

October 3, 2025
Hon. Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

Common Cause and I write to request that the Government Accountability Office investigate whether the Department of State violated federal appropriations law by using government resources to display partisan political messaging during the September 30, 2025, government shutdown.

Background

During the government shutdown that commenced on September 30, 2025, the Department of State—under Secretary Marco Rubio's leadership—displayed a prominent red banner across the top of its official website that read:

Federal Government Shutdown. Due to the Democrat-led shutdown, website updates will be limited until full operations resume.

This partisan message was prominently featured on the State Department's homepage, using the Department's taxpayer-funded official website to assign political blame to one party for the appropriations lapse. Rather than providing neutral information about how the shutdown affected diplomatic services, consular operations, or emergency assistance for American citizens abroad, the banner existed solely to advance partisan political messaging.

The State Department's website serves as a critical resource for Americans traveling abroad, foreign nationals seeking visa information, and diplomatic partners worldwide. Using this official platform to disseminate partisan political statements undermines the Department's diplomatic mission and violates federal restrictions on the use of government resources for political purposes.

Legal Analysis

Federal agencies are prohibited from using appropriated funds for "publicity or propaganda purposes" under annual appropriations acts. GAO has consistently determined that communications serving purely partisan political purposes constitute prohibited propaganda when funded with government resources.

The State Department's partisan shutdown messaging violated these restrictions by using the Department's official website infrastructure, government web servers, and employee time to create and maintain political statements that served no legitimate diplomatic or operational purpose related to the Department's mission of conducting American foreign policy.

Using government resources to display partisan political messaging on an official agency website violates the Anti-Deficiency Act by obligating appropriated funds for unauthorized purposes that exceed the Department's appropriated authority for legitimate operational communications about agency services.

Request for Investigation

We respectfully request that GAO investigate whether the Department of State violated federal appropriations law by using government resources to create, authorize, and display partisan political messaging during the government shutdown. This investigation should examine the authorization and implementation of this partisan website banner and determine what federal resources were used for political rather than diplomatic purposes.

The Department of State should focus on conducting American diplomacy and serving Americans abroad, not advancing partisan political messaging at taxpayer expense.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Respectfully,
Omar H. Nouredin
Senior Vice President, Policy & Litigation
Common Cause

Exhibit A

