

Care Needed in Impeachment Role



By
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Civil servants who are taking, or planning, an active role in the campaign to impeach President Nixon would be wise—from a legal and common sense standpoint—to watch their step.

The Hatch Act which prohibits federal employees from partisan political activities does not apply to the impeachment movement, so long as the movement itself is considered non-partisan.

For example, there would be nothing legally wrong with a federal worker signing an impeachment petition, writing a congressman on the subject, or sending a letter to the editor for or against impeachment.

On the other hand, a federal worker could run afoul of the no-politics law if he or she passed around or signed an impeachment petition on the job, or

publicly took a stand on the issue as a civil servant or federal official, rather than as a private individual.

Also, there would be a difference in signing an impeachment petition sponsored by an independent citizens group vs. signing a similar petition sponsored by a partisan political organization. The first would be permissible, the latter a no-no.

In response to a question on federal worker participation in the impeachment movement, the Civil Service Commission's legal office has this to say:

"The relevant law provides that a federal employee is permitted to engage in political activity in connection with a question which is not specifically identified with a national or state political party . . . For purposes of the law, questions relating to constitutional amendments, referendums, approval of a municipal ordinance, and others of similar character, are deemed nonpartisan . . .

"We are assuming that the petition for impeachment is not in fact identified with a national or state political party. Thus, a federal employee would be per-

mitted to take an active part in the petitioning process, provided the employee is not working on behalf of a political party or other partisan political group."

On-the-job political activity (especially opposing the President in power) is generally illegal, and is nearly always, from a practical standpoint, stupid.

Federal workers ran afoul of the Hatch Act, and their political bosses, during the Johnson administration when many displayed antiwar posters and slogans, plus unflattering pictures of the President, in their offices.

Likewise, overzealous employees had problems early in the Nixon administration when they put up dart boards featuring the faces of the President and Vice President. Most of the political graffiti disappeared under informal pressure from top bosses who thought the items in bad taste, and not appropriate for the walls of a taxpayer-funded office.

Department of Agriculture's Graduate School begins its winter evening program January 9. Registration runs from January 2 to 8. Three new courses have

been added: computer performance measurement, labor economics and blacks in American agriculture. Details call 447-2077.

Jack Goldberg, a top official in Civil Service Commission's Bureau of Retirement-Health-Insurance plans to retire at the end of the month. Goldberg has an encyclopedic memory of federal laws in his field, and an equally large memory bank of jokes and tall tales for all occasions. He's been a regular, popular, official visitor at federal employee union conventions.

Postal Employees: Most of them will be required to work Dec. 24 and Dec. 31, even though President Nixon has given other federal workers those two Mondays off. Postal officials say they can't give workers those days off because of heavy holiday mail volume. Workers will be given compensatory days off later on.

Summer Interns: Customs Service is looking for first- and second-year law students interested in joining its summer intern program. Call Judy Hatter at 964-5572.