

Active-Duty Military Political Activities

This handout provides a brief overview of regulations for participating in political activities as a member of the Armed Forces on Active Duty. The separation between political activities and the Federal Government is even more crucial when involving the Armed Forces because of the need for public confidence in civilian control over the military.

What is a political activity?

It is an activity directed toward the success or failure of a political party, candidate for *partisan* political office, or a *partisan* political group.

What is Active Duty (AD)?

It is defined as full-time duty in the active Military Service of the United States without regard to duration or purpose, including: full-time training duty, annual training duty, attendance at a school designated as a Service school by law or by the Secretary of the Military Department concerned, or National Guard Duty.

PARTISAN VS. NONPARTISAN

Partisan activities relate to candidates or issues representing national or state political parties. Candidacy for national or state office is partisan, even if the candidate is not affiliated with a national or state political party. Partisan activities are more restricted than nonpartisan activities

Nonpartisan activities are not associated with a national or state political party but involve “stand alone” political issues, such as constitutional amendments, municipal ordinances, etc. Employees have more leeway with these activities as long as they:

- Refrain from participating in uniform

- Refrain from using Government facilities and/or resources
- Avoid any implication that the Air Force endorses or supports their participation in the activity

GUIDELINES FOR ACTIVE DUTY MEMBERS

Members of the Armed Forces are encouraged to carry out the obligations of a citizen but are subject to certain restrictions on their political activities.

Members May:

- Register, vote, and express their opinions on political candidates and issues (but not as a representative of the Armed Forces).
- Make monetary contributions to a political organization.
- Attend partisan and non-partisan political meetings or rallies as a spectator when not in uniform.
- Promote and encourage other military members to exercise their voting rights, if such action does not attempt to influence or interfere with the outcome of an election.
- Join a political club and attend its meetings when not in uniform.
- Serve as an election official, if such service is not as a representative of a partisan political party, does not interfere with military duties, is performed while out of uniform, and has the prior approval of the Secretary of the Air Force.

- Sign a petition for specific legislative action or a petition to place a candidate’s name on an official election ballot.
- Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper expressing his personal views on public issues or political candidates, if such action is not part of an organized letter-writing campaign.
- Display a political sticker on your private vehicle.

Member May Not:

- Use his or her official authority or influence to interfere with an election, affect the course or outcome of an election, solicit votes for a particular candidate or issue, or solicit political contributions from others.
- Be a candidate for, or hold, civil office except as authorized below.

Exception on holding office:

As long as the member is not serving on extended active duty (EAD), enlisted members and reserve officers may hold partisan or nonpartisan civil office if the office is held in a private capacity and does not interfere with the performance of military duties.

Enlisted members on EAD may seek and hold nonpartisan civil office as a notary public or member of a school board, neighborhood planning commission, or similar local agency, as long as the office is held in a private capacity and does not interfere with the performance of military duties.

Officers on active duty may seek and hold nonpartisan civil office on an independent school board that is located exclusively on a military reservation.

- Participate in partisan political management, campaigns, or conventions.
- Make campaign contributions to another member of the Armed Forces or an employee of the Federal Government
- Solicit or receive a campaign contribution from another member of the Armed Forces, a civilian officer, or an employee of the U.S. for promoting a political objective or cause.
- Allow publication of partisan political articles that solicit votes for or against a partisan political party or candidate and that carry his signature.
- Serve in any official capacity or be listed as a sponsor of a partisan political club.
- Speak before a partisan political gathering of any kind for promoting a partisan political party or candidate.
- Participate in any radio, television, or other program or group discussion as an advocate of a partisan political party or candidate.
- Conduct a political opinion survey under the auspices of a partisan political group or distribute partisan political literature.
- Perform clerical or other duties for a partisan political committee during a campaign or on Election Day.
- Solicit or fundraise in Federal offices, facilities, or military reservations for a partisan political cause or candidate.
- March or ride in a partisan political parade.
- Display a large political sign, banner, or poster (as distinguished from a bumper

sticker) on the top or side of a private vehicle.

- Participate in any organized effort to provide voters with transportation to the polls if the effort is organized by a partisan political party or candidate.
- Sell tickets for, or otherwise actively promote, political dinners and similar fundraising events.
- Attend partisan political events as an official representative of the Armed Forces.

Local Nonpartisan Political Activities

A member on AD participating in nonpartisan political activities, shall not:

- Wear a uniform or use any Government property or facilities while participating.
- Engage in conduct that in any way implies that the Air Force has taken an official position on, or is otherwise involved in, the local political campaign or issue.

If you need advice on a particular situation please contact SAF/GCA at (703) 697-7430 or by email at saf.ethics@pentagon.af.mil to set up an appointment with one of the attorneys. Please also view the website at www.safgc.hq.af.mil/ethics.htm

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References: JER DOD Directive 1344.10