



Judicial Watch™

*Because no one
is above the law!*

VIA FACSIMILE (312) 814-6485
AND U.S. MAIL

October 30, 2008

Ann McGeehan, Director of Elections
Elections Division
Secretary of State
P.O. Box 12060
Austin, Texas 78711-2060

Re: Electioneering Text Messages Within Polling Places

Dear Ms. McGeehan:

Texas, like many states, imposes restrictions on political speech around and within polling places. The U.S. Supreme Court has reaffirmed the constitutionality of these statutes because "a long history, a substantial consensus, and simple common sense show that some restricted zone around polling places is necessary to protect" what the Court calls a "fundamental right" to "cast a ballot in an election free from the taint of intimidation and fraud." *Burson v. Freeman*, 504 U.S. 191, 211 (1992). To achieve this end, Texas law specifically states, "A person commits an offense if, during the voting period and within 100 feet of an outside door through which a voter may enter the building in which a polling place is located, the person electioneers for or against any candidate." TEX. ELEC. CODE ANN. § 61.003.

Judicial Watch, Inc. is a non-partisan educational foundation that promotes transparency, accountability, and integrity in government and fidelity to the rule of law.

Through its educational endeavors, Judicial Watch advocates high standards of ethics, law, and morality in our nation's public life and seeks to ensure that government officials do not abuse the powers entrusted to them by the American people. Judicial Watch, Inc. is concerned that Senator Barack Obama and his presidential campaign may violate the "Electioneering and Loitering Near Polling Place Prohibited" statute on November 4, 2008 by text messaging voters while they are at Texas polling places.

According to media reports, Senator Barack Obama's presidential campaign sent text messages to New Hampshire voters on primary day encouraging them to vote for Senator Obama. See Exhibit 1. Because the campaign found this strategy particularly effective in influencing 18 to 24 year old voters, it appears that the campaign intends to text message voters on Election Day again encouraging them to vote for Senator Obama. See Exhibit 2.

Many of these voters will be voting in Texas. Because a great many individuals carry cellular telephones and are able to receive text messages anywhere and almost instantaneously upon transmission, it is highly likely that Texas voters will receive and read Obama campaign text messages inside Texas polling places and even in voting booths.

When drafting the statute, legislators focused on the popular and prevalent method of electioneering on Election Day: signs and face-to-face contact between campaign workers and voters. Since that time, electioneering has drastically changed. Modern technology, such as text messaging, has become a fundamental component of campaigning. Throughout the past year, Senator Obama and his presidential campaign have sent out countless text messages informing voters of developments in the Senator's campaign, including dates/times of the Senator's public appearances and the selection of the Senator's running mate, and encouraging them to vote for Senator Obama.

Even if an individual is planning on voting for Senator Obama on Election Day, a voter should be able to enter a polling place and cast his or her vote without being subjected to yet more electioneering. Secrecy, privacy, and freedom from outside influence in the polling place are fundamental to ensuring a fair voting process. The people of Texas must be free to cast their votes

without electioneering text messages inside polling places. Texas law requires no less.

Judicial Watch, Inc. requests that the Elections Division conduct an inquiry into this matter. If the Division determines that text messaging a voter within a polling place violates ELEC. CODE ANN. § 61.003, Judicial Watch, Inc. requests that the Board ask Senator Obama and his campaign to forego their plans to text message Texas voters after the polls open on Election Day, or fashion some other, equally effective remedy.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

JUDICIAL WATCH, INC.

Handwritten signature of Thomas J. Fitton in cursive script.

Thomas J. Fitton
President

Enclosures

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FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

TO: ANN MCGEEHAN, DIRECTOR OF ELECTIONS
ELECTIONS DIVISION
SECRETARY OF STATE

FROM: Thomas J. Fitton

DATE: October 30, 2008

TELECOPY NUMBER: (312) 814-6485

NUMBER OF PAGES (Including Cover Page): 10

Our Reference No.: 500

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