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Don Fox Acting Director and General Counsel Office of Government Ethics 1201 New York Avenue, NW Suite 500 Washington, DC 20005-3917

RE: RIN 3209-AA04

Proposed Amendments Limiting Gifts from Registered Lobbyists and Lobbying Organizations

Dear Mr. Fox:

On behalf of the American Supply Association (ASA), the national trade association serving wholesale distributors and their suppliers in the plumbing, heating, cooling and industrial and mechanical pipe, valves and fittings industries, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the administration's proposal to amend existing limits on interaction between executive branch employees and members of trade associations such as ASA.

The Plumbing, Heating, Cooling and Piping (PHCP) and industrial and mechanical Pipe, Valves and Fittings (PVF) channel encompasses nearly 3,600 corporations with 5,300 outlets and 75,000 employees nationwide.

In its proposed rule, the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) asserts that trade associations "may sponsor educational activities for their members and even the public, but the primary concern of such associations generally is not the education and development of members of a profession or discipline, which is the focus of the proposed exclusion."

When this proposal was originally published, ASA was holding its annual convention, NetworkASA 2011 in Las Vegas, Nevada. As an industry directly impacted by a number of external factors, we strive to stay several steps ahead of the unforeseen challenges that confront our members as employers of independent, small- and medium-sized businesses, as well as national wholesaler-distributers. Some of those factors include the ongoing pressures within the residential and commercial construction market, new laws being implemented such as the elimination of lead in plumbing products and the contraction of lending by the banking community, which also experiences similar pressures.



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Like many trade associations, advocacy is just one component that we offer to our members. ASA prides itself on its versatile and multi-faceted programming that enables our members to play a critical, hands-on role in enhancing their businesses and our industry. ASA's value proposition is fourfold: Advocacy, Benchmarking, Education, and Networking, each of which provides tremendous value to our members and those they employ.

OGE's interpretation of trade associations and their activities appears to be overly narrow, and doesn't properly embrace the services that we provide our members. For instance, our Special Interest Divisions and Professional Peer Networking Councils provide networking and educational opportunities for member employees in specific areas of management. Specifically, we have a CFO Networking Council that addresses the needs of accounting and financial officers, and provides them with an open forum for communication and sharing of ideas. For safety managers that regularly oversee safety practices and monitor the regulatory environment, our Safety Committee is a proud member of the OSHA Alliance. For the next generation planning to take the reins of their family's business, or for those targeted by their managers for their tremendous potential, we have our Young Executives Division (Y.E.'s). The Y.E. Division prepares future industry leaders through focused educational and networking programs designed for executives and middle managers.

ASA's Education Foundation is our association's crown jewel for employee training and education services. As businesses began to experience the effects of the downturn in our economy a few years ago, a reality often overlooked was that the first positions targeted for elimination were a distributor's training staff. To provide continuing development and essential training needs for new and existing employees, the ASA Education Foundation established ASA University. ASA University is a one-stop-shop for training and development for new or seasoned employees in the PHCP, Industrial and Mechanical PVF Industry. We believe companies gain a competitive advantage when employees understand their roles in running a profitable distribution business while delivering outstanding customer service.

Finally, while ASA is a national trade association, our members also take part in regional affiliates that gather on an annual basis to meet about industry-specific issues. We believe that isolating their needs and prohibiting them from hearing from a member of the executive branch provides a disservice to those in businesses struggling to overcome the headwinds of this economy. We ask that the Office of Government Ethics reconsider this proposal and view trade associations in a more favorable light.

Sincerely,

Daniel Hilton

Director of Government Affairs American Supply Association