

Election Season – The Home Stretch!

Please keep in mind your special status as a Federal employee. You may engage in a variety of political activities, such as voting, making donations to political parties and candidates, and expressing your views to friends and others directly and through social media; however, you are limited in some political activities regarding Presidential, Congressional, state, and local elections.

DO NOT, if you are a career SES employee or a NOAA Corps officer, actively assist a political campaign (such as by doing volunteer work) or hold office in a party organization.

Recent Example:

- A career SES official at the U.S. Department of Agriculture approached a subordinate and outlined the official's proposal to establish a political action committee (PAC) in support of a Presidential election campaign. The official told the subordinate that he hoped to obtain a political appointment by contributing a large sum of money to the campaign and that if the subordinate contributed to the official's proposed PAC and he received a political appointment, the official would help the subordinate obtain a career SES position. This led to the SES member's resignation after a complaint was filed.

DO NOT engage in political activities during duty time or on Government premises (unless you are in a Senate-confirmed position); wait until you are off the clock and out of the office to express support or opposition to candidates or political groups. Do not display anything in your Government workplace expressing such support or opposition.

Recent Examples:

- A U.S. Postal Service employee in Colorado displayed a "Make America Great Again" sign behind the desk at the post office. This was found to violate the Hatch Act—the law that restricts the political activity of Federal employees.
- A Federal Aviation Administration employee displayed a Hillary Clinton bobble head doll at work. This display was found to be illegal under the Hatch Act.
- A U.S. Customs and Border Protection employee posted a derogatory picture of Secretary Hillary Clinton in a Federal workplace (and in view of members of the public). This led to a complaint and investigation by the Office of Special Counsel—which has exclusive authority to discipline employees on Hatch Act violations.

DO NOT use the authority of your Government position to influence an election.

Recent Example:

- A Cabinet Secretary advocated for and against Presidential candidates while appearing in a televised interview in an official capacity. Although the Cabinet member gave a verbal disclaimer that the comments about the candidates were personal views and not made as a Government official, the comments were found to be a misuse of the authority of the individual's Government position to affect an election.

DO NOT use Government equipment or services for political activities (such as by using your Government e-mail account for political purposes or your Government-provided computer or mobile device to access a private e-mail account or the web to engage in a political activity).

Recent Examples:

- A Government employee tweeted a number of tweets seeking support for a candidate using his Government issued mobile device. This led to an investigation by the Office of Special Counsel and the employee's resignation.
- A U.S. Air Force civilian employee sent numerous partisan political emails using a Government account to a list of as many as 60 Federal employees. This led to a 40-day suspension without pay.

DO NOT engage in fundraising for a political party or a partisan candidate—even when you are off duty. Although you may personally donate, do not ask for or receive funds for a candidate or party or otherwise fundraise (unless you are a Federal employee union representative fundraising from another union member who is not a subordinate for a multicandidate political committee fund of the union).

Recent Examples:

- A Government employee was disciplined after he invited approximately 100 people to a party fundraiser and asked them to mail checks to his home address; he had also communicated with candidates and provided assistance with their campaigns while on duty and in his office.
- A Federal employee re-tweeted a candidate's request for political contributions. This resulted in a 3-day suspension without pay and a letter of reprimand.

You can find more detailed information on the political activity rules on the Ethics web page at www.commerce.gov/ethics.

If you have questions about engaging in political activities or how the rules apply to a specific activity, please contact a Department ethics attorney at 202-482-5384 or ethicsdivision@doc.gov.