**INaugural Edition: Welcome New Employees!**

**Ethics in the News**

**The President and Ethics and You**

There have been a number of news reports recently about the President not being subject to conflict of interest laws, which may have made you wonder, “Is that true?” or “How could that be possible?”

The basic Federal conflict of interest law, which addresses financial interests, is Section 208 of Title 18 of the United States Code (18 U.S.C. § 208), which provides that “whoever being an officer or employee of the executive branch of the United States Government” may not participate in a matter affecting the employee’s or officer’s personal financial interests or those of certain others (such as the employee’s or officer’s spouse or minor child) unless an exemption applies or a waiver to the law is issued. This law applies to everyone in the U.S. Department of Commerce, whether competitive service, excepted service, foreign service, or uniformed service (and everyone in other Federal agencies). However, this law does not apply to the President or Vice President of the United States because they are elected officials and neither is an “officer or employee” of the U.S. Government.

Now you know why you (along with all other Federal employees) are covered by the financial conflict of interest statute, while the President and Vice President (and Members of Congress) are not. However, the President and Members of Congress are subject to other ethics statutes, including the one against bribery, which applies to anyone who is a “public official”—which includes elected officials.

**Ethics Critic: “No Way Out” (1987 film)**

Kevin Costner stars as Cmdr. Tom Farrell, investigating the murder of his lover in a conspiracy that reaches the highest levels of the Pentagon. *Warning—spoiler alert!* While being chased by his own Government as a spy, Cmdr. Farrell uses the ethics rules to bring the real killer to justice, linking him to his lover via a registry of gifts given to Federal employees from foreign governments.

**Ethics Spotlight: Financial Disclosure Reports**

Approximately 10,000 Commerce employees are required to file confidential financial disclosure reports on February 15th every year. You may wonder what happens to these reports after they are filed with the Ethics office. Each report is reviewed by an ethics official to determine if the entries indicate an actual or potential conflict of interest—such as stock in a company that could be affected by the filer’s duties. This analysis is used to advise the filer about potential conflicts and actions to avoid such conflicts, which may include selling the stock. Similar reviews are conducted for positions the filer holds outside the Government and whether such work is compatible with the filer’s position. The role of the ethics official is to advise and educate. This serves as a protection for the filer and for the Government, and helps ensure that the public has the utmost confidence in the integrity of the Government and its employees.
Ask Ethicina

Dear Ethicina,
I’ve been invited to my boss’s 25th wedding anniversary and my wife says the gift should be silver, but I think the gift should be gold—who’s right?
Respectfully, Self-Assured

Dear Child,
First of all, you might want to memorize this little mantra: “My wife is always right”—it will help you get to your 25th anniversary. Second, the 25th anniversary is Silver. And third, it doesn’t matter because you can’t give your boss a gift greater than $10 so that pretty much leaves out anything that is silver. An anniversary (or birthday or holiday) is a regularly recurring event, rather than a major life event—regardless of the number—so the regular gift rules apply, meaning gifts to your supervisor cannot be greater than $10 for any anniversary, even the 25th. - E

“Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair....”
George Washington
- As inscribed on the Herbert C. Hoover Building, Washington, DC (Commerce headquarters)

UNETHICAL ANIMALS

These unethical animals live with Eric Johnson, Attorney Advisor in the Ethics Law and Programs Division.

Submit photos of your pets’ adorably bad behavior by emailing us here.

Pets of the Month

Jumbo is misusing his position to prevent anyone from reading or watching TV until he gets fed.

Pickles only looks this guilty when she gets caught stealing the catnip.

Published by the U.S. Department of Commerce Ethics Law and Programs Division
202-482-5384 • EthicsDivision@doc.gov • commerce.gov/ethics