

As written by Justice Matthew Okocha

JUDICIAL PANEL
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT GOVERNMENT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

OLIVER GRIFFITH

Plaintiff

v.

ROBERT ROSSING-NOMA CAMPAIGN

Defendants

MARCH 17, 2025

As written by Justice Matthew Okocha

In the matter of OLIVER GRIFFITH v. ROBERT ROSSING-NOMA CAMPAIGN, the plaintiff alleges that the defendants violated Article IV. D. b and Article II.A.a.i. of the Undergraduate Student Government Election Bylaws.

Election Bylaws

Article IV. D. b.

“Candidates may not knowingly falsify any documents submitted to the Judicial Panel at any time or falsely testify/present false evidence in a Judicial Panel proceeding. This is a Type V bylaw.”

Article II.A.a.i.

“Candidates, candidate teams, and slates may not disseminate libelous or slanderous information against another candidate. This is a Type III bylaw.”

Held: The Judicial Panel finds the Rossing-Noma campaign not guilty of all alleged violations.

Opinion

In the matter of OLIVER GRIFFITH v. ROBERT ROSSING-NOMA CAMPAIGN, the plaintiff, Mr. Oliver Griffith, alleged that the defendants, Mr. Chay Robert Rossing and Ms. Kathrina Noma, committed three violations of Article IV.D.b by falsely testifying or presenting false evidence in a Judicial Panel proceeding, as well as three violations of Article II.A.a.i for disseminating libelous or slanderous information against another candidate. After reviewing the evidence presented in hearings held on February 23, 2025, and March 17, 2025, the Judicial Panel finds that the defendants are not guilty of any of the alleged violations.

The first accusation of false testimony and slander arises from Mr. Rossing’s statement during the February 23, 2025 hearing, where he said, *“This all started with Kathrina’s own testimony. You told her that you would kick her out of USG.”* This statement stems from a November 18, 2024, recorded conversation between Mr. Griffith and Ms. Noma, in which Mr. Griffith stated that he would not want to be a part of or force himself into a Rossing-Noma administration if they were to win, and likewise, he would not have them as part of his administration should he win. Mr. Griffith characterized this as setting a boundary between two administrations, while Ms. Noma perceived it as an effective removal from USG.

A central issue in this case was the definition of an “administration” and its scope. The Judicial Panel finds that an administration can be reasonably understood as a campaign’s appointed Senior Staff and the appointed Directors reporting to the President. Since both Mr. Rossing and Ms. Noma were appointed Directors within USG, Mr. Griffith’s own words implied that, should they continue their campaign and he were to win, they would not be reappointed to those roles.

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Ms. Noma interpreted this as an effective removal from USG, which was then paraphrased by Mr. Rossing in the hearing. Since Mr. Rossing's statement was a restatement of Ms. Noma's characterization, rather than an outright fabrication, this does not constitute false testimony or slander.

The second accusation of false testimony and slander stems from Mr. Rossing's statement in the February 23, 2025 hearing, when he said, "*Are you literally saying the words 'you're kicked out of USG'? You did to Kathrina from what I heard.*" This statement arose when Mr. Griffith cross-examined Mr. Rossing regarding messages between the two. Mr. Griffith asked whether he had explicitly stated that Mr. Rossing and Ms. Noma would be removed from USG if they continued their campaign. In response, Mr. Rossing asserted that he had heard this from Ms. Noma, rather than directly from a transcript or recording of the conversation.

At the time Mr. Rossing made this statement, the transcript of Mr. Griffith's recorded conversation with Ms. Noma had not been read or played before the Panel, as the audio was only introduced later in the March 17, 2025 hearing. Because Mr. Rossing's statement was based on secondhand information from Ms. Noma rather than the actual transcript or audio, it does not meet the threshold for false testimony or slander. Had the audio already been played or transcribed at the time of the statement, this could have been a different matter, but under these circumstances, the Judicial Panel does not find Mr. Rossing guilty of the alleged violation.

The third accusation of false testimony and slander concerns Ms. Noma's statement in response to Mr. Griffith's questioning. During the hearing, Mr. Griffith asked Ms. Noma, "*Are you saying that it is a fact that I said, literally, that you'll be removed from USG, or at least some paraphrased form of that?*" Ms. Noma responded, "*That is correct.*" This response is consistent with Ms. Noma's characterization of Mr. Griffith's words, as discussed in the first accusation. Since Mr. Griffith himself asked if she meant his words in a "paraphrased form," and her response aligned with her prior interpretation of the conversation, this does not meet the standard for false testimony or slander.

The Judicial Panel finds that none of the statements made by Mr. Rossing or Ms. Noma constitute false testimony or slander, as they were either paraphrased interpretations or based on secondhand information rather than deliberate misrepresentations. While the Judicial Panel recognizes the importance of accurately representing statements in hearings, we do not find that the defendants knowingly provided false testimony or disseminated libelous information.

Going forward, the Judicial Panel urges all parties to be cautious when paraphrasing statements, as excessive reinterpretation of another candidate's words could, in certain circumstances, constitute false testimony or slander when presented in hearings or to the media.

It is so ordered.

As written by Justice Matthew Okocha

Signed: The Judicial Panel

Majority:

Chief Justice Matthew Okocha

Justice Judith Vega

Justice Sean O'Brien

Justice Ryan Buchko

Justice Abigail Yallop