

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 U.S. Department of Agriculture 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 began on September 30, 2025, the U.S. Department of Agriculture—under Secretary Brooke Rollins' leadership—displayed explicitly partisan messaging on its official homepage. Instead of providing neutral information about how the shutdown affected agricultural services or food assistance programs, the Department's website prominently featured the following message:

Due to the Radical Left Democrat shutdown, this government website will not be updated during the funding lapse. President Trump has made it clear he wants to keep the government open and support those who feed, fuel, and clothe the American people.

This partisan statement was displayed on the USDA's official taxpayer-funded website, using federal resources to assign political blame to the "Radical Left Democrat shutdown" while crediting President Trump for wanting to support agricultural workers and families. Rather than informing the public about which USDA programs would continue during the shutdown or how farmers and families could access available services, the message served purely partisan political purposes.

The USDA website serves as a critical resource for American farmers, ranchers, rural communities, and families seeking information about food assistance programs, agricultural loans, food safety guidelines, and rural development services. Using this official platform to disseminate partisan political messaging undermines the Department's agricultural 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 held that communications serving purely partisan political purposes constitute prohibited propaganda when funded with government resources.

The USDA's partisan shutdown messaging violated these restrictions by using the Department's official website infrastructure, government web servers, and employee time to create and display political statements that served no legitimate agricultural purpose related to the Department's mission of providing leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues.

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 agricultural services.

Request for Investigation

We respectfully request that GAO investigate whether the U.S. Department of Agriculture 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 partisan website messaging and determine what federal resources were used for political purposes rather than agricultural ones.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture should focus on supporting American farmers, ranchers, and families, not advancing partisan political messaging at taxpayer expense.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

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

Exhibit A

