

HATCH ACT GOVERNS FEDS' ELECTION-YEAR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

As the 2016 election season begins in earnest, federal employees should keep in mind the rules and regulations established by the Hatch Act regarding their political activities.

The Hatch Act limits certain partisan political activities of federal employees. The law was created to protect the federal workforce from partisan political influence and ensure the non-partisan administration of laws. Enforced by the Office of Special Counsel (OSC), it applies to all civilian employees in the executive branch, except the president and the vice president. *However, the law does not apply to federal retirees.*

What Is Prohibited. In general, federal employees may not engage in political activity – that is, activity directed at the success or failure of a political party, candidate for partisan political office or partisan political group – while the employee is on duty, in any federal building, while wearing a uniform or official insignia, or using any federally owned or leased

vehicle. Activities prohibited in the workplace include wearing or displaying political items and sending emails or posting on social media content that advocates for or against a partisan political party, candidate or group.

The ease of accessing social media accounts at work, either on computers or smartphones, has made it easier for federal employees to violate the Hatch Act. The OSC recently updated its social media guidance for federal employees to simplify the do's and don'ts of posting on social media.

What Is Allowed. Federal employees may contribute to the campaign of a candidate, or to a political party or organization, provided the employee does not do so while on duty or in the federal workspace. Similarly, NARFE members are allowed to make contributions to the Associa-

tion's political action committee, NARFE-PAC.

How about advocacy? Legislative activism by NARFE members, whether by writing letters or calling congressional offices to express an opinion, is not prohibited by the Hatch Act. However, employees still should not engage in such advocacy activities on government time or using government equipment or resources.

More information on Hatch Act compliance can be found on OSC's website, www.osc.gov. Click on "What We Do" and then "Hatch Act." To access OSC's new social media guidance, click on "Social Media Guidance" in the left tab bar. Federal employees with specific questions about violating the Hatch Act should contact OSC or their agency ethics officers.

Federal Retirees. Federal retirees have no Hatch Act prohibitions, so if you are retired and looking to volunteer for a campaign or engage in other similar political activity, don't hesitate!

—BY JASON FREEMAN, POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE SPECIALIST