

ETHICAL PRACTICES BOARD

First Floor South, Centennial Building . 658 Cedar Street . St. Paul, MN 55155-1603

**THE FOLLOWING PUBLICATION DOES NOT IDENTIFY
THE REQUESTER OF THE ADVISORY OPINION, WHICH IS NONPUBLIC DATA
under Minn. Stat. § 10A.02, subd. 12(b)**

RE: Use of principal campaign committee funds for computer training

ADVISORY OPINION # 266

SUMMARY

Costs of computer training which is needed to enable a legislator to use a state-provided personal computer may be paid with principal campaign committee funds and reported as a noncampaign disbursement.

FACTS

As a member of the legislature, you ask the Ethical Practices Board for an advisory opinion based on the following facts:

1. In December, 1996, the legislative body in which you serve provided its members with laptop personal computers to use in their daily legislative tasks.
2. You had no previous knowledge of computers or how to use them. The House provided four hours of computer training, but this was inadequate to provide you with the skills you needed to effectively use your computer.
3. In order to better utilize the new technology, you enrolled in courses at a local community college. These courses included instruction on using a personal computer for the first time, an introduction to Windows 3.1, and intermediate/advanced Windows 3.1.
4. You intend to take additional computer training to allow you to fully utilize your personal computer.
5. You feel that this training is a legislative necessity, otherwise you would not take it.

ISSUE

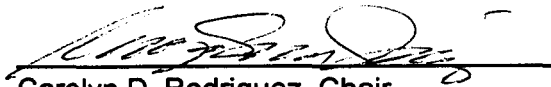
May the cost of computer training to enable a legislator to effectively use a state-provided personal computer be paid with principal campaign committee funds as a noncampaign disbursement for expenses of a public official for serving in office?

OPINION

Yes; under the facts presented, training to enable you to use the personal computer provided is an expense of serving in public office. Such an expense is reported as a noncampaign disbursement under Minn. Stat. § 10A.01, subd. 10c(j).

You would not take these classes if you did not feel it was necessary for your legislative work. The training will assist you in acquiring the skills needed to better use computer technology in your performance as a legislator. Since you did not come to the legislature with these skills, this purpose is directly related to your service in public office.

Issued: 4-25-97


Carolyn D. Rodriguez, Chair
Ethical Practices Board

CITED STATUTES

10A.01 DEFINITIONS.

Subdivision 1. For the purposes of sections 10A.01 to 10A.34, the terms defined in this section have the meanings given them unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

Subd. 10c. **Noncampaign disbursement.** "Noncampaign disbursement" means a purchase or payment of money or anything of value made, or an advance of credit incurred, by a political committee, political fund, or principal campaign committee for any of the following purposes:

(j) payment by a principal campaign committee of the candidate's expenses for serving in public office, other than for personal uses;