

As written by Justice Matthew Okocha

JUDICIAL PANEL

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT GOVERNMENT

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAY ROBERT ROSSING and KATHRINA NOMA

Plaintiffs

v.

GRIFFITH-MORE SLATE

Defendants

MARCH 17, 2025

As written by Justice Matthew Okocha

In the matter of CHAY ROBERT-ROSSING v. GRIFFITH-MORE SLATE, the plaintiffs allege that the defendants violated Article II.A.a.i and Article II.A.a.v of the Undergraduate Student Government Election Bylaws.

Election Bylaws

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.”

Article II.A.a.v.

“Any candidate seeking election to any position is required to abstain from engaging in any type of bullying or harassment of other candidates. This includes, but is not limited to, actions such as mockery, belittlement, intimidation, or any other behavior intended to harm, demean, or undermine the candidacy of others. This is a type IV bylaw.”

Held: The Judicial Panel finds that the Griffith-More campaign is not guilty of any of the alleged violations.

Opinion

In the matter of Rossing-Noma v. Griffith-More Campaign, the plaintiffs, Mr. Chay Robert Rossing and Ms. Kathrina Noma, alleged that the Griffith-More campaign committed five violations of Article II.A.a.i, which prohibits candidates, candidate teams, and slates from disseminating libelous or slanderous information against another candidate, as well as one violation of Article II.A.a.v, which prohibits candidates from engaging in bullying, harassment, mockery, belittlement, intimidation, or any behavior intended to harm, demean, or undermine the candidacy of others. After reviewing the evidence, the Judicial Panel finds that the Griffith-More campaign is not guilty of any of the alleged violations.

This case centers around a statement made by the Griffith-More campaign in response to an article written by *The Lantern*, referred to in this opinion as “The Charge Statement”. The full statement reads:

*“The Griffith-More campaign was disappointed to see an article from The Lantern that failed to include critical details of the election. The Lantern failed to acknowledge that the people who are accusing Mr. Griffith of pressuring them not to run are currently **charged** with 3 counts of providing false testimony to the Judicial Panel, 5 counts of intimidation, 3 counts of*

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libel, and 3 counts of slander. We are looking forward to working with our wonderful student groups to make Ohio State a better place and inaccurate reporting does not deter that."

The Charge Statement was posted in multiple locations, forming the basis of the plaintiffs' claims:

1. The official Griffith-More campaign Instagram
2. Oliver Griffith's personal Instagram story
3. Armaan Chaudhary's personal Instagram story
4. A post in the "Protect DEI @ OSU" GroupMe group chat
5. A public comment by Oliver Griffith on The Lantern's Instagram post

The plaintiffs argue that this statement, and its repeated dissemination, was a coordinated effort to spread libelous information during the active voting period, with the intent to harm and demean their candidacy.

The plaintiffs argue that the wording of the Charge Statement falsely portrays them as individuals formally charged with misconduct, misleading the public and injuring their reputation. Specifically, they contend that the use of the word "charged" implies a legal accusation or official sanction, which was not the case at the time of the statement's release. However, the Judicial Panel finds that the use of the term "charged" in this context is not inherently false or misleading. While "charge" can carry legal connotations, it can also simply refer to the formal filing of an accusation. The Judicial Panel considers the act of filing a brief to be a formal accusation, meaning that the Griffith-More campaign's assertion that the plaintiffs were "charged" aligns with the reality that briefs had been submitted against them, even if those briefs had not yet been heard.

Since the Charge Statement was factually accurate in describing the status of complaints filed against the plaintiffs, it does not meet the definition of libel under the Election Bylaws, which require a false written statement that can injure a candidate's, candidate team's, or slate's reputation. Thus, the Judicial Panel finds the Griffith-More campaign not guilty of all five alleged violations of Article II.A.a.i.

The plaintiffs also allege that the Charge Statement and its dissemination were intended to harm, demean, and undermine their candidacy, constituting a violation of Article II.A.a.v. They argue that the statement falsely equated their situation with legal wrongdoing, damaging their credibility among voters.

While the Judicial Panel acknowledges that the timing and repetition of the statement may have been politically strategic, the Panel finds that the statement itself does not constitute bullying, harassment, mockery, or intimidation as defined in the bylaws. The statement does not contain explicit personal attacks, threats, or belittling language, nor does it fabricate evidence or

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manipulate facts beyond reasonable interpretation. Therefore, the Judicial Panel finds the Griffith-More campaign not guilty of the alleged violation of Article II.A.a.v.

After careful review, the Judicial Panel finds that the Griffith-More campaign did not disseminate libelous or slanderous information, nor did it engage in bullying or harassment under the definitions outlined in the Election Bylaws.

The Judicial Panel also acknowledges that, in the context of election campaigns, the strategic use of language can blur the line between political rhetoric and misinformation. While this case does not rise to the level of a bylaw violation, the Judicial Panel strongly advises candidates and campaign teams to use precise and responsible language when making accusations against opponents.

It is so ordered.

Signed: The Judicial Panel

Majority:

Chief Justice Matthew Okocha

Justice Judith Vega

Justice Sean O'Brien

Justice Ryan Buchko

Justice Abigail Yallop