying legal proceedings have some impact on the campaign or the officeholder's status. Thus, legal expenses associated with a divorce or charges of driving under the influence of alcohol will be treated as personal, rather than campaign or officeholder related.")

This approach is also consistent with the Commission's recent advisory opinions on the subject of personal use. For example, in Advisory Opinion 2005-11 (Cunningham), the Commission concluded that "the use of campaign funds to pay for representation in legal proceedings regarding any allegations [in the Federal grand jury investigation] that are not related to [Representative Cunningham's] campaign activity or duties as a Federal officeholder would constitute an impermissible personal use."

Similarly, in Advisory Opinion 2006-35 (Kolbe), the Commission concluded that Kolbe

for Congress "may not use campaign funds to pay for Representative Kolbe's legal

expenses in the preliminary inquiry [by the Department of Justice] regarding other

allegations, if any, that do not concern [Representative Kolbe's] campaign activities or

⁷ To the extent that Advisory Opinions 1997-12 (Costello) and 1998-01 (Hilliard) may be construed as allowing the use of campaign funds to pay a portion of legal fees and expenses incurred in representing a candidate or Federal officeholder before a non-congressional investigation or legal proceeding involving

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1 Press Relations

2 Senator Vitter wishes to use campaign funds to pay legal fees and expenses 3 incurred when Subpoena Counsel consulted with him and his public relations 4 professional regarding press management and press statements.

The Commission has recognized that "the activities of candidates and 6 officeholders may receive heightened scrutiny and attention in the news media because of 7 their status as candidates and officeholders." Advisory Opinion 1998-01 (Hilliard). The 8 Commission has found that a candidate or officeholder's need to respond to media 9 allegations that result from this elevated scrutiny would not exist irrespective of the 10 candidate's campaign or officeholder status. *Id.* (citing Advisory Opinions 1997-12 11 (Costello) and 1996-24 (Cooley)). Thus, the Commission has determined that a 12 candidate's authorized committee may use campaign funds to pay certain legal fees and expenses⁸ incurred in responding to press inquiries and news stories regarding allegations 13 14 both related and unrelated to campaign activities and duties as an officeholder. See Advisory Opinions 2006-35 (Kolbe), 2005-11 (Cunningham), 1998-01 (Hilliard), 1997-15 16 12 (Costello), and 1996-24 (Cooley).

As noted above, the press closely scrutinized Senator Vitter's involvement in the Palfrey criminal proceeding. Although the allegations underlying the media's scrutiny were unrelated to Senator Vitter's duties as an officeholder and status as a candidate, the

allegations not directly related to the individual's campaign activity or duties as a Federal officeholder, we view those advisory opinions as inconsistent with the statutory and regulatory definitions of "personal use," as well as the more recent advisory opinions discussed above, and superseded.

The Commission has also allowed a candidate's campaign committee to pay legal fees incurred in preparing press releases, appearing at press conferences, meeting or talking with reporters, reviewing and monitoring media allegations, responding to media requests for comment, and conferring with the candidate or officeholder regarding media allegations. See Advisory Opinion 1998-01 (Hilliard).

| 1 | media scrutinized the Senator's political and policy positions as an officeholder and |
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| 2 | status as a candidate in 2010 in light of the Palfrey allegations. Senator Vitter's need to |
| 3 | respond to the media's demands for public discussion of the Palfrey allegations would |
| 4 | not exist irrespective of his campaign or officeholder status. The Commission concludes |
| 5 | that the Committee may use campaign funds to pay Senator Vitter's legal fees and |
| 6 | expenses incurred in press relations related to the Palfrey criminal proceeding, including |
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Monitoring

Senator Vitter seeks to use campaign funds to pay legal fees and expenses incurred when Subpoena Counsel monitored the Palfrey criminal proceeding.

the review of press releases and consultations with a public relations professional.

As stated above, "personal use" is "any use of funds in a campaign account of a present or former candidate to fulfill a commitment, obligation or expense of any person that would exist irrespective of the candidate's campaign or duties as a Federal officeholder." 11 CFR 113.1(g); see also 2 U.S.C. 439a(b)(2). Here, Subpoena Counsel would have monitored the Palfrey criminal proceeding irrespective of Senator Vitter's campaign or duties as a U.S. Senator. Thus, the use of campaign funds to pay for the legal fees and expenses incurred when Subpoena Counsel monitored the Palfrey criminal proceeding would be an impermissible personal use.

Although the Commission has previously concluded that a political committee may use campaign funds to pay a portion of the legal fees and expenses incurred in monitoring a third party's trial, see Advisory Opinion 1997-12 (Costello), the Commission's conclusion in the present advisory opinion is more consistent with the statutory and regulatory definition of "personal use" and more recent Advisory Opinions

- on this subject. See 2 U.S.C. 439a(b)(2); 11 CFR 113.1(g). Thus, this Advisory Opinion
- 2 supersedes in part Advisory Opinion 1997-12 (Costello), to the extent that opinion
- 3 permitted the use of campaign funds to pay for a portion of legal expenses resulting from
- 4 monitoring a third party's criminal trial.
- 5 Miscellaneous Expenses
- Senator Vitter also seeks to use campaign funds to pay certain miscellaneous

 responses, including transportation and copying. To the extent that Senator Vitter
- 8 incurred the miscellaneous expenses in connection with legal fees the Commission has
- 9 determined may be paid with campaign funds, the miscellaneous expenses also may be
- paid with campaign funds. To the extent that Senator Vitter incurred the miscellaneous
- expenses in connection with legal fees the Commission has determined may not be paid
- with campaign funds, however, the miscellaneous expenses may not be paid with
- 13 campaign funds.
- 14 Reimbursing Senator Vitter
- Senator Vitter seeks reimbursement from the Committee for his personal payment
- to Subpoena Counsel of \$70,000 of the legal fees and expenses encompassed in this
- 17 advisory opinion request. The Commission concludes that the Committee may reimburse
- 18 Senator Vitter for his payment of those legal fees and expenses that the Commission has
- determined the Committee could pay with campaign funds. See, e.g., Advisory Opinion
- 20 2000-02 (Hubbard).
- 21 Documentation and Reporting
- The Committee must maintain appropriate documentation of any disbursements
- 23 made to pay permissible legal expenses in accordance with this advisory opinion. See

- 1 2 U.S.C. 432(c)(5); see also 11 CFR 102.9(b) and 104.11. The Committee must report
- 2 all funds disbursed for legal fees and expenses as operating expenditures, noting the
- 3 payee's full name, address, and a detailed description of the purpose of the payment. See
- 4 11 CFR 104.3(b)(2) and 104.3(b)(4). For legal fees and expenses paid by Senator Vitter
- 5 and to be reimbursed by the Committee, the Committee must amend its prior reports for
- 6 the reporting periods during which Senator Vitter made the payments and report Senator
- 7 Vitter's payments as entries on Schedule D, describing the nature of the debt and the
- 8 purpose as legal fees to be reimbursed, and including in that description the name and
- 9 address of Senator Vitter's payee. When the Committee reimburses Senator Vitter, it
- must report the expenditures on Schedule B, noting the purpose as reimbursement for
- legal fees and cross-referencing the descriptions on Schedule D.
- The Commission expresses no opinion regarding the application of Federal tax
- law, other law, or the rules of the U.S. Senate to the proposed activities, because those
- 14 questions are not within the Commission's jurisdiction. The Commission expresses no
- opinion as to whether Senator Vitter could pay the legal fees and expenses through a
- legal expense trust established in accordance with the rules of the United States Senate.
- 17 See 11 CFR 113.1(g)(6)(i).
- This response constitutes an advisory opinion concerning the application of the
- 19 Act and Commission regulations to the specific transaction or activity set forth in your
- request. See 2 U.S.C. 437f. The Commission emphasizes that, if there is a change in any
 - of the facts or assumptions presented, and such facts or assumptions are material to a
 - 22 conclusion presented in this advisory opinion, then the requestor may not rely on that
 - conclusion as support for its proposed activity. Any person involved in any specific

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| 1 | transaction or activity which is indistinguishable in all its material aspects | from the |
| 2 | transaction or activity with respect to which this advisory opinion is rende | ered may rely on |
| 3 | this advisory opinion. See 2 U.S.C. 437f(c)(1)(B). Please note that the ar | nalysis or |
| 4 | 4 conclusions in this advisory opinion may be affected by subsequent devel | opments in the |
| 5 | law including, but not limited to, statutes, regulations, advisory opinions, | and case law. |
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| 8 | 8 http://saos.nictusa.com/saos/searchao. | |
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| 12 13 | 2 On behalf of the Cor | nmission, |
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| 18 | 8 Chairman | |