

October 3, 2025
Ms. Michelle L. Anderson
Acting Inspector General
Social Security Administration
Office of the Inspector General
PO Box 17785
Baltimore, Maryland 21235

Dear Acting Inspector General Anderson:

I am writing to formally complain about a violation of the Anti-Lobbying Act (18 U.S.C. § 1913) by officials at the Social Security Administration. This complaint requests that the SSA Office of Inspector General investigate the Agency's use of appropriated federal funds to disseminate partisan political messaging during the September 30, 2025, government shutdown.

Background and Factual Allegations

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 communications violated federal restrictions on using government resources for partisan political activity.

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.

The Social Security Administration's email systems serve critical functions for communicating with the millions of Americans who depend on Social Security benefits and services. Using these taxpayer-funded communication platforms for partisan political messaging undermines the agency's mission and violates federal restrictions on the use of government resources for political purposes.

Legal Violation

The Anti-Lobbying Act, codified at 18 U.S.C. § 1913, prohibits federal agencies from using appropriated funds for activities designed to influence members of Congress or to encourage the public to contact Congress about pending legislation. The statute specifically provides:

No part of the money appropriated by any enactment of Congress shall, in the absence of express authorization by Congress, be used directly or indirectly to pay for any personal service, advertisement, telegram, telephone, letter, printed or written matter, or other device, intended or designed to influence in any manner a Member of Congress, a jurisdiction, or an official of any government, to favor, adopt, or oppose, by vote or otherwise, any legislation, law, rule, regulation, policy, or appropriation.

The SSA's partisan messaging violated this prohibition by using government resources—including the agency's official email infrastructure, government servers, and federal employee time—to advance political positions that served no legitimate Social Security function.

Specific Violations

The SSA's actions violated the Anti-Lobbying Act in the following ways:

1. **Use of Appropriated Funds for Political Messaging:** The creation, approval, and distribution of partisan political content through SSA employee email systems required the use of federal employee time, government email infrastructure, and other taxpayer-funded resources in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1913.
2. **Grassroots Lobbying Activity:** By explicitly blaming "Congressional Democrats" for blocking specific House legislation (H.R. 5371) while praising President Trump's position, the messages were designed to influence public opinion about political matters rather than provide neutral information about SSA operations during the shutdown.
3. **Exceeding Authorized Appropriations:** The SSA has no congressional authorization to use appropriated funds for partisan political communications. Such expenditures exceed the agency's authorized appropriations and constitute improper obligations of federal funds.

Responsible Officials

Commissioner Frank Bisignano bears ultimate responsibility for the content distributed through official SSA communication systems. As the senior official overseeing the agency, he has authority over and responsibility for ensuring that SSA communications comply with federal law, including the Anti-Lobbying Act.

Evidence

I have attached supporting documentation that details the partisan political messaging distributed through official SSA email systems.

Request for Investigation

I respectfully request that the SSA Office of Inspector General conduct a thorough investigation into this apparent violation of the Anti-Lobbying Act, including:

1. Determining who authorized the creation and distribution of the partisan political messaging through SSA email systems;
2. Identifying what federal resources were used to create, approve, and distribute this content;
3. Calculating the cost to taxpayers of the government resources used for partisan political purposes;



4. Reviewing SSA policies and procedures to determine how such violations occurred; and
5. Recommending appropriate remedial actions and disciplinary measures.

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter. The American people deserve a Social Security Administration that uses taxpayer resources for legitimate functions—delivering benefits and services to the millions of Americans who depend on Social Security—rather than advancing partisan political messaging at taxpayer expense.

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

Exhibit A

NPR, *Trump administration uses taxpayer dollars to blame Democrats for government shutdown*, (October 1, 2025): <https://www.npr.org/2025/09/30/nx-s1-5558393/government-shutdown-trump-ethics-hatch-act>

