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Bloomberg Will Have to Pay Up for a Broken Promise to His 2020 Staff

When Michael Bloomberg ran for president in 2020, his employees were told they would be paid through November. They were not, several sued, and one just won his demand for the back pay.



Michael R. Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York, spent \$1 billion on his 2020 campaign for president. He dropped out of the race in March of that year, after winning 58 delegates. Kim Raff for The New York Times



By Reid J. Epstein

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When Michael R. Bloomberg ran for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, he and his aides promised a legion of staff members that they would be paid through the general election, whether he made it to November or not.

But when Mr. Bloomberg dropped out in March 2020, having won only the faraway contest in American Samoa, those campaign employees did not receive the money and health benefits they had been promised to continue the fight against Donald J. Trump, who was in the last year of his first term as president.

More than five years later — and as the statute of limitations to pursue claims approaches — Mr. Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York and a billionaire, lost on Thursday a Massachusetts lawsuit brought by a former campaign field organizer. The outcome could lead other former campaign employees to seek pay that had been promised to them.

The former field organizer, Nygel O’Bannon, was awarded the value of eight months of his promised pay and benefits, \$56,000, as well as interest on that back pay. That means that Mr. Bloomberg will owe him about \$90,000, according to Mr. O’Bannon’s lawyer, Shannon Liss-Riordan.

“I’m hopeful that everybody else who worked with me is also able to get a bit of justice for what happened,” Mr. O’Bannon said on Friday.

Mr. Bloomberg’s spokesman, Howard Wolfson, declined to comment on the verdict.

The decision came after a yearslong court battle that included an extensive fight over whether Mr. Bloomberg himself would be forced to sit for a deposition. (He has not done so.)

Mr. O’Bannon was among a few former Bloomberg staff members who sued the campaign after it ended and Mr. Bloomberg cut off the pay and health care benefits that had been promised. In the end, Mr. Bloomberg spent \$1 billion on his bid but won just 58 delegates. Any momentum his campaign might have had evaporated on a February night in Las Vegas, when Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts scorched him in a televised debate.

Field organizers like Mr. O’Bannon were recruited to work for the Bloomberg campaign with promises of “full health, dental and vision benefits” and “employment through November 2020

with Team Bloomberg,” according to interview talking points viewed by The New York Times at the time.

Ms. Liss-Riordan, a prominent labor lawyer who has represented workers suing Uber, IBM, the social media platform X and other major companies, said in an interview on Friday that she hoped the verdict would spur Mr. Bloomberg to pay campaign employees what they were promised without additional court fights.

“It’s our hope that Mike Bloomberg will come to the table and do the right thing,” Ms. Liss-Riordan said. “A promise was made and it was broken. It’s never a good time to have someone have a promise broken.”

Reid J. Epstein covers campaigns and elections from Washington. Before joining The Times in 2019, he worked at The Wall Street Journal, Politico, Newsday and The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.