

FCC commissioner broke the law by advocating for Trump, officials find

Republican FCC commissioner Michael O’Rielly broke a federal law preventing officials from advocating for political candidates when he told a crowd that one way to avoid policy changes was to “make sure that President Trump gets reelected,” according to a newly released letter from government officials. O’Rielly was warned by the officials about making similar comments in the future.

O’Rielly received a warning letter

The Hatch Act bars many federal employees from using their offices to influence an election. During the conservative CPAC conference in February, which was also attended by FCC chairman Ajit Pai, O’Rielly was asked about how to avoid rapid swings in policy ushered in by a new administration. “I think what we can do is make sure as conservatives that we elect good people to both the House, the Senate, and make sure that President Trump gets reelected,” he responded, adding that there would also be a fight in the US Senate over net neutrality rules.

After he made the comments, the watchdog group American Oversight filed a letter with the Office of Special Counsel, which handles Hatch Act complaints. In response to the group’s letter, the Office of Special Counsel said today that O’Rielly did, in fact, violate the Hatch Act. The letter said O’Rielly responded that he was only trying to provide an explanatory answer to how those changes in policy could be stopped, but the office rejected that reasoning.

The office said it has sent a warning letter to O’Rielly this time, but will consider other infractions “a willful and knowing violation of the law” that could lead to legal action.

O’Rielly’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the letter.

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