

Ethical Journalism

Excerpts from The New York Times 'Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Opinion Departments'

June 20, 2024

Voting, Campaigns and Public Issues

Journalists have no place on the playing fields of politics. Staff members are entitled to vote, but they must do nothing that might raise questions about their professional neutrality or that of The Times. In particular, they may not campaign for, demonstrate for, or endorse candidates, ballot causes or efforts to enact legislation. They may not wear campaign buttons or themselves display any other insignia of partisan politics. They should recognize that a bumper sticker on the family car or a campaign sign on the lawn may be misread as theirs, no matter who in their household actually placed the sticker or the sign.

Staff members may not themselves give money to, or raise money for, any political candidate or election cause. Given the ease of Internet access to public records of campaign contributors, any political giving by a Times staff member would carry a great risk of feeding a false impression that the paper is taking sides.

No staff member may seek public office anywhere. Seeking or serving in public office plainly violates the professional detachment expected of a journalist. It poses a risk of having the staff member's political views imputed to The Times, and it can sow a suspicion of favoritism in The Times's political coverage when one of its staff is an active participant.

Staff members may not march or rally in support of public causes or movements, sign ads taking a position on public issues, or lend their name to campaigns, benefit dinners or similar events if doing so might reasonably raise doubts about their ability or The Times's ability to function as neutral observers in covering the news. Staff members must keep in mind that neighbors and other observers commonly see them as representatives of The Times.

Staff members may appear from time to time on radio and television programs devoted to public affairs, but they should avoid expressing views that go beyond what they would be allowed to say in the paper. Opinion writers enjoy more leeway than others in speaking publicly because their business is expressing opinions. The Times nevertheless expects them to consider carefully the forums in which they appear and to protect the standards and impartiality of the newspaper as a whole.

Staff members must be sensitive that perfectly proper political activity by their spouses, family or companions may nevertheless create conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflict. When such a possibility arises, the staff member should advise his or her department head and the standards editor or the opinion editor or managing editor. Depending on circumstances, the staff member may have to recuse himself or herself from certain coverage or even move to a job unrelated to the activities in question.

A staff member with any doubts about a proposed political activity should consult the standards editor or the opinion editor or managing editor. These restrictions protect the heart of our mission as journalists. Though The Times will consider matters case by case, it will be exceedingly cautious before permitting an exception.