

Elon Musk canvassing operation sued in California for alleged labor law violations

Plaintiffs accuse America Pac of several violations during its operation to support Orange county's Michelle Steel

Andrew Gumbel *in Los Angeles*

[Elon Musk's](#) troubled canvassing operation on behalf of [Donald Trump](#) and the [Republican](#) party is now facing a lawsuit in southern California filed by two women who say they were cheated out of wages and expenses as they knocked on doors for an embattled Republican congresswoman.

The suit accuses Musk's America Pac, which has poured more than \$100m into this year's election campaign, of "willful violations of the California labor code" by paying the plaintiffs less than it promised and refusing to make up the difference.

The women, Tamiko Anderson and Patricia Kelly, say they were hired last month and promised an hourly wage – about \$25, according to their lead lawyer – to help turn out votes for Michelle Steel, who represents a closely contested swing district in Orange county, south of Los Angeles.

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It was only once the women started working, the suit alleges, that they found out they were being paid instead by the number of houses they visited. The suit further alleges that they were not reimbursed for work-related expenses, including the use of personal cellphones to track their movements along their designated routes.

Musk's ground-game operation has come under repeated scrutiny in recent days following a report in the Guardian that canvassers may have skipped as many as a quarter of the houses they claimed to have visited in Arizona and Nevada, and a second report in Wired that revealed hired canvassers in Michigan were not told which campaign they were working for until they had already signed on.

The Orange county lawsuit, also first reported by Wired, did not specify how much less the women had earned than they were expecting, or how much they had unsuccessfully claimed in expenses. The lead plaintiff's lawyer, Larry Lee, said that they did not have a signed contract for their work, only a "sheet of paper" detailing the hourly wage they should expect.

These, however, were not reasons to consider the suit some kind of political stunt days before the 5 November election, according to a prominent national labor lawyer, Ryan Hancock of Willig, Williams & Davidson in Philadelphia. He said it was common for such suits to be light on details when first filed, and amended and fleshed out later. "This appears to be a legitimate lawsuit based on an employer failing to pay compensation owed under state and federal law," Hancock said.

Musk's Pac is one of several named defendants in the suit, along with a hiring and payroll company, Liberty Staffing Services; a national canvassing company, the Blair Group; and Representative Michelle Steel's re-election campaign.

The campaign, however, was quick to disavow any association with the canvassing operation. "The Steel campaign has no knowledge of these

individuals," a spokesperson said. "They did not and do not work for the Steel campaign."

Pac like Musk's usually operate independently of candidates' campaigns, under rules that make it illegal to coordinate activities. When asked why he had named Steel's campaign among the defendants, Lee, the plaintiff's lawyer, said: "I'm not going to comment."