

**American Democracy Legal Fund  
455 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20001**

December 9, 2019

Charles Kitcher  
Acting Associate General Counsel  
Federal Election Commission  
1050 First St NE  
Washington, DC 20463

To Whom It May Concern,

We respectfully request that your office immediately begin an investigation into new allegations that those working on behalf of United States Senator Joni Ernst may have violated federal election law.

At the center of our allegations is a third party entity called Iowa Values, a 501(c)(4) organization that by law cannot make political work their primary purpose. However, while Iowa Values claims its purpose was to educate voters on policy issues, a recent report by the Associated Press notes that internal documents make clear that group's primary purpose was to re-elect Senator Ernst. The report also notes that Iowa Values was founded by a longtime consultant to Senator Ernst, and the group shares a fundraiser with the Senator's campaign.

Furthermore, the Associated Press has obtained evidence that a fundraiser for Ernst may have solicited excessive contributions for Iowa Values in clear violation of federal election law. Federal campaign finance law prohibits candidates' agents from soliciting contributions that exceed federal limits, even if those contributions are made to an outside group. Current contribution limits are \$2,800 for a candidate and \$5,000 to a PAC per election. Senator Ernst's fundraiser, Claire Holloway Avella, worked for both Ernst's 2020 campaign and Iowa Values. Ms. Avella solicited a \$50,000 contribution for Iowa Values according to the Associated Press.

**Factual Background**

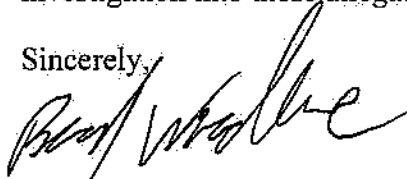
According to the Associated Press:

- "An outside group founded by top political aides to Sen. Joni Ernst has worked closely with the Iowa Republican to raise money and boost her reelection prospects, a degree of overlap that potentially violates the law, documents obtained by The Associated Press show. Iowa Values, a political nonprofit that is supposed to be run independently, was co-founded in 2017 by Ernst's longtime consultant, Jon Kohan. It shares a fundraiser, Claire Holloway Avella, with the Ernst campaign. And a condo owned by a former aide — who was recently hired to lead the group — was used as Iowa Values' address at a time when he worked for her."

- “Political nonprofits are often referred to as ‘dark money’ groups because they can raise unlimited sums and are not required to reveal their donors. But they must take steps to keep their activities separate from the candidates they support. Additionally, while such tax-exempt groups can do political work, they can’t make it their primary purpose.”
- “Iowa Values’ mission ‘is to educate the public about common-sense solutions to various public policy issues of national importance,’ it stated. ‘It was not formed by any federal candidates or agents of candidates or at the direction or request of any candidates or an agent of a candidate.’”
- “The documents reviewed by the AP, including emails and a strategy memo, not only make clear that the group’s aim is securing an Ernst win in 2020, but they also show Ernst and her campaign worked in close concert with Iowa Values.”
- “Campaign finance law states that candidates and their ‘agents’ can’t solicit, direct or spend contributions that exceed federal limits, even if the donations are made to an outside group. Those limits currently prevent donors from giving more than \$2,800 to a candidate and \$5,000 to a political action committee per election.”
- “An outside group founded by top political aides to Sen. Joni Ernst has worked closely with the Iowa Republican to raise money and boost her reelection prospects, a degree of overlap that potentially violates the law, documents obtained by The Associated Press show. Iowa Values, a political nonprofit that is supposed to be run independently, was co-founded in 2017 by Ernst’s longtime consultant, Jon Kohan. It shares a fundraiser, Claire Holloway Avella, with the Ernst campaign. [...] In July, Holloway Avella requested ‘an investment of \$50,000’ from a donor after Ernst made an introduction. She made clear in an email, which was obtained by the AP, how much a contribution of that size could help.”

The facts outlined in this report are extremely troubling and suggest a pattern of illegal behavior by close affiliates of Senator Ernst’s. We respectfully request you begin an immediate investigation into these allegations.

Sincerely,



Brad Woodhouse

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