

United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

July 20, 2021

Dear Colleague:

The Select Committee on Ethics (the Committee) is sending this letter to provide updated guidance regarding the purchase and use of challenge coins in connection with a Member's official duties. Members may use excess principal campaign committee funds or their own personal funds to purchase challenge coins and distribute them in connection with their official duties subject to the guidance below.

In a 2016 "Dear Colleague" letter, the Committee advised that Members could not use excess principal campaign committee funds or personal funds to purchase *personalized* challenge coins (i.e., coins engraved with a Member's name, initials, likeness, or other personal identifying mark) for distribution in connection with official activities. In the 2016 guidance, the Committee recognized that challenge coins enjoyed a long-standing and unique tradition beginning with U.S. military units in World War II and were distinguishable from other trinkets more closely associated with political campaigns. Despite this history and tradition, however, the Committee determined personalized challenge coins carried a significant risk of undue self-promotion and conflation of campaign and official activities.

Since the 2016 guidance, an ever-growing number of civilian public officials, including the President of the United States, cabinet members, and ambassadors, have adopted the tradition of challenge coins. Personalized challenge coins have become especially meaningful to military personnel, law enforcement, and first responders as recognition for their service, prompting the Committee to reassess our guidance. The Committee has now determined that it is generally appropriate for Members to distribute personalized challenge coins in connection with their official duties and is providing **the following specific guidance**:

- If a challenge coin is purchased with excess principal campaign committee funds or personal funds for use **as an award or recognition at official events or activities**:
 - The coin may include a Member's name, initials, likeness, or other personal identifying mark.
 - The coin may include an image or message specific to the home State (e.g., the State seal, State motto).
 - The coin may include a generic message (e.g., "Thank You for Your Service.").
 - The coin may include the Senate Seal, a Leadership or Committee title, or the term "U.S. Senate".

- The coin **shall not** be distributed at a campaign event or in connection with campaign activities.
- The coin **shall not** include a campaign logo, slogan, or other partisan political image (e.g., political party symbol).
- However, if a challenge coin is purchased with excess principal campaign committee funds or personal funds for **use in connection with campaign activities**:
 - The coin **shall not** contain the Senate Seal, a Leadership or Committee title, or the term “U.S. Senate”.
 - The coin **shall not be used** in connection with official duties.
 - The coin **shall not be distributed or displayed in Senate offices**.

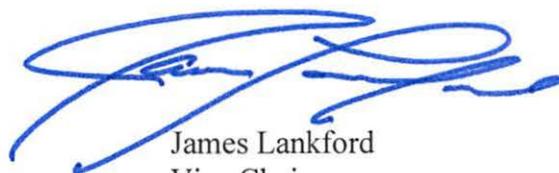
A quick reference guide with examples of permissible challenge coins is attached to this letter and available on the Committee’s website. As always, it is the duty of each Member to avoid both an actual violation of Senate Rules and the appearance of improper conduct. Accordingly, in a situation where there is a risk of conflation of campaign and official activities, distribution of official challenge coins containing the Senate Seal, a Leadership or Committee title, or the term “U.S. Senate” is not appropriate.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Committee at (202) 224-2981 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Christopher A. Coons
Chairman



James Lankford
Vice Chairman

Enclosure: Challenge Coins Quick Reference Guide



U.S. SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS



Challenge Coins

The Select Committee on Ethics released updated guidance regarding the purchase and distribution of Member challenge coins. Subject to the restrictions below, Members may use excess principal campaign committee funds or personal funds to purchase challenge coins and distribute the coins in connection with their official duties. Members may also use excess principal campaign committee funds or personal funds to purchase challenge coins exclusively for campaign activity. If you have additional questions, please contact the Committee at (202) 224-2981 or Mailbox_Office@ethics.senate.gov.

	OFFICIAL ACTIVITY	CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY
Member Name	✓	✓
Member Initials	✓	✓
Member Signature	✓	✓
Senate Seal or Great Seal of the United States	✓	✗
“U.S. Senate”	✓	✗
“Senator” OR “U.S. Senator”	✓	✓
Leadership Title	✓	✗
Committee Title	✓	✗
Personal Message	✓	✓
State Emblem	✓	✓
Campaign Slogan	✗	✓
Party Symbol	✗	✓



U.S. SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

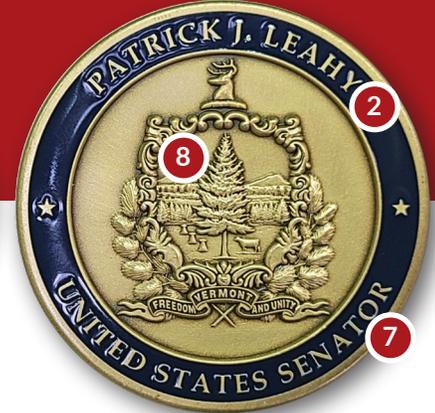
Examples of Permissible Coins

Challenge Coin Examples for OFFICIAL ACTIVITY

This coin can be distributed at official activities.

✓ Examples

1. Initials or Signature
2. Name
3. National or State Motto
4. Leadership or Committee Title(s)
5. Personal Message
6. Senate Seal or Great Seal of the United States
7. "Senator" OR "U.S. Senator" OR "U.S. Senate"
8. State Emblems or Symbols



Challenge Coin Examples for CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY

This coin can be distributed at campaign activities.

✓ Examples

9. Campaign Slogan
10. Name
11. Party Symbol or Affiliation
12. Personal Message
13. "Senator" OR "U.S. Senator" (**NOT** "U.S. Senate")
14. State Emblems or Symbols

