

The Media Highlights Wiley Rein's Advisory Role in Stephen Colbert's Spoof Bid for the White House

November 2007

The Politico, *The New York Sun* and *The Blog of Legal Times* recently explored the legal implications of Stephen Colbert's satirical run for the presidency and the role played by Wiley Rein's Election Law experts, who counseled Mr. Colbert's network, Comedy Central, on the legal issues surrounding his candidacy.

Mr. Colbert, the host of Comedy Central's program, "The Colbert Report," allegedly sought to get on the South Carolina ballot in both parties' primaries. Whether or not his presidential candidacy was a joke, executives at Comedy Central took the legal implications of it very seriously, reports an October 26 *Politico* story.

"The network has consulted a top Washington election law firm," says the *Politico* article in reference to Wiley Rein, "and appears keenly aware of the strict election law provisions that could be triggered by Colbert's satirical campaign."

The *Politico* article is one of many media stories to highlight Wiley Rein's advisory role in Mr. Colbert's faux campaign. *The New York Sun* published a similar commentary on the same day, noting that Comedy Central and parent company Viacom had hired "the real-life big-time D.C. law firm Wiley Rein" to explain the limitations on how Mr. Colbert could use his corporate money.

The Blog of the Legal Times also weighed in on the "joke" campaign, noting "the legal issues surrounding Colbert's presidential bid aren't exactly laughable" and that Comedy Central had hired Wiley Rein "to advise Colbert on how to avoid running afoul of the Federal Election Commission."

"It's an open question whether the FEC will move against Mr. Colbert," said *The Sun* article. "He's not running as a write-in candidate, as many of the other satirists have; he's taking concrete legal steps that make it difficult to declare that he's not technically a candidate."

In the October 18 episode of "The Colbert Report," Mr. Colbert held up for the audience a Wiley Rein memo prepared by Election Law attorneys Jan Witold Baran and Caleb P. Burns that noted that he could not spend

corporate sponsorship money on his presidential campaign, but that Comedy Central could assert a "media exemption" for campaign coverage.

"Ok, so it's illegal for my crunch money here to pay for the campaign," Mr. Colbert explained to viewers. "But it is legal for it to pay for my show, and the show can report on my campaign."

As a result of Wiley Rein's legal advice, Mr. Colbert quickly changed the new title of "The Colbert Report" campaign segment from "The Hail to the Cheese Stephen Colbert Nacho Cheese Doritos' 2008 Presidential Campaign" to "The Hail to the Cheese Stephen Colbert Nacho Cheese Doritos' 2008 Presidential Campaign Coverage."