

United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 220
SECOND AND CONSTITUTION AVENUE, NE
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6425

June 6, 2016

Dear Colleague:

The Select Committee on Ethics (the Committee) is sending this letter to provide specific guidance regarding the purchase and use of challenge coins in connection with a Member's official duties. Members may use excess principal campaign funds or their own personal funds to purchase an official Senate challenge coin and distribute such a coin in connection with their official duties, as long as Members follow the guidance below to avoid undue self-promotion.

In a 2001 "Dear Colleague" letter, the Committee advised that officially connected funds could not be used to purchase personalized token or souvenir-like items for distribution in relation to official or officially connected activities. The Committee noted that such a "trinket" containing the Senator's name or logo could appear "unduly self-promotional" and "could lead to a blurring of the distinction between campaign and official activities," because such self-promotional trinkets are commonly distributed by and identified with campaigns.

A "challenge coin" is a small coin or medallion bearing an organization's insignia or emblem and carried by the organization's members. Challenge coins have been a long standing tradition with members of the U.S. military dating back to World War II. In recent years, many public officials outside the military have adopted the tradition, including members of the U.S. House of Representatives, the President of the United States, cabinet members, and foreign ambassadors. Challenge coins are seen not merely as a token, but as a tangible source of pride intended to symbolize membership in or recognition by a unique group. Accordingly, challenge coins are specifically distinguishable from the trinkets described in the Committee's 2001 Dear Colleague letter.

However, while challenge coins are unique and distinguishable from other trinkets, the concerns regarding personalization, undue self-promotion, and conflation of campaign and official activities remain. **To address these concerns, the following specific guidance is provided:**

- The Senate coin sold at the Senate Gift Shop, which has an image of the Senate Seal, may be used in a Member's official capacity. However, the coin **may not** contain the name or likeness of the Senator, or any personal identifying mark (e.g. logo, initials, etc.).
- Such a coin could contain an image or message specific to the home State (e.g., the State seal, State motto) and/or a generic message such as, "Thank You for Your Service."
- Because the Senate coin may only be used in connection with a Member's official duties, it would be an officially related expense and therefore, a Member **may only use excess**

principal campaign funds or their own personal funds to purchase such official challenge coins.

- A Member **may not** use or distribute their official challenge coin in connection with campaign activity.

Please contact the Committee at (202) 224-2981 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Johnny Isakson
Chairman



Barbara Boxer
Vice Chairman