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9
10 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
11 FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA

12 Arizona Democratic Party, et al.,
13
14 Plaintiffs,
15
16 v.
17 Michele Reagan, et al.,
18 Defendants.

No. CV-16-01065-PHX-DLR

**DEFENDANTS' AND
INTERVENOR-DEFENDANTS'
MOTION IN *LIMINE* ON
PLAINTIFFS' SPOILIATION OF
ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE**

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Pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(e), the inherent power of this Court to sanction for abusive litigation conduct, and the Court's order dated July 31, 2017 (Doc. 334), State Defendants and Intervenor-Defendants (collectively, "Defendants") move for an adverse inference due to Plaintiff Arizona Democratic Party's ("ADP") failure to preserve electronically stored information in the form of emails and attachments ("the deleted emails"). The emails may have included evidence reflecting that no voter requested Plaintiffs' assistance in collecting an early voted ballot or, if a voter did so, that there were easy and convenient alternatives that would not violate applicable law. In any event, the deleted emails should have been preserved in the conduct of litigation and, at the minimum, the Court should have had an opportunity to conduct an *in camera* review of them for relevancy in this matter. Plaintiffs failed to take reasonable steps to preserve the deleted emails, and because they could not be restored or replaced, sanctions are warranted. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(e). Moreover, several high-level ADP employees deleted email accounts during the pendency of this case, and the former employee whose own emails were offered as ineffectual replacements for those deleted admitted he was unaware of any litigation hold or attempts to retrieve the deleted emails. This appears to be not just a failure of preservation, but instead bad faith or at the very least gross negligence. *See Surowiec v. Capital Title Agency, Inc.*, 790 F. Supp. 2d 997, 1007 (D. Ariz. 2011) (failure to suspend ongoing destruction of emails and preserve evidence "constituted gross negligence"). As spoliation of this sort is considered "an abuse of the judicial process," the Court may also impose sanctions via its "inherent power to manage" its own affairs to "achieve the orderly and expeditious disposition of cases." *See id.* at 1008 (internal punctuation and citations omitted).

The remedy of an adverse inference sanction is particularly warranted, as Plaintiffs' intentional acts deprived both the Defendants and the Court of the opportunity to review the information during this litigation. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(e)(2)(B) (upon finding that party acted "with intent to deprive" court may presume "that the lost information was unfavorable to the party"). Defendants have been prejudiced by the loss

1 of the information, and the Court may remedy this. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(e)(1) (court
2 may order measures “necessary to cure the prejudice”).

3 Specifically, the email accounts of ADP’s Get-Out-the-Vote (“GOTV”) Director,
4 as well as four of ADP’s voter protection deputies, were closed and their entire contents
5 irretrievably deleted in the month following the November 2016 General Election. At that
6 time, Plaintiffs’ lawsuit had been pending for nearly seven months, yet the deputies’
7 supervisor, a 30(b)(6) designee of the ADP, testified in his deposition that he never
8 received any litigation hold related to this matter. When it was confirmed that ADP’s
9 culpable mindset and failure to preserve had resulted in the information being
10 permanently lost, the Court ordered the filing of this Motion, which is supported by the
11 following Memorandum of Points and Authorities.

12 **I. BACKGROUND**

13 Plaintiffs brought this action on April 15, 2016, roughly seven months before both
14 the November 2016 General Election and the ADP’s deletion of emails that followed that
15 election. Among other things, Plaintiffs alleged that H.B. 2023’s ban on ballot collection
16 would result in Plaintiffs and their members being “completely foreclosed from
17 associating with voters in this manner” (Doc. 233, Second Am. Compl., at ¶115; *see*
18 Doc. 12, First Am. Compl., at ¶134.) In Plaintiffs’ words, “associating with voters in this
19 manner” refers to “lawful efforts to assist voters in casting their ballots.” (Doc. 233, at
20 ¶115.) As Plaintiff ADP testified in a Fed. R. Civ. P. 30(b)(6) deposition, it was ADP’s
21 voter protection deputies who would have had the direct “voter-facing” contact and who
22 would have engaged in the activities implicated by the above allegations. (Dep. of S.
23 Scharff (“Scharff Dep.”), June 6, 2017, at 116:19-117:23, 136:6-137:4, pertinent portions
24 attached as Exhibit A.)

25 On March 13, 2017, Plaintiffs responded to Intervenor-Defendants’ Requests for
26 Production and disclosed the spoliation at issue in this Motion for the first time. (Pls.’
27 Resps. to Intervenor’s Reqs. for Prod., March 13, 2017, at 2, pertinent portions attached as
28 Exhibit B.) Plaintiffs admitted that responsive electronically stored information was

1 deleted nearly four months before; particularly, they noted that:

2 . . . although ADP had received a litigation hold in connection with this
3 case, an ADP employee, on November 30, 2016, closed numerous email
4 addresses that were no longer in use. While the vast majority of those
5 accounts were highly unlikely to contain any responsive documents, four of
6 *the closed email accounts were the accounts of volunteer voter-protection*
7 *deputies and would have contained responsive documents.* The closing of
8 those email accounts resulted in the deletion of the emails in the accounts,
9 and Plaintiffs have been unable to retrieve those emails.

10 *The ADP employee who closed these email accounts did so as part of*
11 *the close-out of operations for the 2016 campaign and believes he was*
12 *unaware of the litigation hold.*

13 (*Id.* at 2-3, attached as Exhibit B (emphasis added).)

14 Four days later, in response to Requests for Production from the State Defendants,
15 Plaintiffs acknowledged a fifth deleted email account that had responsive documents,
16 using slightly different language to describe the mindset of the spoliators, who Plaintiffs
17 now admitted were not just one but *several* high-level ADP personnel:¹

18 . . . ADP, during the period from November 11, 2016, to December 7, 2016,
19 closed numerous email addresses that had been but no longer were in
20 use. . . . [T]here are five accounts that likely would have been searched for
21 and would have contained responsive documents: the accounts of four
22 volunteer voter-protection deputies and the account of the GOTV director.
23 The closing of those email accounts resulted in the deletion of the emails in
24 the accounts, and Plaintiffs have been unable to retrieve those emails.[n.1]

25 The email accounts were closed as part of the close-out of operations
26 for the 2016 campaign, and *it is Plaintiffs' understanding that the*
27 *individual who directed the closing of the accounts was unaware of the*
28 *litigation hold. . . .*

[n.1] Plaintiffs stated in their Responses and Objections to Intervenor's
Requests for Production that an ADP employee closed email accounts on
November 30, 2016. Plaintiffs have determined that accounts that had been
but no longer were in use were closed on other dates within the above-
referenced period as well and that, *while one employee directed the closing*
of the accounts, the accounts were closed out by several different

¹ Plaintiffs have admitted that *four* apparently high-level personnel—Daniel Hernandez, Coordinated Campaign Director Stan Williams, GOTV Director Tom Reade, and Data Director Sam Almy—destroyed email accounts. (ADP's Resps. to Intervenor-Defs' First Interrs., May 19, 2017, at 5, pertinent portions attached as Exhibit D.)

1 *employees.*

2 (Pls.' Resps. to State Defendants' First Reqs. for Prod., March 17, 2017, at 2-3, 3 n.1,
3 pertinent portions attached as Exhibit C (emphasis added).)

4 It is unknown how many email accounts the ADP deleted during the pendency of
5 this litigation. Plaintiff ADP objected on relevance and First Amendment grounds to
6 providing additional information about the numerous other email addresses that had been
7 but no longer were in use that were closed during that period as part of the close-out of
8 operations for the 2016 campaign. (ADP's Resps. to Intervenor-Defs' First Interrs., Ex. D,
9 at 5.) Plaintiff ADP admitted that one deleted email account was closed between
10 November 11 and December 7, 2016, "reopened on January 16, 2017, and then closed
11 again on January 17, 2017." (*Id.* at 4.) Plaintiffs filed their Second Amended Complaint in
12 this matter on December 28, 2016 (Doc. 233), were aware that full discovery began on
13 December 15, 2016 (Doc. 231), and issued their first sets of discovery on January 6, 2017
14 (Docs. 237-38.) Plaintiffs have no explanation, even in response to this Court's questions,
15 for why the deleted emails were not preserved and were intentionally deleted—twice,
16 even, for one account. As the Court previously noted, we were "in this litigation," when
17 the emails were deleted. (Tr. of Hr'g, May 17, 2017, at 13:2, pertinent portions attached as
18 Exhibit E.) "Why were they deleting emails in November?" *Id.* at 13:2-3. That answer
19 remains unknown.

20 What is known is ADP has been unable to recover any of the deleted emails. (*See*
21 Ex. D, at 6-7; *see also* Tr. of Hr'g, June 12, 2017, at 3:14-4:5, pertinent portions attached
22 as Exhibit F (Plaintiffs' counsel explaining inability to recover any emails and that they
23 "are at the end of the process in terms of trying to find additional e-mails").) Spencer
24 Scharff, an attorney, was the ADP's Voter Protection Director and supervised four of the
25 individuals whose responsive email account contents were spoliated. Mr. Scharff was
26 deposed as the ADP's 30(b)(6) designee and in his personal capacity. He testified he was
27 unaware of efforts to retrieve the deleted emails. (Scharff Dep., Ex. A, 109:17-110:2.) He
28 also testified he did not know if a litigation hold ever issued, or if any direction was given

1 that emails were to be preserved. (*Id.* at 110:10-22.)

2 Plaintiffs clearly failed in their duties of preservation under Rule 37(e), Fed. R. Civ.
3 P., and failed even to take reasonable steps toward that end. Given the number of high-
4 level ADP employees who directed the destruction of and destroyed email accounts
5 during the pendency of this litigation—including the GOTV Director, the Data Director,
6 and the Coordinated Campaign Director, among others—it is unclear Plaintiff ADP even
7 attempted to comply with its duty. (*See* Ex. D, at 5:1-7.) The federal civil rules and related
8 case law provide that such conduct warrants sanctions. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(e); *see also*
9 *Surowiec*, 790 F. Supp. 2d at 1010 (inherent powers sanctions warranted for bad faith;
10 Rule 37 sanctions appropriate in instances of willfulness, bad faith, or fault).

11 **II. SANCTIONS ARE APPROPRIATE UNDER BOTH RULE 37(e) AND THE**
12 **COURT’S INHERENT AUTHORITY.**

13 Rule 37(e) provides for sanctions when “electronically stored information that
14 should have been preserved in the anticipation or conduct of litigation is lost because a
15 party failed to take reasonable steps to preserve it, and it cannot be restored or replaced
16 through additional discovery[.]” And under the inherent authority doctrine:²

17 A party seeking sanctions for spoliation of evidence must prove the
18 following elements: (1) the party having control over the evidence had an
19 obligation to preserve it when it was destroyed or altered; (2) the destruction
20 or loss was accompanied by a “culpable state of mind;” and (3) the evidence
that was destroyed or altered was “relevant” to the claims or defenses of the
party that sought the discovery of the spoliated evidence.

21 ² Even after the 2015 amendments to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure resulted in an
22 amended Rule 37(e) dealing with failures to preserve electronic evidence, “courts have
23 continued to recognize powers to sanction the destruction of evidence *outside of* Rule
24 37(e) because certain implied powers must necessarily result to our Courts of justice from
the nature of their institution, powers which cannot be dispensed with in a Court, because
they are necessary to the exercise of all others.” *See Ronnie Van Zant, Inc. v. Pyle*, 2017
25 WL 3721777, **9-10 (S.D.N.Y. Aug. 28, 2017) (emphasis added) (internal punctuation
omitted) (quoting *CAT3, LLC v. Black Lineage, Inc.*, 164 F. Supp. 3d 488, 497 (S.D.N.Y.
26 2016) ((itself quoting *Chambers v. NASCO, Inc.*, 501 U.S. 32, 43 (1991)) (also citing
Hsueh v. State Dep’t of Fin. Servs., 15 Civ. 3401 (PAC), 2017 WL 1194706, *4 (S.D.N.Y.
27 Mar. 31, 2017) (collecting cases)).

1 *Surowiec*, 790 F. Supp. 2d at 1005. (internal punctuation and citations omitted).

2 When the evidence in a case, taken as a whole, would allow a reasonable fact
3 finder to conclude the missing evidence would have helped the requesting party support
4 its defenses, it may be a sufficient showing of both relevance and prejudice to make
5 sanctions appropriate. *See Surowiec*, 790 F. Supp. 2d at 1008-09. That standard is met
6 here. *See id.* (granting an adverse inference). The Court, then, has “particularly wide
7 latitude” and discretion to issue sanctions. *See id.* at 1011.

8 As discussed below, sanctions are warranted in this case, under either Rule 37(e) or
9 this Court’s inherent authority, or both. *See Hsueh v. State Dep’t of Fin. Servs.*, 15 Civ.
10 3401 (PAC), 2017 WL 1194706, *5 (S.D.N.Y. March 31, 2017). Not only does it appear
11 that ADP “had improper systems³ in place to prevent the loss of the” emails, but multiple,
12 high-level ADP employees also “took specific action to delete” the emails. *See id.* at *4
13 (finding Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(e), inapplicable only because there was not a showing that a
14 party had improper preservation systems in place, but ordering sanctions under the court’s
15 inherent powers).

16 **A. Plaintiffs had an existing duty to preserve the deleted emails.**

17 “It is well established that the ‘duty to preserve arises when a party knows or
18 should know that certain evidence is relevant to pending or future litigation.’” *See*
19 *Surowiec*, 790 F. Supp. 2d at 1005. The duty is not owed to specific litigants, however,
20 “but to the judicial system.” *Id.* at 1007. The scope of the duty is generally coextensive
21 with disclosure obligations and available discovery under Fed. R. Civ. P. 26. *See, e.g.,*
22 *Zubulake v. UBS Warburg LLC*, 220 F.R.D. 212, 217-18 (S.D.N.Y. 2003); *Young v.*
23 *Facebook, Inc.*, 2010 WL 3564847, at *1 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 13, 2010). The duty to preserve

24 _____
25 ³ ADP Rule 30(b)(6) deponent Mr. Scharff testified that he was unaware of any litigation
26 hold or efforts to retrieve or, in fact, any direction to preserve emails (Ex. A, at 109:17-
27 110:2, 10-22), and the emails were deleted by an unusually high number of high-level
28 ADP employees for there to actually have been a litigation hold in place (Ex. D, at 5:1-7).
If there actually were a litigation hold in place, then it appears not many ADP employees
were aware of it. (Ex. D, at 5:1-7.)

certainly extends to “key players,” like the multiple high-level ADP employees who deleted the emails. *See Zubulake*, 220 F.R.D. at 218.

Plaintiffs brought their lawsuit roughly seven months *before* they deleted the email accounts at issue in this motion. Litigation in this matter was clearly pending at the time. Plaintiffs knew or should have known that those accounts, which belonged to voter-facing personnel contained evidence relevant to that pending litigation. Specifically, the emails likely reflected whether or not voters ever requested ballot collection services from Plaintiffs and, if they did, whether other convenient accommodations under applicable law were possible (and carried out). This satisfies the first prong necessary for sanctions to be ordered. *See Surowiec*, 790 F. Supp. 2d at 1005.

Additionally, Plaintiff ADP eventually admitted to deleting the accounts over several weeks (from November 11 to December 7, 2016) after the November 2016 General Election. (Ex. C, at 2-3.) While the parties and Court awaited a ruling or rulings from the Ninth Circuit during that period, this Court’s order staying proceedings advised: “Within 14 days of the 9th Circuit’s ruling on the appeal, the parties are directed to meet and prepare a joint stipulation to amend briefing and Rule 26 compliance schedule, and submit the same to the Court.” (Doc. 225, Minute Entry, Nov. 9, 2016.) Plaintiffs had a clear duty of preservation under the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. *Id.* Indeed, the Court’s Order references compliance with Fed. R. Civ. P. 26, with which the scope of the duty of preservation is coextensive. *See, e.g., Zubulake*, 220 F.R.D. at 217-18.

B. Plaintiffs destroyed the emails with a culpable state of mind.

“Courts have not been uniform in defining the level of culpability—be it negligence, gross negligence, willfulness, or bad faith—that is required before sanctions are appropriate.” *Surowiec*, 790 F. Supp. 2d, at 1006. An allegedly spoliating party’s culpability must be determined case-by-case. *Id.* Importantly, bad faith is not required for an adverse inference instruction so long as there is notice that the evidence is potentially relevant to the litigation. *Glover v. BIC Corp.*, 6 F.3d 1318, 1329 (9th Cir. 1993).

As noted above, Plaintiffs admitted the relevance of the deleted emails upon

disclosing the spoliation, nearly four months after it occurred. (Ex. B, at 2-3; Ex. C, at 2-3; Ex. D, at 5-6.) Plaintiffs have given only “unconvincing reasons” for the deletion of the emails—that an employee or employees were possibly unaware of a litigation hold. *See Hsueh*, 2017 WL 1194706, at *5 (finding unconvincing a party’s proffered reasons for deleting electronic evidence during the pendency of a case she brought and concluding therefore that the party “acted in bad faith in deleting” the evidence).

If Plaintiffs had acted promptly once full discovery began in this matter—or even once they filed the Second Amended Complaint—the emails would have been retrieved, to include clear evidence undermining Plaintiffs’ claims. (Ex. D, at 4 (citing an account that was reopened briefly in January 2017, when discovery was in full swing, and then promptly closed again, apparently without thought to preservation of evidence).) Instead, Plaintiffs were willful in their destruction of the emails and an adverse inference is warranted. *See Hsueh*, 2017 WL at *6 (“Under either Rule 37(e) and the Court’s inherent authority, an adverse inference is the appropriate remedy in light of the Court’s findings.”)

C. The deleted emails were highly relevant to the claims and defenses in this action.

Even Plaintiffs understand the relevance and unique importance of what was lost when at least the five email accounts were destroyed—these are accounts that “would have contained responsive documents,” in Plaintiffs’ own words. (Ex. B, at 2; Ex. C, at 2.) Thus, there is no dispute that the deleted emails “would have been relevant to the instant matter.” *See Ronnie Van Zant, Inc.*, 2017 WL 3721777, at *9-10 (presuming an adverse inference against a party who allowed a *non-party* to delete text messages that were indisputably relevant to the case). Just as in *Ronnie Van Zant, Inc.*, Defendants “have tried repeatedly—albeit unsuccessfully—throughout this expedited litigation to access” the deleted emails. *Id.* at *9.

Beyond Plaintiffs’ clear admissions of the relevance of the deleted emails and their responsiveness to Defendants’ discovery requests, deposition testimony and Plaintiffs’ pleadings (Doc. 233) show that the deleted emails were both relevant and irreplaceable.

(See Ex. A, at 116:19–117:23, 136:6–137:4) (testimony of ADP 30(b)(6) deponent that voter protection deputies would have been involved with voter-facing contact via email). The deleted emails likely contained communications highly relevant to and supportive of Defendants’ defenses regarding H.B. 2023 and out-of-precinct provisional voting, particularly as the emails involved the November 2016 General Election—the only general election for which H.B. 2023 has been in effect.⁴ That election would have been an intense period of communication for those at ADP whose emails were deleted and is also the only general election occurring during the pendency of this litigation. See *Surowiec*, 790 F. Supp. 2d at 1008 (failure to preserve emails from “period of intense communication and negotiation” resulted in “sufficient showing of both relevance and prejudice” to warrant sanctions).

Though Plaintiffs attempted to offer the emails of 30(b)(6) deponent and Voter Protection Director Mr. Scharff as a salve for the deleted emails’ destruction, he testified in this matter that he may have no longer been copied on “important” emails from his voter protection deputies—and he did not know whether he would have been copied on any important emails of the GOTV director⁵—in the week leading up to the November 2016 General Election. (Scharff Dep., Ex. A, at 116:4-21.) The deleted emails were highly relevant and probative, ADP inexplicably deleted them well after they brought this action, Plaintiffs apparently did not attempt to retrieve them until responses to Defendants’ and Intervenor-Defendants’ discovery requests were due (Exs. B-D), and they are simply irreplaceable. Plaintiffs should be sanctioned, under Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(e), this Court’s inherent authority, or both, for their failures to preserve the deleted emails and for the deliberate actions that resulted in their deletion. See *Hsueh*, 2017 WL 1194706, at *4-6

⁴ H.B. 2023, the target of three of Plaintiffs’ claims, took effect on August 6, 2016.

⁵ The GOTV Director, Tom Reade, was involved in the destruction of email accounts during the pendency of this litigation, as was ADP’s Data Director, Sam Almy, who has been hiking the Appalachian Trail for several months, rendering him unavailable for deposition and trial testimony. (See Ex. D, at 5)

(ordering an adverse inference and attorney's fees and costs⁶ for deletion of electronic evidence during the pendency of case).

III. LRCiv 7.2(l) CERTIFICATION

Pursuant to LRCiv 7.2(l), undersigned counsel certify that they in good faith conferred on multiple occasions—including on April 6, 2017; May 15, 2017; and June 9, 2017—with Plaintiffs' counsel in an effort to resolve the spoliation issues. When those efforts proved unsuccessful, the issue was brought to the Court's attention, including on June 12, 2017, as noted above, and in its Minute Entry order dated July 31, 2017 (Doc. 334), the Court ordered the filing of this Motion.

IV. CONCLUSION

Plaintiffs' failures and intentional acts severely prejudiced State Defendants and Intervenor-Defendants. This Court should order an inference adverse to Plaintiffs' case and any other appropriate relief. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(e).

The Court should find that the email contents would support findings that Plaintiffs have failed to meet their burdens to prove a discriminatory effect and a severe burden from the challenged procedures, and, related to H.B. 2023, that Plaintiffs have further proven neither a discriminatory purpose, nor that the statute was enacted with discriminatory intent. Specifically, no voter sought the assistance of Plaintiffs in returning an early ballot. The Court should grant the requested adverse inference and order such other and further relief as it deems appropriate.

DATED this 18th day of September, 2017.

⁶ Defendants and Intervenor-Defendants do not herein affirmatively seek their reasonable attorneys' fees and costs for pursuing the emails and bringing this Motion, but do note that that is a remedy available to the Court. *See Hsueh*, 2017 WL 1194706, at *4-6; *see also* Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(e)(1).

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on September 18, 2017, I electronically transmitted the foregoing document to the Clerk's Office using the CM/ECF System for filing and transmittal of a notice of electronic filing to the CM/ECF registrants.

/s/ Tracy Hobbs

4852-3388-9359

General Information

Court	United States District Court for the District of Arizona; United States District Court for the District of Arizona
Federal Nature of Suit	Civil Rights - Voting[441]
Docket Number	2:16-cv-01065
Status	CLOSED