

JUDICIAL COURT OF TEXAS A&M

Syllabus

QUILLAN THURMAN *v.* ELECTION COMMISSIONER EDALUR

CERTIORARI TO THE TEXAS A&M STUDENT GOVERNMENT
ASSOCIATION ELECTION COMMISSION

No. 77-03. Argued March 6, 2025 – Decided March 8, 2025.

Following the results of the Spring 2025 Student Body Elections, Quillan Thurman (the “petitioner”) filed a petition for Writ of Certiorari against Election Commissioner Edalur, (the “respondent”) with the Judicial Court. In stating their desired result, the petitioner requested the Judicial Court overturn the decisions of nine different violations listed within the Election Commission’s (the “EC”) Spring 2025 Violation Report. During oral arguments, the petitioner requested that violation number 96 be removed from the list of requested violations to be overturned, as this instance did not relate to the petitioner’s overall desired result. In evaluating the remaining eight decisions made by the EC (violations 20, 21, 22, 23, 95, 97, 98, and 103), the Court must decide whether or not students running on ‘The Goodbull Ticket’ (a group of students campaigning for office together) violated Election Regulations by campaigning in the Memorial Student Center (the “MSC”), failing to expense and report campaign materials, and undermining the free and fair nature of the election through the actions of supporter, Malik Salami.

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WHITCOMB, J., delivered a concurring opinion.

After carefully reviewing the evidence provided and considering oral arguments, the Court unanimously affirms the Election Commissioner's position on violations twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, ninety-five, ninety-six, ninety-seven, and ninety-eight.

The Court has concluded that there is insufficient evidence to prove that Student Body President candidate Riley Pritzlaff and Student Body Vice President candidate Ezra Villareal, along with candidates on the Good Bull Ticket, committed offenses by bribing students with a \$200 giveaway on *Salami the Aggie's* Instagram, actively campaigning in the MSC while filming a video with *Salami the Aggie*, or using an unexpensed banner to solicit votes in a campaign video. However, the Court believes the election commissioner erred in their position on Violation 103.

The petitioners filed a case on the basis that social media influencer Malik Salami, known as "*Salami the Aggie*," was offered financial compensation for a campaign endorsement on behalf of Student Body President candidate Riley Pritzlaff and Student Body Vice President candidate Ezra Villareal, along with candidates on the Good Bull Ticket. The petitioners posit that the aforementioned parties should be issued a violation for failing to expense the campaign endorsement on finance forms.

The violation report includes a screenshot of an Instagram story posted by "*Salami the Aggie*" with the caption: "Finally done with all the campaign promo. Back to our regularly scheduled content (crying emoji)... Let an Aggie get his (money bag emoji), y'all (crying emoji)." The petitioners claim this social media activity proves an "unregulated transaction, a misapplication of the rules, and an unreported in-kind contribution to boost Goodbull's campaign appeal."

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Although the petition for writ of certiorari outlined multiple desired outcomes, the Court has limited its consideration to the claim that "The Goodbull Ticket violated the Election Regulations by failing to expense and report campaign materials."

A proper analysis of the Court's decision begins with defining its role and the reach of its authority. According to the Student Government Association Code, II S.G.A.C §001.4(1), "All judicial powers shall be vested in the Judicial Court of the Student Government Association of Texas A&M University. (a) The powers of the Judicial Court shall extend to any case between any student and any member of the Student Government Association in regards to: this constitution; any statute; any rule or procedure enacted pursuant to this constitution or any rule or procedure enacted pursuant to this constitution or any statute; or any action or inaction authorized by the same and executive agreement."

In III S.G.A.C. §003, The Judicial Court recognizes its duties of constitutional interpretation, legislative interpretation, election regulation, and conflict resolution as granted by the Student Government Association constitution. Each student shall be protected by equal justice under the Student Government Association governing documents." The Concurring Opinion derives the Court's authority to rule on this issue from its judicial powers explicitly granted by the Student Government Association Code.

According to III S.G.A.C. §003.4(2), "Parties to the appeal have 72 hours following notification of the issuance of a Writ of Certiorari to submit all relevant evidence and a Witness List to the Court. Except upon an emergency Motion to Admit, no additional evidence or witnesses will be accepted for consideration following the 72-hour period of discovery."

The Concurring Opinion believes that the codification of the 72 hours of discovery allows the Court to consider evidence not initially available to the Election Commissioner. This enables the Court to make holistic and just decisions, ensuring that election procedures are conducted fairly and

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transparently. Additionally, this offers students protections under SGA governing documents and upholds their right to a fair and impartial review.

Accordingly, all additional evidence must be relevant to the case. Concurring Opinion asserts that relevant evidence meets the Oxford Languages definition of relevancy: "the quality or state of being closely connected or appropriate."

Furthermore, the Court must apply Rule 3 of III S.G.A.C. §003.6(3), which states: "Test for Relevant Evidence Evidence is relevant and admissible, unless provided otherwise under these rules or the SGA Code, if: (a) it has any tendency to make a fact more or less probable than it would be without the evidence; and (b) the fact is of consequence in determining the action."

The compilation of violation reports submitted as evidence by the petitioner satisfies these criteria for relevance and admissibility.

During this 72-hour discovery period, the petitioner presented the Court with relevant evidence related to Violation 103. One piece of evidence included a list promoting 64 candidates, displaying their first and last names alongside the caption, "Make sure to vote @goodbulticket." Another included a screenshot of an Instagram comment by *Salami the Aggie* stating, "Whatever pays the bills, lil bro." The remaining relevant evidence consisted of additional screenshots of the sponsored video. The Court received seven relevant pieces of evidence linking public posts about "campaign promo" and "getting the bag" to promoting the Good Bull Ticket.

The petitioner provided a preponderance of evidence indicating that social media influencer *Salami the Aggie* was compensated to endorse the candidates named in the video. Moreover, it would be unreasonable for the Court to dismiss the evidence as a mere coincidence.

The Court recognizes that failing to address campaign finance violations would set a dangerous precedent, effectively allowing students to pay for endorsements without proper disclosure or regulation.

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Furthermore, the Concurring Opinion deems *Salami the Aggie's* post to be an advertisement, meaning the Election Commissioner failed to properly regulate "internet activity in which there is a monetary transaction, including, but not limited to, advertisement, hosting, or the purchase of products (physical or electronic)." It "must be documented and expensed in accordance with the financial rules in these Regulations." (V S.G.A.C. §601.5(3) (a)(1))

In determining what qualifies as an advertisement, the Concurring Opinion relies on the Oxford Language definition—"a notice or announcement in a public medium promoting a product, service, or event or publicizing a job vacancy"—as a foundation in deliberations.

Because *Salami the Aggie* admits to promoting campaigns after posting a video that deviates from his usual content—explicitly endorsing the Good Bull Ticket—followed by a written statement implying he was compensated ("Let an Aggie get his 💰, y'all"), The Concurring Opinion finds that there is substantial evidence indicating *Salami the Aggie* was paid to publicly promote candidates in the 2025 spring election.

The Court has the authority to review cases in which a candidate or individual challenges a violation issued by the Election Commissioner. If the violation was misapplied, the Court can rule accordingly.

Evidence demonstrates that a violation should have been issued to additional individuals, and the Court believes the Election Commissioner erred in their decision. Candidates involved in the transaction with *Salami the Aggie* should have expensed the solicitation in their finance forms. "Common sense and reasonability" are provided by the code as a standard for decision-making (V S.G.A.C. §601.6(3) (a)(1)(iv)).

The Concurring Opinion holds that the Election Commissioner should have issued a violation based on "common sense" and "reasonability", complemented by additional relevant evidence.

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Using symbolism, linguistic cues, and a literal interpretation of *Salami the Aggie's* Instagram post, the Election Commissioner should have recognized "Let an Aggie get his (money bag emoji)" as a written statement confirming solicitation.

If the Election Commissioner issued a fine, those responsible for the violation could have petitioned the Court for a writ of certiorari. If no financial transaction occurred, witnesses could have been called to testify, or concrete proof of an unpaid endorsement could have been submitted to the Court as evidence, swiftly resolving the issue.

While the Concurring Opinion maintains that the Election Commissioner was wrong to abstain from issuing a violation, it is not the Court's role to determine who should receive a violation. While the Court acknowledges that "tickets" are commonly discussed and publicly referenced during elections, it cannot recognize them in an official capacity, as the SGA Code does not explicitly define or govern them. From a student's perspective, the Concurring Opinion would be remiss to feign ignorance of ticketing—forming agreements with friends to sponsor or support one another's campaigns while publicly promoting their group identity. From the perspective of a justice, the Concurring Opinion, bound by the guidelines and language of the code, views each name in the video as an individual rather than a supporter of another. Because Violation 103 was issued to the "Good Bull Ticket" rather than to each individual named in the video, the Judicial Court lacks the authority to determine who should receive a violation. Assigning a violation solely to Student Body President candidate Riley Pritzlaff and Student Body Vice President candidate Ezra Villareal would be unfair due to the complexities of ticketing. Conversely, assigning violations to them and every individual listed in the video would require launching an investigation, which falls beyond the Court's scope.

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As a result, the Court cannot address who should have received the fine—only that a fine should have been issued. The Court's focus remains solely on campaign violations.

The Concurring Opinion recommends adapting the Student Government Association Code alongside the election and campaign process. Tickets are a known campaign strategy, but without proper guidelines and boundaries, they can lead to situations where candidates unknowingly risk receiving minor or major violations.

To prevent this ambiguity in the future, the Concurring Opinion urges the Student Senate to formally define what constitutes a ticket and establish clear expectations for those running on a ticket. The Concurring Opinion would like to reiterate that it is not overstepping its duties in any way by issuing recommendations in its opinions. While "ticketing" can be an effective campaign strategy, it can also shape voting dynamics by prioritizing personal connections and group affiliations over individual merit. The Concurring Opinion warns that this could influence the fairness of elections. The Concurring Opinion highlights that if current senators fail to establish clear rules for ticketing, they risk setting future senators up for unnecessary confusion and challenges. To uphold its integrity, the Student Government Association must work together to set future leadership up for success.

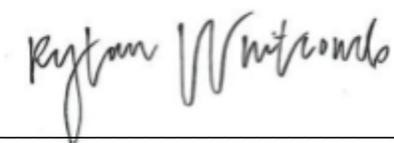
It is so ordered.

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SIGNATURE OF THE JUSTICE

No. 77-03

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rylan Whitcomb". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Rylan Whitcomb, Associate Justice