

Guidelines on Gifts for Members of the Storting

Adopted by the Presidium of the Storting, 26 May 2016.

General

The obvious point of departure is that no Member of the Storting shall put forward or speak on a matter in the Storting for payment, or accept compensation or any other form of reward or gift that may be intended to influence them to adopt a particular position on a certain matter in the Storting. In the worst case this may be an offence punishable by law, cf. the provisions on corruption in the General Civil Penal Code. Confidence in the Members may suffer if there is a general impression that certain Members are willing to allow their positions to be influenced by gifts or other economic benefits they are offered.

Members should therefore be extremely conscious about their attitude to which benefits they accept in connection with the discharge of the position of Member of the Storting. It is important to be aware that it may be unacceptable to accept a gift or economic benefit even if the gift has not been given with the object of gaining influence. Moreover, it may be difficult to prove that the gift donor has such an intention.

Normally, gifts received by Members of the Storting are solely the expression of a pleasant gesture or a polite token of appreciation on the part of the gift donor. It is perfectly allowable to accept such gifts.

The registration of gifts or other economic benefits

A distinction must be made between gifts received on behalf of the Storting and gifts that Members receive on their own behalf and keeps themselves.

The Executive Office and the Storting Archives work together to keep a record of the gifts that are received on behalf of the Storting in an official capacity.

Gifts or economic benefits given to individual Members, and which the Member in question decides to keep shall be recorded in the Register of Members of the Storting's Appointments and Economic Interests, provided that the gift or benefit has been given in connection with the individual's work as a Member and has a value of more than NOK 2000. An exception is made for gifts of appreciation and anniversary gifts from the Member's own party or parliamentary party group.

Foreign travel which is not paid for in full by public funds, the Member's own party, or the Member personally shall also be recorded in the Register if the travel is connected to the position of Member of the Storting.

Tax liability

As a rule, gifts received in connection with the discharge of the position of Member of the Storting are considered to be taxable income for the receiver. However, there may be a broad interpretation and understanding of how to define such gifts. A control question could be “Would I have been offered this gift if I were not a Member of the Storting?” The person receiving the gift must make his or her own assessment of its value, i.e. the gift’s market value. If the gift is received abroad, tax liability would be based on the market value in the country in which the gift was given.

Gifts of appreciation, such as flowers, chocolates, a moderately priced bottle of wine or ordinary souvenirs, would in practice not be regarded as taxable for the receiver. Tax exemption may also be considered in connection with anniversary gifts and gifts of appreciation from a Member’s own parliamentary party group. There are separate tax rules for such gifts.

Members are recommended to contact their local tax office regarding tax rules for gifts. Guidelines for gifts and subsidies in a working situation are also available on the Norwegian Tax Administration’s website.

Accept or reject?

In many cases there is little doubt whether or not a gift may be accepted, e.g. if a Member receives a gift on behalf of the Storting in an official capacity. If a Member is uncertain about whether a gift offered by a third party ought to be kept, he or she could ask the following control questions:

- Is this a benefit and why is it being offered to me?
- Is the benefit being offered to several Members, e.g. the whole parliamentary party group, constituency bench or committee?
- Is there a connection between the benefit and the discharge of my position?
- What kind of benefit is it and what is it worth?

Even if a gift is of little value, several corresponding gifts from the same gift donor over an extended period of time may all the same be reason to reject new gifts from the person concerned. The actual situation or the relationship to the person offering the gift will often have an impact on how a Member assesses a situation when such a question is to be dealt with.

The obligation to record gifts and economic benefits with a value of over NOK 2000 in the Register of Members of the Storting’s Appointments and Economic Interests contributes to transparency and openness about the gift and who the gift donor is. This may be significant in the assessment of whether or not the gift should be accepted.

The following gifts must be rejected:

- Gifts that are offered during a negotiating process
- Money or anything else that may easily be redeemed in money
- Gifts, work or materials that are delivered to the Member's private address
- Gifts which are given on certain conditions, unless these relate to representation for non-profit organizations or other worthy causes

In cases where the value of a gift is uncertain or there is doubt about whether or not the Member may keep the gift him- or herself, the matter may be submitted to the Constitutional Department.

Example cases

Listed below are descriptions of the most common situations or forms of gifts and economic benefits, and advice on what Members should do in such cases.

Representation abroad

The exchange of gifts does not have the same political or social significance as it used to, and is now mostly regarded as a symbolic act. During official visits and to a certain degree delegation and committee trips, it is still common practice for hosts and visitors to exchange gifts. For cultural or diplomatic considerations it will often not be appropriate to reject gifts that are given when hosting foreign visits or when travelling abroad.

When such gifts are brought back to Norway, it must be ensured on arrival that the prevailing customs regulations are adhered to.

Gifts when receiving visitors from abroad

As far as possible, in such cases the same practice is followed as for gifts received when travelling abroad.

Gifts when on committee trips or travel in Norway

If a committee or an individual member of a committee is offered gifts, it may appear impolite not to accept these. In most cases, the gifts in question are of fairly little value, often consisting of a book about the county or municipality being visited or a souvenir bearing a municipal logo or coat of arms, etc. Such gifts may be kept by the individual Member. Alternatively, the hosts may be informed in advance that the presentation or exchange of gifts is not desirable.

Promotional gifts

Members may accept promotional gifts, such as company ball-point pens or calendars, since they have little or no financial value. However, Members should consider carefully whether or not to accept products such as expensive sports gear or branded clothing, even if these bear the logo of a company,

producer or organizer. It must be accepted that Members who attend charitable events or other worthy causes may receive these sorts of product if the products are associated with the assignment in question. If so, remember that the products may be subject to registration if they are worth more than NOK 2000.

Gifts of appreciation

Appreciation in the form of a polite gesture, such as flowers, chocolates, a book or a moderately priced bottle of wine, is acceptable when given in situations where it is common to do so, e.g. in gratitude for a speech, at the celebration of a personal event, or at Christmas and other corresponding festivals or holidays.

Gift tokens may be accepted as a gift of appreciation if the value of the token is within what is considered the norm in such situations.

As a rule, gifts received by a Member to celebrate a special birthday, anniversary, etc. are unproblematic, but should be considered carefully all the same. Expensive gifts in particular should be assessed in the same way as in other situations where the gift's value or the intentions of the gift donor play a key role. Such gifts must be recorded in the Register of Members of the Storting's Appointments and Economic Interests. The transparency about the relationship will make it less problematic to accept the gift. Anniversary gifts and gifts of appreciation from a Member's own party or parliamentary party group may be freely accepted and do not need to be recorded in the Register.

Conferences, individual travel, invitations etc.

Representation on behalf of the Storting and participation in committee and delegation travel form part of a Member's activities. Taking part in courses, seminars or meetings with individual companies, organizations, etc. is also an element of a Member's work so long as this participation is connected to his or her duties as a Member of the Storting.

As a rule, any expenses incurred in connection with participation in such events are paid for by the Storting or by the Member in question's parliamentary party group. Sometimes it is natural for the organizer to cover the costs, such as if the Member has been asked to make a speech, take part in a panel discussion, etc. There may also be practical reasons for doing this. On other occasions it may be a complimentary working dinner or lunch. All of the above are basically considered relevant working assignments for a Member, and are not generally regarded as being a gift even if the expenses are not covered by the Storting, the parliamentary party group, or the Member in question.

Members are at liberty to take part in other complimentary events. Whether a Member accepts such invitations should be assessed on the same basis as for other economic benefits or gifts. Whether to accept invitations to spouses, partners or other family members should also be considered carefully.

Members should be aware that taking part in such events may be subject to registration if the value exceeds NOK 2000 and participation may be connected to his or her duties as a Member of the Storting

The offer of free tickets to concerts and other cultural or sporting events should be assessed on the same basis as other gifts. If a Member holds a position of responsibility in a cultural institution or sports club, it is obviously acceptable to receive free tickets in this regard. It is assumed that the appointment itself has been recorded in the Register and that it is therefore not necessary to record tickets to the institution's events.

The offer to pay in full or in part for complimentary pleasure trips or holidays by those other than family members or close friends should not be accepted.

Discounts etc.

Discounts on offer to whole groups, such as all the members of a trade union, sports club or housing association, are unproblematic. However, the acceptance of any discount terms or similar that are offered purely on the basis that the person is a Member of the Storting is not permissible. Gifts having an indirect monetary value, such as discount cards, should not generally be accepted.

See also

[Ethical Guidelines for Members of the Storting](#)

Last updated: 21.06.2016 15:04