

## Discussing Politics in the Workplace

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As Americans, we hold firmly to the idea that we can say what we like, when we like and to whom we like. Wrapped in our constitutional right to "freedom of speech," we have no qualms about sharing our personal views with our friends, family, neighbors and co-workers. We all have our opinions, and it's our right express them.

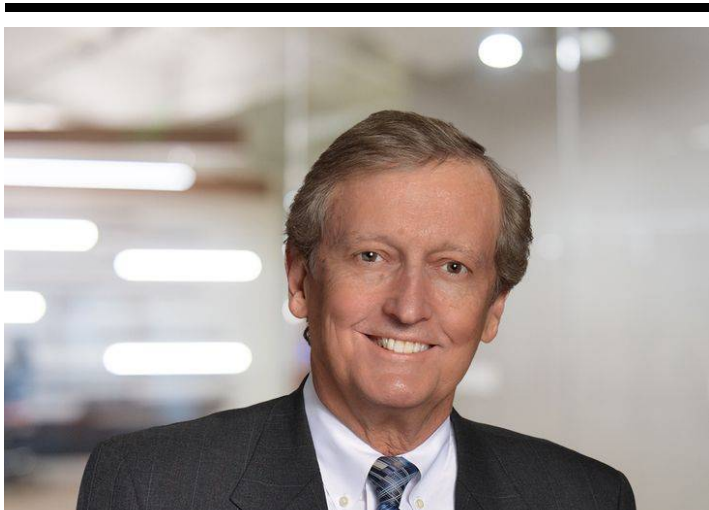
That's all true, but it doesn't eliminate a company's right to define the kinds of conversations that are appropriate (or not) in the workplace, or to discipline employees for offensive comments made at the office. During this contentious election year, it's important for employees and employers to know their rights and responsibilities when it comes to discussing politics during work hours.

The constitutional right to freedom of speech means the government can't stop an individual from speaking his or her mind. But within the confines of the workplace, a private employer certainly can. While a private employer may not want to broadly prohibit discussions about important issues, there sometimes can be a thin line between friendly debate and potential legal problems.

But this doesn't mean a company needs to squelch all political talk. It simply means the employer should communicate to employees the expectation that everyone in the workplace conduct himself or herself in a professional, respectful manner.

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