UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
Washington, D.C. 20460

DEC 1 1 2017

OFFICE OF
GENERAL COUNSEL

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Impartiality Determination to Participate in Certain Matters Involving Holland & Hart LLP

FROM: Kevin S. Minoli KSM
Designated Agency Ethics Official and
Acting General Counsel

TO: Doug Benevento
Regional Administrator
Region 8

This memorandum addresses your ethics obligations with respect to Holland & Hart LLP (Holland & Hart), a law firm that practices environmental law and where your spouse is employed as an attorney. Because your spouse is not an equity sharing principal and does not receive any bonus based on the profitability of the firm, you do not have a financial conflict of interest with her employer, Holland & Hart. What remains is whether you may participate in particular matters in which your spouse's employer is a party or represents a party. As explained in more detail below, I am granting you a limited impartiality determination.

Pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(b)(1)(iii), you have a "covered relationship" with Holland & Hart given your spouse's employment. The applicable ethics rules are set forth in the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, 5 C.F.R. Part 2635, specifically Subpart E, "Impartiality in Performing Official Duty." Absent an impartiality determination, you cannot participate in any specific party matter in which Holland & Hart is a party or represents a party if that matter is likely to have a direct and predictable effect upon the firm or if the circumstances would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question your impartiality. *See* 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(a).

Federal ethics regulations permit federal employees to participate in matters that might raise impartiality concerns when the interest of the federal government in the employee's participation outweighs concern over the questioning of the "integrity of the agency's programs and operations." 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d). The factors that the Agency takes into consideration are:

(1) the nature of the relationship involved;

(2) the effect that resolution of the matter will have upon the financial interest of the person affected in the relationship;

(3) the nature and importance of the employee's role in the matter, including the extent to which the employee is called upon to exercise discretion in the matter;

(4) the sensitivity of the matter;

(5) the difficulty of reassigning the matter to another employee; and

(6) adjustments that may be made in the employee's duties that would reduce or eliminate the likelihood that a reasonable person would question the employee's impartiality.

Because I conclude that the interest of the United States Government in your participation outweighs any concerns about your impartiality, I am authorizing you to participate as Regional Administrator in particular matters that involve Holland & Hart with the following limitation, however unlikely: you must recuse yourself from participation in EPA specific party matters if your spouse participates in the same specific party matters. In making this determination, I have taken the following factors into consideration:

Nature of the relationship involved – Your spouse is employed part time as of counsel at Holland & Hart. Her areas of practice do not include environmental matters or involve the EPA. Thus, the intersection between your spouse's work and that of the Agency is extremely remote.

Effect of the matter upon your financial interest – Your spouse has no equity interest in the firm's revenues since she is not an equity sharing partner at the firm. Also, she does not receive any bonus from the firm. Due to this compensation arrangement with the firm, I conclude that there is no possibility that any of EPA's actions involving Holland & Hart will affect your own financial interests or those imputed to you under the financial and impartiality rules. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 208 and 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502.

Nature and importance of the employee's role – As Regional Administrator, you are the leader of your Region and part of the Agency's political team. You may be asked to participate in discussions and meetings related to particular matters that involve Holland & Hart.

Sensitivity of the matter – I understand that in Region 8 there are already a number of specific party matters where Holland & Hart provides legal representation. These matters will likely rise to your level of attention, merit your participation and raise nationally significant issues.

Difficulty of reassigning the matter to another employee – Your participation and input as Regional Administrator in such matters will be of importance to the Administrator, and therefore, in the Agency's interests. In these situations, it may not be appropriate to reassign the matter to another employee.

Under this limited authorization, you are authorized to participate in specific party matters that involve Holland & Hart, but not the same specific party matters which your spouse participates in while employed at the firm. If the Agency determines that we have a compelling reason for your participation as an EPA official on any specific party matter that your spouse participates in personally and substantially, then you or your Deputy Regional Administrator or Regional Counsel may ask OGC/Ethics to reconsider the factors and information listed above on a case-by-case basis along with additional relevant details before determining whether to authorize your participation. You must continue to recuse yourself from these matters unless EPA ethics officials determine that the Agency's interest in your participation outweighs any impartiality concern and authorizes you to participate.

While I have issued you this determination to interact with Holland & Hart on specific party matters, except for any specific party matter in which your spouse participates, please note that you may elect to voluntarily make adjustments to your duties and not participate in a particular matter that involves Holland & Hart. Nothing in this impartiality determination should preclude you from choosing to recuse yourself altogether from specific party matters in which Holland & Hart represents a party, but doing so is not necessary under the federal ethics rules.

If you have any questions regarding this determination, or if a situation arises in which you need advice or clarification, please contact Justina Fugh at fugh.justina@epa.gov or (202) 564-1786, or any member of your regional ethics team.

cc: Deb Thomas, Deputy Regional Administrator, Region 8
Kenneth Schefski, Regional Counsel, Region 8
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