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OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT ETHICS

5 CFR Part 2641

RIN 3209-AA14

Post-Employment Conflict of Interest Regulations; Exempted Senior Employee Positions

AGENCY: Office of Government Ethics (OGE).

ACTION: Final rule; revocation of exemptions.

SUMMARY: The Office of Government Ethics is issuing this final rule to provide notice of the revocation of certain regulatory exemptions of senior employee positions at the Securities and Exchange Commission from the one-year post-employment restrictions of 18 U.S.C. 207(c) and (f).

DATES: *Effective Date:* This action will be effective without further notice on January 2, 2014. The removal of the listing for the Securities and Exchange Commission (and all positions thereunder) from Appendix A to part 2641 of title 5 is effective January 2, 2014.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Christopher J. Swartz, Assistant Counsel, Ethics Law & Policy Branch, Office of Government Ethics; telephone: 202-482-9300; TTY: 800-877-8339; FAX: 202-482-9237.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Substantive Discussion: Revocation of Exemptions for Certain Positions

18 U.S.C. 207(c) prohibits a former “senior employee” for a period of one year from knowingly making, with the intent to influence, any communication to or appearance before an employee of the department or agency in which he served in any capacity during the one-year period prior to termination from senior service, if that communication or appearance is made on behalf of any

other person, except the United States. For purposes of 18 U.S.C. 207(c), a “senior employee” includes, *inter alia*, any employee (other than an individual covered by the “very senior employee” one-year restriction in 18 U.S.C. 207(d)) who was employed in a position for which the rate of pay is specified in or fixed according to the Executive Schedule, in a position for which the rate of basic pay is equal to or greater than 86.5 percent of the rate of basic pay payable for level II of the Executive Schedule, or in a position which is held by an active duty commissioned officer of the uniformed services who is serving in a grade or rank for which the pay grade is O-7 or above.

The representational bar of 18 U.S.C. 207(c) usually applies to all senior positions. However, 18 U.S.C. 207(c)(2)(C) provides that the Director of OGE may exempt any position or category of positions from the one-year prohibition under 18 U.S.C. 207(c) (and consequently the prohibition of 18 U.S.C. 207(f)), if the Director determines, after a review requested by the department or agency concerned, that the imposition of the restrictions with respect to the particular position or positions would create an undue hardship on the department or agency in obtaining qualified personnel to fill such position or positions, and that granting the waiver would not create the potential for use of undue influence or unfair advantage.

The Director of OGE regularly reviews these position exemptions and, in consultation with the department or agency concerned, makes such additions and deletions as are necessary. As specified in 5 CFR 2641.301(j)(3)(ii), the Director must respond to exemption and revocation requests from agency ethics officials and maintain a compilation of all exempted positions or categories of positions. Once an exemption has been granted, the Designated Agency Ethics Official at the relevant agency may, at any time, request that the exemption be revoked. See 5 CFR 2641.301(j)(3)(i). Under 5 CFR 2641.301(j)(4), the revocation of a waiver becomes effective 90 days after OGE has published notice of the revocation in the **Federal Register**. If a revocation is granted, all employees occupying positions covered by the exemption will become subject to the prohibitions of 18 U.S.C. 207(c) and (f)

as of the effective date. However, any “[i]ndividual who formerly served in a position for which a waiver of restrictions was applicable will not become subject to 18 U.S.C. 207(c) (or section 207(f)) if the waiver is revoked *after* [the employee’s] termination from the position.” See 5 CFR 2641.301(j)(4) (emphasis added).

In 1991, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) requested, and was granted, exemptions for the positions of Solicitor, Office of the General Counsel and Chief Litigation Counsel, Division of Enforcement. In 2003, the SEC requested and was granted additional exemptions for the position of Deputy Chief Litigation Counsel, Division of Enforcement, SK-17 Positions, SK-16 and lower-graded SK positions supervised by employees in SK-17 positions, and SK-16 and lower-graded SK positions not supervised by employees in SK-17 positions. These exemptions were predicated on recruitment and retention considerations resulting from the implementation of a new pay system that converted many GS-15 positions into “senior employee” positions above the statutory pay threshold.

Pursuant to the procedures prescribed in 5 CFR 2641.301(j), the SEC has now requested that the Director of OGE revoke the exemptions for these positions. In support of its request, the SEC explains that the original bases for these exemptions no longer exist. In particular, the SEC states that it is no longer experiencing undue hardship in obtaining qualified personnel to fill the covered positions. Furthermore, the SEC states that discontinuing the exemptions will create parity between SEC employees occupying the covered positions and employees in similar positions at other financial regulatory agencies who are currently subject to the one year cooling-off prohibitions of 18 U.S.C. 207(c) and (f). For these reasons, the SEC no longer believes these exemptions are necessary or desirable. Therefore, pursuant to 5 CFR 2641.301(j), OGE hereby gives notice that the above-referenced post-employment exemptions, granted on October 29, 1991; November 10, 2003; and December 4, 2003, respectively, will expire and are revoked effective on January 2, 2014. As of the effective date, a person occupying any one of these positions will become subject to the

post-employment restrictions of 18 U.S.C. 207(c) and (f) if the rate of basic pay for the position is equal to or greater than 86.5 percent of the rate of basic pay payable for level II of the Executive Schedule.

As stated in 5 CFR 2641.301(j)(3)(ii), the Director of OGE is required to “maintain a listing of positions or categories of positions in Appendix A to [5 CFR part 2641] for which the 18 U.S.C. 207(c) restriction has been waived.” As such, Appendix A of this part is being amended to remove references to those SEC positions that are no longer exempt from the restrictions of 18 U.S.C. 207(c) and (f). These positions include: Solicitor, Office of General Counsel; Chief Litigation Counsel, Division of Enforcement; Deputy Chief Litigation Counsel, Division of Enforcement; SK–17 Positions; SK–16 and lower-graded SK positions supervised by employees in SK–17 positions; and SK–16 and lower-graded SK positions not supervised by employees in SK–17 positions.

I. Matters of Regulatory Procedure

Administrative Procedure Act

Under 5 U.S.C. 553(a)(2), rules relating to agency management or personnel are exempt from the notice and comment rulemaking requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). Further, under 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(3)(A), notice and comment rulemaking requirements do not apply to rules concerning matters of agency organization, procedure, or practice. Given that this rule concerns matters of agency management or personnel, and organization, procedure, or practice, the notice and comment requirements of the APA do not apply here. Even if this rulemaking were subject to APA proposed rulemaking procedures, OGE finds good cause pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(3)(B), to waive the notice and comment requirements of the APA. The codification of OGE’s revocation of exempted positions is technical in nature, and it is important and in the public interest that the codification of OGE’s revocation of exempted positions be published in the **Federal Register** as promptly as possible. For these reasons, OGE is issuing this regulation as a final rule effective 90 days after publication.

Regulatory Flexibility Act

As Director of the Office of Government Ethics, I certify under the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. chapter 6) that this final rule would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities

because it primarily affects current and former Federal executive branch employees.

Paperwork Reduction Act

The Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. chapter 35) does not apply because this regulation does not contain information collection requirements that require approval of the Office of Management and Budget.

Unfunded Mandates Reform Act

For purposes of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (2 U.S.C. chapter 5, subchapter II), this final rule would not significantly or uniquely affect small governments and will not result in increased expenditures by State, local, and tribal governments, in the aggregate, or by the private sector, of \$100 million or more (as adjusted for inflation) in any one year.

Executive Order 12866

In promulgating this final rule, the Office of Government Ethics has adhered to the regulatory philosophy and the applicable principles of regulation set forth in section 1 of Executive Order 12866, Regulatory Planning and Review. This rule has not been reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget under that Executive order since it deals with agency organization, management, and personnel matters and is not “significant” under the order.

Executive Order 12988

As Director of the Office of Government Ethics, I have reviewed this final rule in light of section 3 of Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform, and certify that it meets the applicable standards provided therein.

List of Subjects in 5 CFR Part 2641

Conflict of interests, Government employees.

Approved: September 19, 2013.

Walter M. Shaub, Jr.,

Director, Office of Government Ethics.

Accordingly, for the reasons set forth in the preamble, the Office of Government Ethics is amending part 2641 of subchapter B of chapter XVI of title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations as follows:

PART 2641—POST-EMPLOYMENT CONFLICT OF INTEREST RESTRICTIONS

■ 1. The authority citation for part 2641 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 5 U.S.C. App. (Ethics in Government Act of 1978); 18 U.S.C. 207; E.O. 12674, 54 FR 15159, 3 CFR, 1989 Comp., p.

215, as modified by E.O. 12731, 55 FR 42547, 3 CFR, 1990 Comp., p. 306.

■ 2. Effective January 2, 2014, Appendix A to part 2641 is amended by removing the listing for the Securities and Exchange Commission (and all positions thereunder).

[FR Doc. 2013–23346 Filed 10–2–13; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 205

[Document Number AMS–NOP–11–0003; NOP–10–13FR]

RIN 0581–AD13

National Organic Program (NOP); Sunset Review (2013)

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This final rule addresses recommendations submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture (Secretary) by the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) following their November 2011 and May 2012 meetings. These recommendations pertain to the 2013 Sunset Review of substances on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (National List). Consistent with the recommendations from the NOSB, this final rule continues the allowed uses of multiple synthetic and nonsynthetic substances and the prohibition of one nonsynthetic substance on the National List (along with any restrictive annotations). This rule also removes one synthetic substance from the National List.

DATES: This rule is effective November 3, 2013.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Melissa Bailey, Ph.D., Director, Standards Division, Telephone: (202) 720–3252; Fax: (202) 205–7808.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA) (7 U.S.C. 6501–6522) authorizes the establishment of the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances (National List). The National List, a subpart within the USDA organic regulations (7 CFR 205.600 through 205.607), identifies synthetic substances that may be used in organic production and nonsynthetic (natural) substances that are prohibited in organic crop and