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Nevada Man Pleads Guilty to Election Fundraising Scam and Cheating Taxpayers Out of Paycheck Protection Loan Funds

Defendant used a web of fake PACs and sham companies to cheat donors and taxpayers

WASHINGTON – James Kyle Bell, 44, of Las Vegas, Nevada, entered a guilty plea today to one count of wire fraud in federal court in the District of Columbia.

As he admitted in entering his guilty plea, Bell created two political action committees (PACs) which operated during the 2020 election cycle: the Keep America Great Committee ("KAGC"), which purportedly supported the re-election of Donald Trump, and the Best Days Lie Ahead Committee ("BDLAC"), which purportedly supported the candidacy of Joe Biden. Both PACs registered with the Federal Election Commission ("FEC") as Section 527 independent expenditure-only committees. Such committees are often referred to as "527 Groups" or "Super PACs."

Between January 2020 and October 2020, Bell's PACs sent solicitations nationwide to more than 40,000 recipients. The solicitations promised that individual donations would be "5x matched" by Bell's PACs. The solicitations also replicated the look and feel of marketing materials used by the presidential campaigns including official logos and slogans. Bell also set up websites to solicit donations with names like "keepamericagreatcommittee.com," "trump2020maga.com," and "bestdayslieaheadcommittee.com." KAGC and BDLAC received no less than \$346,000 in contributions from individuals and other groups during the months before the 2020 election. However, none of the individual donations was ever "5x matched" by Bell or anyone else. And Bell made a series of false filings with the FEC in which Bell claimed that his PACs had made expenditures in support of both presidential campaigns.

Court documents also reflect that during the same time period, Bell applied for more than \$1.6 million in loans from the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program ("PPP") on behalf of five shell companies that Bell owned and controlled. For example, one of Bell's companies named "Echo Three LLC," a company registered in Nevada with no employees and no payroll, received a PPP loan of \$485,000 based on Bell's false statements to the government that the company had 83 employees working at Bell's private residence. In another instance, Bell obtained a PPP loan in the amount of \$492,000 for a company he owned and controlled named "Myson Rules LLC" which had no employees, no payroll, no business operations, and no active business license in the State of Nevada. Bell submitted fabricated tax documents and other company records in support of all five PPP loan applications.

Bell diverted almost all of the funds from PAC donors and the taxpayer-supported PPP loans to bank accounts where they could be used for Bell's personal benefit, commingling the proceeds of the fraud and further violating federal campaign finance laws with exacting record keeping for PACs. According to court papers, the government has located and seized \$519,000 of Bell's criminal proceeds. Bell's plea agreement requires that Bell make full restitution to his victims and agree to the entry of a money judgement of \$862,000 against him.

"The First Amendment protects everyone's right to express and promote their viewpoints by giving to political committees," said Acting U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips. "My Office and the Justice Department are committed to protecting this important right—citizens are entitled to have confidence that their political contributions will be spent to support the candidates and causes for which they are intended." Phillips continued, "We are equally committed to protecting from fraud the Paycheck Protection Program and other government programs aimed at easing the crippling economic effects of the pandemic. Today's guilty plea sends a clear message that my Office and the Justice Department will not tolerate fraudsters who line their pockets by exploiting the political goodwill of our citizens or the benefits afforded under government programs."

"Bell admitted to creating two political action committees that purported to support two different candidates, but instead he used the donations he received for his own personal use," said James A. Dawson, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office, Criminal Division. "Not only did Bell defraud donors, but he also defrauded the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program, designed to help Americans during the pandemic, and used those funds to line his own pockets and private political accounts. The FBI is committed to investigating those who attempt to defraud the American public and government programs."

Bell pleaded guilty before United States District Judge John D. Bates to one count of wire fraud. The maximum sentence for that offense is twenty years of incarceration and a fine of not more than \$250,000 or twice the pecuniary gain or loss from the offense. Sentencing in the case is scheduled for October 8.

This matter is being investigated by the Washington Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of the Inspector General. Assistant United States Attorneys John W. Borchert of the Fraud Section and Elizabeth Aloi of the Public Corruption and Civil Rights Section are prosecuting the case.

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