

Public will get say on SOS rule proposed campaign finance changes

Written by By Andy Lyman
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The New Mexico Secretary of State's office will hold a public hearing on proposed campaign finance rule changes Oct. 23.

The rule changes are aimed at specifying how candidates can spend money received through contributions to their respective campaigns. A candidate, for instance, would not be able to spend campaign money on personal expenses such as membership dues or medical procedures.

Recently, a state lawmaker's campaign came to the attention of the Secretary of State's office for spending money on personal expenses like clothing and a surgical procedure as well as donating money to a family. The new rules would also prohibit donations to groups other than tax-exempt organizations.

The proposed rules spell out that, "If the expense would exist even in the absence of the candidacy, or even if the legislator were not in office, then it is not a campaign expenditure."

The hearing falls on the same day as a court date for Secretary of State Diana Duran, who is facing charges of violating campaign finance laws herself. Duran pleaded not guilty to the dozens of charges brought by New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas.

Common Cause New Mexico, a group that advocates for clean elections, provided feedback on the new rules to the Secretary of State's Interim Election Director Kari Fresquez.

Heather Ferguson, the campaign manager for Common Cause New Mexico, wrote to Fresquez

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in an email that her group has concerns with how a non-candidate could possibly raise money for a candidate and not be forced to report contributions or spending. Common Cause also drafted a document with their suggestions for the Secretary of State's office regarding campaign finance rules.

One issue that Common Cause saw as "the most glaring issue" was that the proposal does not address individuals or groups who sponsor political ads but are neither a candidate or a political action committee.

"These groups would have no reporting obligation at all under the rules and therefore would not have to disclose any information about the sponsorship or financing of their political ads," the document from Common Cause reads.

The group's director Viki Harrison called this, "the bulk of the problem" with the new rules.

In addition to these proposed rule changes, the Secretary of State is also proposing a change to how judges are listed on ballots as well as an effort to clean up voter records for a move to electronic voting and registration.

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