

DEPARTMENTS

Ethics Inquiries

Barbecued Politics?

Scenario: While the former town manager was out of work, he had agreed to help cook for an upcoming fund-raising event for his state representative. When he agreed to offer his culinary skills to the state representative, he figured it would be a good way to meet people and to get job leads. The good news is, the former town manager now is an assistant city manager and is earning a good income again. The bad news is, he has become uneasy about his agreement to barbecue ribs for the state representative.

While the assistant city manager did not think the city council would object because most of them are from the same political party as the state representative, he could see that the guideline for Tenet 7 made his cooking assignment a bit “hotter” than he would like.

Response: While the cook may be in an awkward position, the ethics advice is unambiguous, namely, that the assistant city manager must gracefully excuse himself from this fund-raising activity. A guideline for Tenet 7 gives unequivocal advice: “Members . . . shall not participate in political activities to support the candidacy of individuals running for any city, county, special district, school, or federal offices. Specifically, they shall not endorse candidates, make financial contributions, sign or circulate petitions, or participate in fund-raising activities for individuals seeking or holding elected office.”

The assistant city manager should also inform the city manager of this dilemma so that there are no surprises for the manager.