

Facebook, Twitter and Federal Public Service Employees

ACFO, AJC CAPE, CFPA, PAFSO and PIPSC have formed a coalition, under the name “Professionals Service Canadians” (“PSC”), to launch a joint media campaign against the government’s plans to cut funding to public programs and services. The focus of the campaign is on the effect these cuts will have on the well-being and safety of Canadians more broadly, rather than union members specifically. Among other tactics, the campaign encourages members to utilize social media to spread awareness about the dangers that such funding cuts will pose for all Canadians.

Here is advice extracted from a legal opinion on members rights and the limitations they should respect as it concerns participating in the campaign by tweeting or commenting on Facebook.

Facebook, Twitter and Federal Public Service Employees – the Short Answer

After reviewing the relevant Legislation, policies and codes, the law firm has the following general advice for public service employees who wish to participate in the new media campaign:

If you participate in the Facebook and Twitter campaign;

- Do so from your home computer, using your personal e-mail address. Do not use the employer’s facilities to participate in this campaign;
- Refrain from making comments that target individuals;
- Refrain from making comments that target any specific government departments or organization, particularly your own department or organization;
- If your job relates to the implementation of the cuts to public policy and programming, there is a stronger chance that you may be considered to be in a perceived conflict of interest, and could therefore be subject to discipline;
- If you make comments on Facebook, be aware that you will not be immune from the employer’s scrutiny simply because your profile has some privacy filters in place;
- Keep your comments consistent with the content of the PSC website.

Notwithstanding the above, the opinion also warns of possibly serious consequences should an employee, in engaging in the Twitter and Facebook campaign, be found to be in a conflict of interest pursuant to the Treasury Board’s [Policy on Conflict of Interest and Post-Employment](#), in violation of the [Public Service Employment Act](#), or in violation of the [Ethics Code for the Public Service](#). In such cases employees may face disciplinary actions, possibly to the point of dismissal.

That being said, if you do participate in the Twitter and Facebook campaign, do so in the same professional manner that you carry out your responsibilities for the employer. We are, after all, Professionals Serving Canadians...