

Trump admin defiles even the “out of office” email auto-reply

Well—not “Democrats,” exactly, but “Democrat Senators.” The use of the noun “Democrat” as an adjective (e.g., “the Democrat Party”) is a long-standing and deliberate right-wing refusal to call the opposition by its name. (If you visit the Democrats’ website, the very first words below the site header are “We are the Democratic Party”; the party is run by the “Democratic National Committee.”) Petty? Sure! But that’s a feature, not a bug.

Similar out-of-office suggestions have been made to employees at the Small Business Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services. Such messages appear to be violations of the Hatch Act, which prohibits partisan speech from most executive branch employees while they are on duty, since these people represent and work for all Americans.

The Office of Special Counsel, which is supposed to prosecute violations of the Hatch Act, notes in a training flyer that most executive branch workers “may not engage in political activity—i.e., activity directed at the success or failure of a political party.”

Employees may also not “use any e-mail account or social media to distribute, send, or forward content that advocates for or against a partisan political party.”

When asked about its suggested out-of-office message blaming Democrats, the Department of Health and Human Services told CNN that yes, it had suggested this—but added that this was

okay because the partisan message was accurate.

“Employees were instructed to use out-of-office messages that reflect the truth: Democrats have shut the government down,” the agency said.

Truly, as even a sitting Supreme Court justice has noted, the “rule of law” has now become “Calvinball.”

Websites, too

Department websites have also gotten in on the partisan action. The Department of Housing and Urban Development’s site now loads with a large floating box atop the page, which reads, “The Radical Left in Congress shut down the government.” When you close the box, you see atop the main page itself an eye-searingly red banner that says... the same thing. Thanks, I think we got it!

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