

CHAPTER 211B

FAIR CAMPAIGN PRACTICES

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| <p>211B.01 Definitions.</p> <p>211B.02 False claim of support.</p> <p>211B.03 Use of the term reelect.</p> <p>211B.04 Campaign literature must include disclaimer.</p> <p>211B.05 Paid advertisements in news.</p> <p>211B.06 False political and campaign material; penalty; exceptions.</p> <p>211B.07 Undue influence on voters prohibited.</p> <p>211B.08 Solicitation of contributions prohibited.</p> <p>211B.09 Prohibited public employee activities.</p> <p>211B.10 Inducing or refraining candidacy; time off for public office meetings.</p> <p>211B.11 Election day prohibitions.</p> <p>211B.12 Legal expenditures.</p> | <p>211B.13 Bribery, treating, and solicitation.</p> <p>211B.14 Digest of laws.</p> <p>211B.15 Corporate political contributions.</p> <p>211B.16 County attorney inquiry; associate counsel.</p> <p>211B.17 Forfeiture of nomination or office; circumstances where not forfeited.</p> <p>211B.18 Disqualified candidate not to hold various positions.</p> <p>211B.19 Penalties for violation.</p> <p>211B.20 Denial of access by political candidates to multiple unit dwellings.</p> <p>211B.21 Applicability.</p> |
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211B.01 DEFINITIONS.

Subdivision 1. **Application.** The definitions in chapter 200 and this section apply to this chapter.

Subd. 2. **Campaign material.** "Campaign material" means any literature, publication, or material tending to influence voting at a primary or other election, except for news items or editorial comments by the news media.

Subd. 3. **Candidate.** "Candidate" means an individual who seeks nomination or election to a federal, statewide, legislative, judicial, or local office including special districts, school districts, towns, home rule charter and statutory cities, and counties, except candidates for president and vice-president of the United States.

Subd. 4. **Committee.** "Committee" means two or more persons acting together or a corporation or association acting to influence the nomination, election, or defeat of a candidate or to promote or defeat a ballot question. Promoting or defeating a ballot question includes efforts to qualify or prevent a proposition from qualifying for placement on the ballot.

Subd. 5. **Disbursement.** "Disbursement" means an act through which money, property, office, or position or other thing of value is directly or indirectly promised, paid, spent, contributed, or lent, and any money, property, office, or position or other thing of value so promised or transferred.

Subd. 6. **Political purposes.** An act is done for "political purposes" when the act is intended or done to influence, directly or indirectly, voting at a primary or other election. This does not include news items or editorial comments published or broadcast by the news media.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 1

211B.02 FALSE CLAIM OF SUPPORT.

A person or candidate may not knowingly make, directly or indirectly, a false claim stating or implying that a candidate or ballot question has the support or endorsement of a major political party or party unit or of an organization. A person or candidate may not state in written campaign material that the candidate or ballot question has the support or endorsement of an individual without first getting written permission from the individual to do so.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 2

211B.03 USE OF THE TERM REELECT.

A person or candidate may not, in the event of redistricting, use the term "reelect" in a campaign for elective office unless the candidate is the incumbent of that office and the office represents any part of the new district.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 3

211B.04 CAMPAIGN LITERATURE MUST INCLUDE DISCLAIMER.

(a) A person who participates in the preparation or dissemination of campaign material other than as provided in section 211B.05, subdivision 1, that does not prominently include the name and address of the person or committee causing the material to be prepared or disseminated in a disclaimer substantially in the form provided in paragraph (b) or (c) is guilty of a misdemeanor.

(b) Except in cases covered by paragraph (c), the required form of disclaimer is: "Prepared and paid for by the committee,(address)."

(c) In the case of broadcast media, the required form of disclaimer is: "Paid for by the committee."

(d) Campaign material that is not circulated on behalf of a particular candidate or ballot question must also include in the disclaimer either that it is "in opposition to(insert name of candidate or ballot question.....)"; or that "this publication is not circulated on behalf of any candidate or ballot question."

(e) This section does not apply to objects stating only the candidate's name and the office sought, fundraising tickets, or personal letters that are clearly being sent by the candidate.

(f) This section does not modify or repeal section 211B.06.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 4

211B.05 PAID ADVERTISEMENTS IN NEWS.

Subdivision 1. **Acceptance of paid advertisements.** A newspaper, periodical, or magazine may not intentionally accept for insertion in the newspaper, magazine, or periodical a political advertisement unless the words "PAID ADVERTISEMENT," and the disclaimer required under section 211B.04 are included at the beginning or end of the advertisement. A radio station, television station, or cable system may not accept for broadcast a political advertisement unless the words "PAID ADVERTISEMENT" are included at the beginning or end of the advertisement.

Subd. 2. **Advertising rates.** Rates charged for advertising to support or oppose a candidate or ballot question must be the same as the charges made for any other political candidate and may be no greater than charges made for any other comparable purpose or use according to the seller's rate schedule.

Subd. 3. **Compensation prohibited, except for paid advertisement.** An owner, publisher, editor, reporter, agent, broadcaster, or employee of a newspaper, periodical, magazine, radio or television broadcast station, or cable system may not directly or indirectly solicit, receive, or accept a payment, promise, or compensation, nor may a person pay or promise to pay or in any manner compensate an owner, publisher, editor, reporter, agent, broadcaster, or employee directly or indirectly for influencing or attempting to influence voting at an election or primary through printed material in the newspaper or periodical, or radio, television, or cable broadcast, except as a "PAID ADVERTISEMENT" as provided in this section.

Subd. 4. **Unpaid material identification.** Unpaid material published in a newspaper, magazine, or other publication that is: (1) in unique typeset or otherwise differentiated from other unpaid material, (2) designed to influence or attempt to influence the voting at any election or the passage or defeat of legislation, and (3) not placed on the editorial page must be clearly identified as an editorial opinion.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 5

211B.06 FALSE POLITICAL AND CAMPAIGN MATERIAL; PENALTY; EXCEPTIONS.

Subdivision 1. **Gross misdemeanor.** A person is guilty of a gross misdemeanor who intentionally participates in the preparation, dissemination, or broadcast of paid political advertising or campaign material with respect to the personal or political character or acts of a candidate, whether or not defamatory, or with respect to the effect

of a ballot question, that the person knows or has reason to believe is false and that is designed or tends to elect, injure, or defeat a candidate for nomination or election to a public office or to promote or defeat a ballot question.

A person is guilty of a misdemeanor who intentionally participates in the drafting of a letter to the editor with respect to the personal or political character or acts of a candidate, if defamatory, or with respect to the effect of a ballot question, that the person knows is false and which is designed or tends to elect, injure, or defeat any candidate for nomination or election to a public office or to promote or defeat a ballot question.

Subd. 2. **Exception.** Subdivision 1 does not apply to any person or organization whose sole act is, in the normal course of their business, the printing, manufacturing, or dissemination of the false information.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 6

211B.07 UNDUE INFLUENCE ON VOTERS PROHIBITED.

A person may not directly or indirectly use or threaten force, coercion, violence, restraint, damage, harm, loss, including loss of employment or economic reprisal, undue influence, or temporal or spiritual injury against an individual to compel the individual to vote for or against a candidate or ballot question. Abduction, duress, or fraud may not be used to obstruct or prevent the free exercise of the right to vote of a voter at a primary or election, or compel a voter to vote at a primary or election. Violation of this section is a gross misdemeanor.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 7

211B.08 SOLICITATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS PROHIBITED.

A religious, charitable, or educational organization may not request a candidate or committee to contribute to the organization, to subscribe for the support of a club or organization, to buy tickets to entertainment, or to pay for space in a publication. This section does not apply to:

- (1) the solicitation of a business advertisement in periodicals in which the candidate was a regular contributor, before candidacy;
- (2) ordinary business advertisements;
- (3) regular payments to a religious, charitable, or educational organization, of which the candidate was a member, or to which the candidate was a contributor for more than six months before candidacy; or
- (4) ordinary contributions at church services.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 8

211B.09 PROHIBITED PUBLIC EMPLOYEE ACTIVITIES.

An employee or official of the state or of a political subdivision may not use official authority or influence to compel a person to apply for membership in or become a member of a political organization, to pay or promise to pay a political contribution, or to take part in political activity. A political subdivision may not impose or enforce additional limitations on the political activities of its employees.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 9

211B.10 INDUCING OR REFRAINING CANDIDACY; TIME OFF FOR PUBLIC OFFICE MEETINGS.

Subdivision 1. **Inducing or refraining from candidacy.** A person may not reward or promise to reward another in any manner to induce the person to be or refrain from or cease being a candidate. A person may not solicit or receive a payment, promise, or reward from another for this purpose.

Subd. 2. **Time off for public office meetings.** A person elected to a public office must be permitted time off from regular employment to attend meetings required by

reason of the public office. The time off may be without pay, with pay, or made up with other hours, as agreed between the employee and employer. When an employee takes time off without pay, the employer shall make an effort to allow the employee to make up the time with other hours when the employee is available. No retaliatory action may be taken by the employer for absences to attend meetings necessitated by reason of the employee's public office.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 10

211B.11 ELECTION DAY PROHIBITIONS.

Subdivision 1. Soliciting near polling places. A person may not display campaign material, post signs, ask, solicit, or in any manner try to induce or persuade a voter within a polling place or within 100 feet of the building in which a polling place is situated on primary or election day to vote for or refrain from voting for a candidate or ballot question. A person may not provide political badges, political buttons, or other political insignia to be worn at or about the polling place on the day of a primary or election. A political badge, political button, or other political insignia may not be worn at or about the polling place on primary or election day.

Subd. 2. Election day campaigning. A person may not broadcast, circulate, or distribute campaign material, or cause campaign material to be broadcast, circulated, or distributed on the day of a primary or election. This subdivision does not modify or repeal section 211B.07.

Subd. 3. Transportation of voters to polling place; penalty. A person transporting a voter to or from the polling place may not ask, solicit, or in any manner try to induce or persuade a voter on primary or election day to vote or refrain from voting for a candidate or ballot question.

Subd. 4. Penalty. Violation of this section is a petty misdemeanor.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 11

211B.12 LEGAL EXPENDITURES.

Use of funds collected for political purposes is prohibited unless the use is reasonably related to the conduct of election campaigns. The following are permitted expenditures when made for political purposes:

- (1) salaries, wages, and fees;
- (2) communications, mailing, transportation, and travel;
- (3) campaign advertising;
- (4) printing;
- (5) office and other space and necessary equipment, furnishings, and incidental supplies;
- (6) charitable contributions of not more than \$100 to any charity annually; and
- (7) other expenses, not included in clauses (1) to (6), that are reasonably related to the conduct of election campaigns. In addition, expenditures made for the purpose of providing information to constituents, whether or not related to the conduct of an election, are permitted expenses.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 12

211B.13 BRIBERY, TREATING, AND SOLICITATION.

Subdivision 1. Bribery, advancing money, and treating prohibited. A person who willfully, directly or indirectly, advances, pays, gives, promises, or lends any money, food, liquor, clothing, entertainment, or other thing of monetary value, or who offers, promises, or endeavors to obtain any money, position, appointment, employment, or other valuable consideration, to or for a person, in order to induce a voter to refrain from voting, or to vote in a particular way, at an election, is guilty of a felony. This section does not prevent a candidate from stating publicly preference for or support of another candidate to be voted for at the same primary or election. Refreshments of

food or nonalcoholic beverages of nominal value consumed on the premises at a private gathering or public meeting are not prohibited under this section.

Subd. 2. Certain solicitations prohibited. A person may not knowingly solicit, receive, or accept any money, property, or other thing of monetary value, or a promise or pledge of these that is a disbursement prohibited by this section or section 211B.15.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 13

211B.14 DIGEST OF LAWS.

The secretary of state, with the approval of the attorney general, shall prepare and print an easily understandable digest of this chapter and annotations of it.

The secretary of state shall distribute the digest to candidates and committees through the county auditor or otherwise as the secretary of state considers expedient.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 14

211B.15 CORPORATE POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS.

Subdivision 1. Definition. "Corporation" for purposes of this section means a corporation organized for profit that does business in Minnesota.

Subd. 2. Prohibited contributions. A corporation may not make a contribution or offer or agree to make a contribution, directly or indirectly, of any money, property, free service of its officers or employees, or thing of monetary value to a major political party, organization, committee, or individual to promote or defeat the candidacy of an individual for nomination, election, or appointment to a political office. For the purpose of this subdivision, "contribution" includes an expenditure to promote or defeat the election or nomination of a candidate to a political office that is made with the authorization or expressed or implied consent of, or in cooperation or in concert with, or at the request or suggestion of, a candidate or committee established to support or oppose a candidate.

Subd. 3. Independent expenditures. A corporation may not make an independent expenditure or offer or agree to make an independent expenditure to promote or defeat the candidacy of an individual for nomination, election, or appointment to a political office. For the purpose of this subdivision, "independent expenditure" means an expenditure that is not made with the authorization or expressed or implied consent of, or in cooperation or concert with, or at the request or suggestion of, a candidate or committee established to support or oppose a candidate.

Subd. 4. Ballot question. A corporation may make contributions or expenditures to promote or defeat a ballot question, to qualify a question for placement on the ballot unless otherwise prohibited by law, or to express its views on issues of public concern. A corporation may not take a deduction as provided in section 290.09 for an expenditure made under this subdivision. A corporation may not make a contribution to a candidate for nomination, election, or appointment to a political office or to a committee organized wholly or partly to promote or defeat a candidate.

Subd. 5. News media. This section does not prohibit publication or broadcasting of news items or editorial comments by the news media.

Subd. 6. Penalty for individuals. An officer, stockholder, agent, employee, attorney, or other representative of a corporation acting in behalf of the corporation who violates this section may be fined not more than \$20,000 or be imprisoned for not more than five years, or both.

Subd. 7. Penalty for corporations. A corporation convicted of violating this section is subject to a fine not greater than \$40,000. A convicted domestic corporation may be dissolved as well as fined. If a foreign or nonresident corporation is convicted, in addition to being fined, its right to do business in this state may be declared forfeited.

Subd. 8. Permitted activity; political party. It is not a violation of this section for a political party, as defined in section 200.02, subdivision 7, to form a nonprofit corporation for the sole purpose of holding real property to be used exclusively as the party's headquarters.

Subd. 9. Media projects. It is not a violation of this section for a corporation to contribute to or conduct public media projects to encourage individuals to attend precinct caucuses, register, or vote if the projects are not controlled by or operated for the advantage of a candidate, political party, or committee.

Subd. 10. Meeting facilities. It is not a violation of this section for a corporation to provide meeting facilities to a committee, political party, or candidate on a nondiscriminatory and nonpreferential basis.

Subd. 11. Messages on corporate premises. It is not a violation of this section for a corporation selling products or services to the public to post on its public premises messages that promote participation in precinct caucuses, voter registration, or elections if the messages are not controlled by or operated for the advantage of a candidate, political party, or committee.

Subd. 12. Reports required. The total amount of an expenditure or contribution for any one project permitted by subdivisions 9 and 11 that is more than \$200, together with the date, purpose, and the names and addresses of the persons receiving the contribution or expenditures, must be reported to the secretary of state. The reports must be filed on forms provided by the secretary of state on the dates required for committees under section 211A.02. Failure to file is a misdemeanor.

Subd. 13. Aiding violation; penalty. An individual who aids, abets, or advises a violation of this section is guilty of a gross misdemeanor.

Subd. 14. Prosecutions; venue. Violations of this section may be prosecuted in the county where the payment or contribution was made, where services were rendered, or where money was paid or distributed.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 15

211B.16 COUNTY ATTORNEY INQUIRY; ASSOCIATE COUNSEL.

Subdivision 1. County attorney inquiry. A county attorney who is notified of an alleged violation of this chapter shall promptly investigate. If there is probable cause for instituting a prosecution, the county attorney shall proceed by complaint or present the charge, with whatever evidence has been found, to the grand jury. A county attorney who refuses or intentionally fails to faithfully perform this or any other duty imposed by this chapter is guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction forfeits the office. The county attorney, under the penalty of forfeiture of office, shall prosecute all violations of this chapter except violations of this section. If, however, a complainant withdraws an allegation under this chapter, the county attorney is not required to proceed with prosecution.

Subd. 2. Associate counsel. Anyone except the person under investigation or the person's agent may employ an attorney to assist the county attorney in the investigation and prosecution of a violation of this chapter. The county attorney and the court shall recognize the attorney as associate counsel for the proceeding. A prosecution, action, or proceeding must not be dismissed without notice to the associate counsel. If the associate counsel objects to the dismissal, the county attorney's reasons for dismissal and the associate counsel's objections must be filed with the court and heard within the time period the court requires.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 16

211B.17 FORFEITURE OF NOMINATION OR OFFICE; CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE NOT FORFEITED.

Subdivision 1. Forfeiture of nomination or office. Except as provided in subdivision 2, if a candidate is found guilty of violating this chapter or an offense was committed by another individual with the knowledge, consent, or connivance of the candidate, the court, after entering the adjudication of guilty, shall enter a supplemental judgment declaring that the candidate has forfeited the nomination or office. If the court enters the supplemental judgment, it shall transmit to the filing officer a transcript of the supplemental judgment, the nomination or office becomes vacant, and the vacancy must be filled as provided by law.

Subd. 2. **Circumstances where nomination or office not forfeited.** In a trial for a violation of this chapter, the candidate's nomination or election is not void if the court finds that:

(1) an offense, though committed by the candidate or with the candidate's knowledge, consent, or connivance, was trivial; or

(2) an act or omission of a candidate arose from accidental miscalculation or other reasonable cause, but in any case not from a want of good faith;

and the court also finds that it would be unjust for a candidate to forfeit the nomination or election.

None of these findings is a defense to a conviction under this chapter.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 17

211B.18 DISQUALIFIED CANDIDATE NOT TO HOLD VARIOUS POSITIONS.

A candidate whose election to office has been set aside for a violation of this chapter may not be appointed, during the period fixed by law as the term of the office, to fill a vacancy in that office. A candidate or other individual who is convicted of a violation of this chapter may not be appointed, during the period fixed by law as the term of the office with respect to which the election was held and the offense was committed, to fill a vacancy that may occur in the office. An appointment to an office made contrary to the provisions of this section is void.

A candidate or other individual who is convicted of a violation of this chapter is not qualified, during the period fixed by law as the term of the office with respect to which the election was held and the offense was committed, to fill a vacancy in an office for which the legislature may establish qualifications under article XII, section 3, of the Minnesota Constitution.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 18

211B.19 PENALTIES FOR VIOLATION.

A violation of this chapter for which no other penalty is provided is a misdemeanor.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 19

211B.20 DENIAL OF ACCESS BY POLITICAL CANDIDATES TO MULTIPLE UNIT DWELLINGS.

Subdivision 1. **Prohibition.** It is unlawful for a person, either directly or indirectly, to deny access to an apartment house, dormitory, nursing home, manufactured home park, other multiple unit facility used as a residence, or an area in which two or more single-family dwellings are located on private roadways to a candidate who has filed for election to public office or to campaign workers accompanied by the candidate, if the candidate and workers seeking admittance to the facility do so solely for the purpose of campaigning. A violation of this section is a petty misdemeanor.

Subd. 2. **Exceptions.** Subdivision 1 does not prohibit:

(1) denial of admittance into a particular apartment, room, manufactured home, or personal residential unit;

(2) requiring reasonable and proper identification as a necessary prerequisite to admission to a multiple unit dwelling;

(3) in the case of a nursing home, denial of permission to visit certain persons for valid health reasons;

(4) limiting visits by candidates or workers accompanied by the candidate to a reasonable number of persons or reasonable hours;

(5) requiring a prior appointment to gain access to the facility; or

(6) denial of admittance to or expulsion from a multiple unit dwelling for good cause.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 20

MINNESOTA STATUTES 1988

4783

FAIR CAMPAIGN PRACTICES 211B.21

211B.21 APPLICABILITY.

Nothing in section 211B.17 or 211B.18 may be construed to limit the ability of each house of the legislature to act as judge of the election returns and eligibility of its own members.

History: 1988 c 578 art 3 s 21