

**ARKANSAS ETHICS COMMISSION
OPINION NUMBER 97-EC-012(B)**

ISSUED: August 21, 1997

ISSUE PRESENTED:

Can a county political committee sponsor an event and invite the public and candidates to speak without the cost of the event being a campaign contribution to the candidates who speak?

BRIEF RESPONSE:

Yes. Public activities which are sponsored and funded by a county political party are not considered a contribution to candidates that are invited to speak at such events.

FACTS PRESENTED:

A candidate for General Assembly has been invited to speak to a public gathering sponsored by his local county political committee. The candidate wants to know if the cost of the event, which will be borne by the county political committee, will count as a contribution to the candidate.

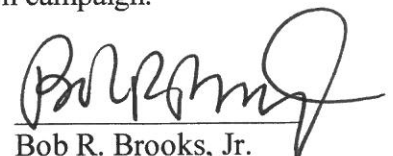
DISCUSSION:

Ark. Code Ann. § 7-6-201(4) states that contribution "shall not include activity sponsored and funded by organized political parties...to promote their candidates or nominees through events such as dinners, rallies, or similar gatherings...."

While county political committees do not technically fit the definition of "an organized political party" as used in § 7-6-201(4), the Commission takes the view that they are one and the same for purposes of this question. It is simply not equitable to distinguish between a county political committee and a state party for purposes of the exception contained in § 201(4) to the term "contribution." To opine otherwise would significantly restrict the ability of county political committees to put on public forums for the purpose of introducing their candidates and making their views known around election time. The Commission is mindful that the county political committees in Arkansas have a long standing tradition of sponsoring and funding events, such as the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinners for the Democrats and the Lincoln Day Dinners for the Republicans, where their nominees for public office are invited to attend and in many instances speak. The cost of these events is not a "contribution" made by the county political committees to their candidates and will not be viewed as such by the Commission.

SUMMARY:

Candidates for public office who attend a event sponsored and funded by a county political committee will not have to count the cost of such an event as a contribution campaign.



Bob R. Brooks, Jr.
Executive Director