

DEPARTMENTS

Ethics

Raising Funds for the YMCA

Scenario: A group of influential leaders (all from one political party) has invited the city manager to attend a birthday roast for a popular councilmember. Although the roast was originally planned as a fund-raising event for the councilmember, the party organizers have told the manager that the proceeds now will be given to a newly built YMCA. The councilmember is twisting the city manager's arm to attend, suggesting that there is now no reason to stay away since the money will go to a charity. The city manager, who is uncomfortable but doesn't want to be needlessly cautious, is seeking another opinion.

Response: To remain politically neutral, the city manager should avoid attending any event that is sponsored by a political party, even if it is linked to a charitable purpose. Going to a birthday party for someone who happens to be an elected official is not a problem, even if a lot of people from one political party happen to attend. It is also appropriate to attend fund-raising events for community or charitable purposes, as long as the city manager is not expected to take an active role in soliciting donations.

The city manager will not want to attend the event if any one of these conditions exists:

1. The political party is the host or participates in sponsoring the event.
2. The invitation is prepared or distributed by the political party.
3. Event expenses are paid by the political party.
4. Checks are made out to the political party, rather than to the YMCA.
5. The event is promoted as a campaign fundraiser.

Ethics advice is a popular service provided to ICMA members. The inquiries and advice are reviewed by the Committee on Professional Conduct, the ethics committee of the ICMA Executive Board. Some of the inquiries are revised and published as a regular feature in *PM*, to give guidance to members in the big and little ethical decisions they make daily. If you have a question about your obligations under the ICMA Code of Ethics, call Elizabeth Kellar at 202/962-3611, e-mail, ekellar@icma.org or Martha Perego at 202/962-3668, e-mail, mperego@icma.org.