

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 Social Security Administration violated federal appropriations law by using government resources to disseminate partisan political messaging during the government shutdown on September 30, 2025.

Background

During the government shutdown that began on September 30, 2025, the Social Security Administration—under the leadership of Commissioner Frank Bisignano—distributed, according to widespread news reports, partisan political communications to SSA employees through official government email systems. These messages used taxpayer-funded federal resources to advance partisan political positions rather than provide neutral operational information about the shutdown's impact on Social Security services.

The SSA emails explicitly assigned political blame for the appropriations lapse, stating that "any lapse in appropriations was forced by Congressional Democrats," while endorsing President Trump's political position by declaring that

President Trump opposes a government shutdown and strongly supports enactment of H.R. 5371." The messages further stated: "Unfortunately, Democrats are blocking this Continuing Resolution in the U.S. Senate due to unrelated policy demands."

These communications went beyond neutral operational updates about which SSA functions would continue during the shutdown. Instead, they systematically framed the shutdown as solely the fault of Democrats while crediting President Trump and Republicans with attempting to keep the government open. Rather than informing employees and the public about how to access Social Security benefits or which services remained available, the messages served purely partisan political purposes.

Legal Analysis

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

The SSA's partisan shutdown messaging violated these restrictions by using the agency's official email infrastructure, government servers, and employee time to create and distribute political statements that served

no legitimate operational purpose related to the agency's mission of delivering Social Security benefits to the American people.

Using government resources to distribute partisan political messaging through official agency email systems violates the Anti-Deficiency Act by obligating appropriated funds for unauthorized purposes that exceed the agency's authorized authority for legitimate operational communications related to Social Security services.

Request for Investigation

We respectfully request that GAO investigate whether the Social Security Administration violated federal appropriations law by using government resources to create, authorize, and distribute partisan political messaging during the government shutdown. This investigation should examine the authorization and implementation of these partisan email communications and determine what federal resources were used for political rather than Social Security operational purposes.

The Social Security Administration should focus on delivering benefits and services to the millions of Americans who depend on Social Security, rather than 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

