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Sept. 25, 2026

U.S. Government Accountability Office
Forensic Audits and Investigative Service
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

U.S. Office of Special Counsel
1730 M Street, NW, Suite 218
Washington, DC 20036

Submitted electronically

RE: Violations of 5 U.S.C. §3107 and related laws prohibiting the use of government resources for propaganda purpose, and 5 U.S.C. §7324 (Hatch Act) by the White House staff of President Donald Trump

Dear Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Office of Special Counsel (OSC):

A television ad boosting the image of President Donald Trump paid for by government funds is airing in two media markets. Both markets are key districts in the upcoming midterm elections. The ads include a disclaimer: “Paid for by the U.S. government.”

Given that the content of the advertisement does not discuss specific government actions, but are just touting the campaign rhetoric of Donald Trump and promoting his character, the ad appears to violate both federal laws prohibiting the use of government expenditures for propaganda purposes (5 U.S.C. §3107 and related appropriations laws) and the Hatch Act (5 U.S.C. §7324). GSA is responsible for overseeing violations of the first law and OSC is responsible for overseeing violations of the Hatch Act.

Whether or not President Trump was personally involved in the ad, it was conceived, produced and distributed by Trump’s White House staff.

Nature of the Ad

The ad was first reported by CBS News Miami reporter, Jim Defede, who saw it aired on September 23, 2026. The 30-second spot does not try to educate the public about government actions or government decisions. In fact, it makes only fleeting reference to any governmental activity. Instead, the focus is on Trump’s campaign rhetoric and images and voiceovers promoting the character of Donald Trump.

The ad kicks off with Trump railing against communism, a theme that he is emphasizing on the campaign trail for the upcoming midterm elections. "Together we will defeat communism, socialism, and Marxism, in America," Trump proudly proclaims. "America will never be a communist country."

The video goes on to briefly establish in general terms what Trump has done for the American people: the "largest tax cuts in history," "reigniting American manufacturing," and "defend law and order and police." Then it quickly turns to gushing praise for the President: "He is the toughest, most resilient person that I've ever met," Ultimate Fighting Championship president Dana White asserts about Trump. "And nothing is going to stop him from fighting so hard for the country he loves." The soundtrack is interspersed with a chorus of women singing, "I'll make them love me."

Complaints About the Ad

Jim Defede, who first reported about the ad, observed the taxpayer-funded video as "clearly a campaign ad."

Isaac Arnsdorf of the *Washington Post* notes that the ad is very "similar to spots" released earlier by the nonprofit arm of Trump's political organization to promote Trump's record in the midterms elections.

Ever since the 1950s, annual appropriations measures – including the [appropriations measure](#) signed recently by Trump – prohibit spending taxpayer dollars for "publicity or propaganda" purposes. And GAO has confirmed this by laying out the prohibition as applying to "purely partisan" messages and "propaganda" devoid of a useful government function. These annual appropriations provisions have also been codified into long-standing law (5 U.S.C. §3107). Even though Donald Trump is not a candidate himself, he has repeatedly hit the campaign trail pleading with his constituents to vote as if he were on the ballot. He is hard on the road promoting Republican candidates in the midterms. This ad appears to be simple propaganda devoid of a useful government function designed to influence the upcoming elections in violation of these laws.

Furthermore, the ad was conceived, produced and distributed by White House staff using government resources for partisan purposes. Though the Hatch Act does not apply to the president, it does apply to White House staff. Therefore, Public Citizen is also filing this complaint with the Office of Special Counsel as a violation of the Hatch Act by White House staff.

Public Citizen has filed a dozen Hatch Act complaints with OSC over the past year and, to our knowledge, all have been ignored by the agency. In choosing not to enforce the law, OSC has cleared the way for on-going violations of the Hatch Act, as we are witnessing today.

Conclusion: It Is Time to Enforce the Law

The TV ad boosting the image and character of Donald Trump as well as reiterating Trump's campaign rhetoric, paid for by taxpayer dollars, and produced and distributed by Trump's White House staff, appears to be a clear violation of the laws prohibiting the use of taxpayer dollars for propaganda purpose as well as a violation of the Hatch Act. Public Citizen is filing this complaint seeking appropriate investigation and enforcement actions by the Government Accountability Office and the Office of Special Counsel.

Sincerely,

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Appendix

“Trump ad airing with government funding despite law against ‘propaganda’”

Washington Post

A TV ad boosting President Trump and saying that it was paid for by the U.S. government is airing in two major markets despite a federal law against using tax funds for "propaganda."

The agency responsible for the commercial was not immediately clear.

By Isaac Arnsdorf

September 24, 2026 at 11:23 a.m. EDT Today at 11:23 a.m. EDT

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2026/09/24/ad-boosting-trump-paid-by-taxpayers-airing-la-chicago/>

A television ad promoting President Donald Trump began airing on cable Wednesday saying it was paid for by the U.S. government, despite a federal prohibition on using taxpayer dollars for “publicity or propaganda.”

The ad is similar to spots [released earlier](#) by the nonprofit arm of Trump’s political operation to promote his record in the midterms campaign. But this one includes a tag reading, “Paid for by the U.S. Government.”

Since the [1950s](#), annual appropriations legislation — including the [funding bill](#) Trump signed in February — has routinely included a ban on using federal funds for “publicity or propaganda purposes.” The Government Accountability Office has [said](#) the prohibition applies to communications that are “purely partisan” and “designed to aid a political party or candidates.”

The ad consists of a supercut of Trump photos and videos interspersed with text of campaign slogans. The soundtrack features snippets of Trump speeches and a chorus of women singing, “I’ll make them love me.” It ends with Ultimate Fighting Championship CEO Dana White praising Trump over footage of the June match on the White House lawn and military flyovers.

It has aired so far on Newsmax in Chicago and Fox News in Los Angeles, according to ad-tracking firm AdImpact. More details about who bought the airtime were not available.

The White House and representatives of Trump’s political team did not immediately respond to questions about the ad.

Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-Maryland), the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, [said on social media](#) that the ad could amount to “felony criminal theft and [conversion of government property](#) for political campaign purposes.” He also cited the [Hatch Act](#), which prohibits government employees from using their positions or official resources for political activities.

There is no immediate precedent for a government-sponsored political ad during a campaign.

In 2004, the administration of President George W. Bush was criticized for releasing ready-to-air video segments showing Bush signing a Medicare prescription drug law, complete with hired contractors posing as reporters. The GAO [said](#) the materials violated the propaganda prohibition.

In the first Trump administration, the Department of Health and Human Services commissioned a \$250 million coronavirus ad campaign that congressional Democratic investigators [found](#) included partisan interests. The agency [backed off](#) using pro-Trump celebrities in the ads.

Last year, the Department of Homeland Security under then-Secretary Kristi L. Noem spent more than \$200 million on ads promoting her and Trump's immigration policies. In March, Noem testified that Trump approved the campaign, prompting him to [fire her](#).

“Critics Slam Trump Propaganda Ad Paid for by the US Government as Illegal” *Truthout*

The White House ad is an “unmistakable [sign] you live under an authoritarian, fascist government,” said one critic.

By [Stephen Prager](#) ,

September 24, 2026

<https://truthout.org/articles/critics-slam-trump-propaganda-ad-paid-for-by-the-us-government-as-illegal/>

The White House is being accused of violating federal law after it aired an ad glorifying President Donald Trump, which it explicitly said was “paid for by the US government.”

The ad was first reported by *CBS News Miami* investigative reporter Jim DeFede, who saw it airing on *Fox News* Wednesday night.

The 30-second spot features numerous videos and images of Trump, set to the song “Love Me” by JMSN. It includes voiceovers by the president railing against “communism,” a label he’s regularly used to hammer Democrats as the midterm elections approach.

“Together we will defeat communism, socialism, and Marxism, in America,” it features Trump saying. “America will never be a communist country.”

The video then goes on to amplify, in bright red letters, what the White House views as Trump’s signature policy accomplishments and goals: the “largest tax cuts in history,” “reigniting American manufacturing,” and “defend law and order and police.”

Footage from the 2024 Republican National Convention featuring Trump alongside Ultimate Fighting Championship president and CEO Dana White is then shown.

“He is the toughest, most resilient person that I’ve ever met,” White is heard saying about Trump. “And nothing was going to stop him from fighting so hard for the country he loves.” As White is heard slathering Trump with praise, a message appears at the bottom of the screen in large white letters: “Paid for by the US government.”

DeFede described the taxpayer-funded message as “clearly a campaign ad.”

Many onlookers found the use of government resources to flood the airwaves with nakedly partisan messaging chilling, particularly in light of Trump’s recent attempts to [censor](#) critical media outlets and [establish](#) a state-run TV channel, while [designating](#) political opponents as “terrorists.”

Fernand R. Amandi, a political science professor at the University of Miami and analyst at *MS NOW* — a network recently [banned](#) from the White House by Trump — [said](#) that the use of state organs for messages like these was an “unmistakable [sign] you live under an authoritarian, fascist government.”

Longtime Senate Democratic aide Jim Manley [said](#) the ad was not just “creepy,” but also “illegal.”

Provisions in annual appropriations laws explicitly [forbid](#) federal appropriations from being used for “publicity or propaganda purposes.”

For decades, the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office has [interpreted](#) this to mean that the executive branch can’t use federal dollars for material whose “obvious purpose is ‘self-aggrandizement’ or ‘puffery,’” or for [communications](#) that are “purely partisan.”

The [Hatch Act](#) also bans federal employees from using their official authority or government resources for partisan activity. While Trump himself is not subject to the Hatch Act, most other senior government employees and appointees are.

The Trump administration has been accused of violating the Hatch Act on multiple occasions during his second term, including by using official agency websites to [run messages](#) blaming “Radical Left” Democrats for last year’s lengthy government shutdown.

During Trump’s first term, multiple officials were found to have violated the Hatch Act for arguably less overt offenses.

Former Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf was [found](#) to have violated the law by [hosting](#) a naturalization ceremony orchestrated to generate footage for the 2020 Republican National Convention. Former Trump housing official Lynne Patton, meanwhile, [admitted](#) to violating the act by using her government position to recruit participants for an RNC video, resulting in a \$1,000 fine and a four-year ban from federal employment.

It's not clear which government employees were behind the taxpayer-funded Trump ad. But Max Flugrath, the communications director at the voting rights group Fair Fight, [said](#) it was the "weirdest way to violate the Hatch Act, ever."