

Resolution of the Montana Republican State Central Committee

Whereas, the Montana Republican State Central Committee (“MTGOP”) is the governing body for the statewide Republican Party;

Whereas, the Montana Republican State Central Committee (“MTGOP”) is a political party committee organized pursuant to Mont. Code Ann. § 13-38-101 et seq.;

Whereas, Montana’s statutory framework governing political parties recognizes their right of association and the strength it affords political parties, protecting them from takeover or destabilization by rogue individuals or factions;

Whereas, Montana law provides that each political party may:

- make its own rules;
- provide for and select its own offices;
- call conventions and provide for the number and qualification of delegates;
- adopt platforms;
- provide for selection of delegates to national conventions;
- provide for the nomination of presidential electors;
- provide for the selection of national committee representatives;
- make nominations to fill vacancies occurring among its candidates nominated for offices to be filled by the state at large or by any district consisting of more than one county where the vacancies are caused by death, resignation, or removal from the electoral district;
- perform all other functions inherent in a party organization.

Mont. Code Ann. § 13-38-101;

Whereas, to protect the inherent functions of political parties, Montana law requires that the state central committee of each political party file a current copy of its governing rules with the Secretary of State. Mont. Code Ann. § 13-18-104;

Whereas, MTGOP has enacted its own rules and has filed a current copy with the Montana Secretary of State;

Whereas, city and county central committees of each political party must file a copy of their governing rules with the election administrator and are only effective when filed. Mont. Code Ann. § 13-38-105;

Whereas, city and county central committee rules must not conflict with any of the provisions of state election laws or the rules of the state political party. Mont. Code Ann. § 13-38-203(1)(a);

Whereas, state law protections are further understood via their parameters for legal recognition of an assumed business name and trademarks. Only a city, county, or state central committee of a political party may register an assumed business name, trademark, or service mark for the central committee. Mont. Code Ann. § 13-38-107;

Whereas, only a city, county, or state central committee of a political party may register an assumed business name on behalf of the central committee. Mont. Code Ann. § 30-13-219;

Whereas, the Secretary of State may not accept an application for an assumed business name of a city, county, or state central committee of a political party unless it is accompanied by a resolution of the relevant central committee attesting that it is the entity applying for an assumed business name. *Id.*;

Whereas, only a city, county, or state central committee of a political party may register a mark on behalf of the central committee. Mont. Code Ann. § 30-13-342;

Whereas, like Montana law, the United States Supreme Court has also long recognized official political parties' rights of association. "Representative democracy in any populous unit of governance is unimaginable without the ability of citizens to band together in promoting among the electorate candidates who espouse their political views." *Cal. Democratic Party v. Jones*, 530 U.S. 567, 574 (2000). "The formation of national political parties was almost concurrent with the formation of the Republic itself." *Id.* "Consistent with this tradition, the Court has recognized that the First Amendment protects 'the freedom to join together in furtherance of common political beliefs,' which 'necessarily presupposes the freedom to identify the people who constitute the association, and to limit the association to those people only.'" *Id.* In other words, "a corollary of the right to associate is the right not to associate." *Id.* "Freedom of association would prove an empty guarantee if associations could not limit control over their decisions to those who share the interests and persuasions that underlie the association's being." *Id.*

Whereas, "It is well settled that partisan political organizations enjoy freedom of association protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments." *Eu v. San Francisco Democratic Central Committee*, 480 U.S. 214, 283 (1989). "Freedom of association means not only that an individual voter has the right to associate with the political party of her choice, but also that a political party has a right to 'identify the people who constitute the association,' and to select a 'standard bearer who best represents the party's ideologies and preferences.'" *Id.*

Whereas, MTGOP's own Rules provide in relevant part:

- These rules are created for the governance of the Montana Republican Party. They shall govern when not in conflict with the Rules of the Republican National Committee. These rules shall govern the organization, the conduct of meetings and the business of the Montana Republican State Central Committee, its officers,

executive board and committees, all Republican State Conventions, and all Republican County Central Committees, to the extent applicable thereto. Rule A.I.

- The State Central Committee shall be composed of the County Chairman, State Committeeman, State Committeewoman, and Finance Chairman for each county, who have been elected or appointed in the manner provided by these rules. Rule C.I.A.
- The State Central Committee is the governing body of the Montana State Republican Party, responsible for establishing all State rules, policies, and programs for the Executive Board in accordance with these Rules. Rule C.I.B.
- In each county of the state there shall be a Republican Central Committee which shall consist of the duly elected or appointed Precinct Committeemen and Committeewomen of each precinct within the county. Rule C.III.A.
- The County Central Committee may adopt rules for the government of the Party in its county, including rules governing the approval of campaign literature to be used for public distribution, which rules may not be inconsistent with any of the provision of the election laws of this state or with these rules. County Committee Rules or Bylaws will be effective only if adopted by a two thirds majority vote of all elected and appointed precinct committeemen and committeewomen present and voting at a properly noticed meeting of the Committee and then filed of record with the Executive Office of the Montana Republican Party within two weeks of adoption. Failure to properly file County Rules or Bylaws with the State Party shall render them null and void. Rule C.III.J.

Whereas, federal law, Montana law, and MTGOP's own rules make clear that only official political parties can carry out the functions and powers of political parties;

Whereas, rogue individuals or factions may not register assumed business names, register trademarks, undertake fundraising activities, create party platforms, organize central committees, elect officers, or conduct any other activity that is within the province of the official party under the auspices of the official party;

Whereas, in the fall of 2023, Lisa Bennett repeatedly falsely presented herself as an official, representative, or employee of the MTGOP to the general public, as well as to the Montana Commissioner of Political Practices ("COPP");

Whereas, Lisa Bennett had multiple phone calls and email correspondence with COPP employees in which she led COPP to believe she was representing MTGOP as a "compliance" officer. Lisa Bennett corresponded with an email address of "compliance@gopmontana.com" in an apparent effort to mislead COPP and others into thinking she was affiliated with MTGOP;

Whereas, Lisa Bennett also used the MTGOP's name, images, logos, and marks to mislead the general public;

Whereas, the email address "compliance@gopmontana.com" and the website address "gopmontana.com" are clearly meant to give the false impression that she is communicating on behalf of MTGOP;

Whereas, Lisa Bennett's actions caused confusion to third parties. For instance, the COPP—believing the false information Lisa Bennett presented—stopped sending official correspondence concerning MTGOP's County Central Committees to MTGOP and sent them to her fake "GOP Montana" email address instead;

Whereas, Lisa Bennett is not authorized to speak for or represent MTGOP in any matter before COPP. She is neither an employee nor officer of MTGOP;

Whereas, when MTGOP learned of Lisa Bennett's actions, it sent her a cease and desist letter on October 5, 2023. MTGOP also sent a clarification letter to COPP on October 11, 2023. MTGOP further requested that Lisa Bennett immediately remove the website address "gopmontana.com" and all associated email domains with the same name. Although Lisa Bennett did slightly alter the logos used on the website, she did not comply with MTGOP's request;

Whereas, Lisa Bennett, along with Karla Johnson and Levi McEuen, is affiliated with the so-called "Montana Association of Republican Central Committees" ("MARCCO");

Whereas, MARCCO is not a city, county, or state central committee. To the contrary, MTGOP views GOP Montana, MARCCO, and the individuals promoting them as undermining the message and work of the MTGOP and harming its right to freely associate to advocate for political candidates, ballots issues, and political messaging;

Whereas, MTGOP has never recognized, authorized, endorsed, or sanctioned the political and fundraising activities of either GOP Montana or MARCCO;

Whereas, MARCCO was registered as an assumed business name with the Montana Secretary of State on February 14, 2024, by Shirley Bennett. According to the GOP Data Center, Shirley Bennett is Lisa Bennett's mother; she is 89 years old. Additionally, the phone number on the registration form is linked to Lisa Bennett's 12-year-old daughter, Nicole Bennett;

Whereas, Shirley Bennett also filed Articles of Correction with the Montana Secretary of State on behalf of another group in which Lisa Bennett is listed as a Director—the Montana Concerned Citizens Foundation Fund. In that filing, the phone number listed as a contact for Shirley Bennett is actually Lisa Bennett's phone number. Lisa Bennett and Shirley Bennett are registered to vote at the same address: 110 Barlow Creek Rd., Luther, Montana, 59068;

Whereas, the current COPP, Chris Gallus, is listed as the Incorporator for the Montana Concerned Citizens Foundation Fund in the records of the Secretary of State. However, Mr. Gallus submitted an affidavit to the Secretary of State stating: “Despite my express refusal to serve as incorporator, Ms. Bennett, or an agent of Montana Concerned Citizens Foundation Fund, filed Articles of Incorporation with the Montana Secretary of State that falsely claim me as the incorporator.”;

Whereas, based on this information, as well as MTGOP’s prior experiences with Lisa Bennett misrepresenting her authority and motives, it appears that Lisa Bennett, not Shirley Bennett, is the true force behind MARCCO, along with Johnson and McEuen;

Whereas, MARCCO co-hosting a town hall meeting titled “Politics & Pancakes” on April 27, 2024, at which it intended to raise money from donors;

Whereas, Neither GOP Montana nor the Montana Association of Republican Central Committees have registered with COPP or filed a certification as required by Mont. Code Ann. § 13-37-201 et seq.;

Whereas, Lisa Bennett and MARCCO have failed to keep detailed records of their political committees or to file any financial reports with COPP as required by Mont. Code Ann. § 13-37-208;

Whereas, Lisa Bennett and MARCCO have failed to file any contribution or expenditure reports with COPP for the political committees as required by Mont. Code Ann. §§ 13-37-225 and 13-37-229 even though the GOP Montana website contains a “Donate” button and MARCCO purports to participate in fundraising activities;

Whereas, Lisa Bennett’s involvement in MARCCO is further shown by the fact that her GOP Montana website is closely linked with MARCCO. The first image on the Home Page contains buttons to “Join Us” and “Find A Central Committee.”;

Whereas, this language is highly misleading to the public because MARRCO is not affiliated with the official Montana Republican Party or any county central committee;

Whereas, when a user clicks on the “Find A Central Committee” button, he is redirected to the MARCCO website, marcco.org. This page purports to promote membership in local central committees; however there is no contact information for any county central committee listed. The page appears to reflect that all Montana county central committees are affiliated with MARCCO, when in fact none of them are;

Whereas, central committees may or may not choose to publish their officer names and contact information to the public. As this page currently sits, the Defendants could include any information—whether true or not—about county central committees. This undermines the official political party and its authority, including that of its local central committees;

Whereas, the MARCCO Home Page is nearly identical to the GOP Montana Home Page. The MARCCO website also contains a “Donate” button. When a user clicks on the “Donate” button, he is directed to a page asking for donations to the Montana Concerned Citizens Foundation Fund, a non-profit organization of which Lisa Bennett is a Director. No other information regarding Montana Concerned Citizens Foundation Fund is provided;

Whereas, GOP Montana website also contains links under its “Resources” tab to “Candidate Training,” “Central Committees,” “Conservative News,” “Elected Officials,” “Legislative Guide,” and “Our Partners.” Under MARCCO’s “About” tab, there is a link to “Our Platform,” which directed me to a page titled “What We Believe” and included the Platform of the Montana Republican Party Adopted July 16, 2022;

Whereas, as with the other information included in this website, this is misleading as it appears to reflect that MARCCO is connected in some way to the MTGOP, when MTGOP does not endorse or authorize this organization in any way;

Whereas, both websites also contain “Sign In” buttons. It is unclear from the website how a person acquires sign-in information from these groups;

Whereas, both GOP Montana and MARCCO continue to promote their political activities, undermine the MTGOP as set forth above, and mislead the public through these websites despite the issuance of a Temporary Restraining Order on April 19, 2024;

Whereas, leading up to the June 2025 State Party Officer’s Convention, Lisa Bennett—without any authorization whatsoever from MTGOP—has been contacting central committee officers and providing them with unsolicited advice and recommendations about credentialing for the convention;

Whereas, some of the information Lisa Bennett has provided is not accurate and has led to additional confusion and chaos;

Whereas, MTGOP has decided to dissociate Lisa Bennett from participating in MTGOP activities to protect its freedom of association, protect the integrity of its message and work in advocating for political candidates, ballots issues, choosing its own governance, and political messaging;

Therefore, The Executive Committee Of The MTGOP Resolves To Make It Known That:

1. Lisa Bennett and MARCCO have taken actions that damage, undercut, and defeat the efforts of the elected officials of the MTGOP and the Republican Party in general;

2. Lisa Bennett and MARCCO's actions aim to weaken or destabilize the official MTGOP by engaging in activities reserved for official political parties or central committees under the auspices of the MTGOP;
3. Lisa Bennett and MARCCO's actions violate Montana's statutory framework, which vests authority in official political parties to govern their activities and central committees, thereby protecting against rogue factions;
4. Lisa Bennett is not considered by the MTGOP to be a member of the Montana Republican Party;
5. MARCCO is not affiliated in any way with MTGOP, nor does MTGOP support, condone, or sanction any of its activities;
6. Lisa Bennett and MARCCO are banned from participating in any MTGOP activities, including any activities of its subsidiary central committees or affiliates, including without limitation the Montana Federation of Republican Women and its local chapters;
7. Lisa Bennett may not attend any state party conventions or participate in any local central committee conventions;
8. Lisa Bennett and MARCCO are not authorized to speak for the MTGOP or any of its affiliates on any matter;
9. Lisa Bennett and MARCCO are not authorized by MTGOP to fundraise on behalf of any Republican candidate or cause;
10. The Executive Committee of the MTGOP, through its Chairman, shall notify all Republican central committees and all groups affiliated with the official MTGOP of this Resolution.