

October 3, 2025
Ms. Janet M. Sorensen
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of Inspector General (OIG)
Room 117-W Jamie Whitten Bldg
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Acting Inspector General Sorensen:

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

Background and Factual Allegations

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 that served no legitimate agricultural purpose. These communications violated federal restrictions on using government resources for partisan political activity.

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 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 USDA's partisan messaging violated this prohibition by using government resources—including the Department's official website infrastructure, government web servers, and federal employee time—to advance political positions that served no legitimate agricultural function.

Specific Violations

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

1. **Use of Appropriated Funds for Political Messaging:** The creation, approval, and display of partisan political content on the USDA website required the use of federal employee time, government web infrastructure, and other taxpayer-funded resources in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1913.
2. **Grassroots Lobbying Activity:** By explicitly blaming the "Radical Left Democrat shutdown" while crediting President Trump for supporting those "who feed, fuel, and clothe the American people," the message was designed to influence public opinion about political matters rather than provide neutral information about USDA operations during the shutdown.
3. **Exceeding Authorized Appropriations:** The USDA has no congressional authorization to use appropriated funds for partisan political communications. Such expenditures exceed the Department's authorized appropriations and constitute improper obligations of federal funds.

Responsible Officials

Secretary Brooke Rollins bears ultimate responsibility for the content published on the Department of Agriculture's official website. As the senior official overseeing the Department, she has authority over and responsibility for ensuring that USDA communications comply with federal law, including the Anti-Lobbying Act.

Evidence

I have attached supporting documentation that details the partisan political messaging displayed on the USDA website.

Request for Investigation

I respectfully request that the USDA 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 publication of the partisan political messaging on the USDA website;
2. Identifying what federal resources were used to create, approve, and maintain this content;
3. Calculating the cost to taxpayers of the government resources used for partisan political purposes;



4. Reviewing USDA 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 Department of Agriculture that uses taxpayer resources for legitimate agricultural functions—providing leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues—not advancing partisan political messaging at taxpayer expense.

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

Exhibit A

