

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 11, 2018

The Honorable Caroline C. Hunter
Chair
Federal Election Commission
1050 First Street, NE Washington, DC 20463

The Honorable Ellen Weintraub
Vice-Chair
Federal Election Commission
1050 First Street, NE Washington, DC 20463

Dear Chairman Hunter and Vice-Chair Weintraub:

We are writing to encourage the Federal Election Commission (“FEC”) to open an investigation into a potential campaign finance violation involving illegal coordination by OnMessage, Inc. (“OnMessage”) through a subsidiary called Starboard Strategic, Inc. (“Starboard”). Based on published reports, we believe it is highly likely that OnMessage and Starboard violated current campaign finance law by exceeding campaign finance limits and sharing proprietary information related to candidates and campaign expenditures. The Campaign Legal Center filed a complaint on the matter in July, and we believe it warrants prompt attention from the FEC.

Candidates are prohibited from accepting contributions outside of the existing campaign finance limits during an election cycle. Moreover, any expenditure made in coordination with a candidate is considered to be an in-kind contribution to the candidate under 52 U.S.C. §30116(a)(7)(B)(i).

OnMessage currently serves as the primary vendor for advertisements for many federal candidates and campaigns, including many Senate candidates and party committees. In 2013, principals at OnMessage established Starboard expressly for the purpose of advertising for a single client: the National Rifle Association of America. (NRA). Tens of millions in NRA advertising expenditures that once went to OnMessage were subsequently redirected exclusively to Starboard. There is little distinction between the two entities: OnMessage and Starboard are located at the same addresses in Annapolis and Virginia, and the firms are composed of the same staff and founders. It appears that Starboard is merely a shell company meant to disguise that the individuals working to direct campaign strategies and advertisements for Senate candidates were employees of OnMessage.

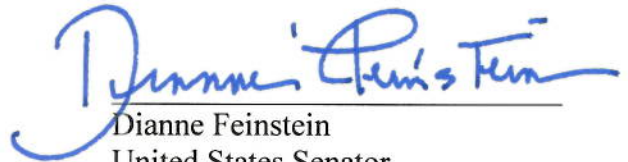
Given the lack of separation between the two entities, we are concerned that OnMessage employees shared inside information with their colleagues working on the Starboard accounts that would otherwise be prohibited if an appropriate firewall existed between these entities. It is possible that these communications allowed the campaigns to coordinate and strategically link their advertising messages and purchases in many competitive races throughout the country.

Every candidate for office has an interest in ensuring that elections are conducted fairly under our current campaign finance law. These reports of illegal coordination and flaunting of campaign finance limits deserve a full investigation by the Commission. We urge you to investigate this matter and hold those who violate our campaign finance laws accountable.

Sincerely,



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



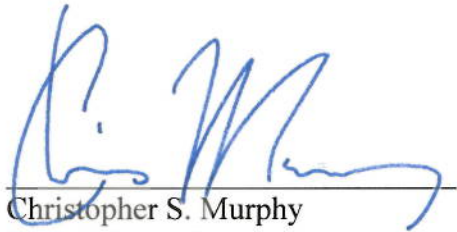
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



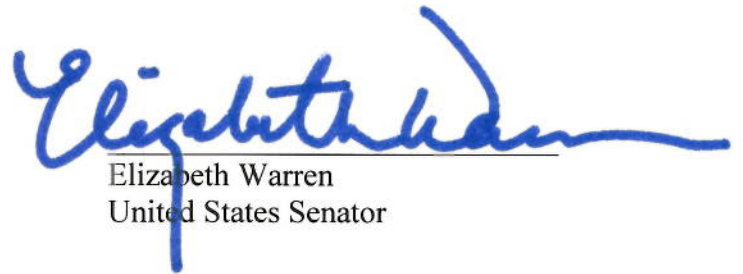
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
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