

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

December 14, 2021

### Important Information Relating to Central U.S. Tornadoes

Dear Colleague:

On December 10 and 11, 2021, a number of states in the central U.S. suffered devastating damage from a historic series of tornadoes. In anticipation that offices will have questions about the extent to which official resources may be used to help those impacted, the Committee on House Administration, the Communications Standards Commission, and the Committee on Ethics offer this overview of the applicable rules, regulations, and procedures.

When a state of emergency is declared, Members whose districts are directly affected may provide constituents with information to assist those impacted. This information may include addresses and telephone numbers of entities involved in relief efforts being coordinated by the federal government. In the past, Members have provided contact information for blood drives conducted by the American Red Cross in conjunction with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). However, referrals to organizations or links to sites whose primary purpose is the solicitation of goods, funds, or services on behalf of individuals or organizations are not permitted under the rules of the House. **To summarize, for Members directly affected, contact information for government entities, as well as private entities directly involved in relief efforts organized by the federal government, may be sent as a mass communication (emails, advertisements, flyers for handout, and posters) and posted on your official website and social media accounts. However, any such unsolicited mass communications must be reviewed by the Communications Standards Commission prior to distribution.**

The Committee on House Administration recommends use of these government established websites for information on the relief efforts:

[www.usa.gov/help-disaster-survivors](https://www.usa.gov/help-disaster-survivors)  
[www.usa.gov/disasters-and-emergencies](https://www.usa.gov/disasters-and-emergencies)  
[www.fema.gov/assistance/volunteer-donate](https://www.fema.gov/assistance/volunteer-donate)  
[www.fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov)  
[www.ready.gov/tornadoes](https://www.ready.gov/tornadoes)  
[www.weather.gov/safety/tornado](https://www.weather.gov/safety/tornado)

Members may also understandably ask whether and to what extent they may use their official resources to solicit or collect donations of goods, funds, or services on behalf of charities and other private organizations involved in such efforts. We understand the good intentions of those making such inquiries, but the rules of the House preclude Members from using official resources for any purpose other than in support of the conduct of the Member's official and representational duties on behalf of the district the Member currently represents. This rule has been interpreted to mean that charitable solicitations using official resources are not permitted. Please contact the Committee on Ethics with any questions surrounding this rule. **To summarize, Members and staff may not use official resources to solicit anything for charities.**

While official resources may not be used to solicit contributions for charitable organizations or to imply that such organizations or purposes have been endorsed by the House of Representatives, Members and staff may solicit in their personal capacities on behalf of organizations that are qualified under § 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code – including, for example, § 501(c)(3) charitable organizations such as the Red Cross or Team Rubicon – without first obtaining Committee on Ethics approval. These personal efforts may not use official resources (including official staff time; office telephones, e-mail, and equipment; and official mailing lists). Other restrictions also apply. Solicitations on behalf of non-qualified entities or individuals are decided on a case-by-case basis through the submission to the Committee on Ethics of a written request for permission to make such solicitations. For example, solicitations of donations directly for individuals suffering as a result of the crisis, as opposed to § 501(c)(3) charities assisting sufferers, would need prior Committee on Ethics approval. For more information about solicitations for § 501(c)(3) or other entities, please review pages 347-49 of the *2008 House Ethics Manual* or contact the Committee on Ethics at 5-7103. **To summarize, Members and staff may solicit for charities in their personal capacities only.**

If you have any questions regarding the use of your:

1. Official resources in general, please contact the Committee on House Administration at (202) 225-2061 (majority) or (202) 225-8281 (minority);
2. Communications resources, please contact the Communications Standards Commission (Franking) at (202) 225-9337 (majority) or (202) 226-0647 (minority);  
or
3. Personal or campaign resources, or the loan of your name and personal title to private solicitations or initiatives in support of the relief efforts, please contact the Committee on Ethics at (202) 225-7103.

Sincerely,

Chairperson Zoe Lofgren  
Committee on House Administration

Ranking Member Rodney Davis  
Committee on House Administration

Chairman Ted Deutch  
Committee on Ethics

Ranking Member Jackie Walorski  
Committee on Ethics