



OFFICE OF THE STAFF JUDGE ADVOCATE

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POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

The American constitutional tradition is a politically neutral military establishment under civilian control. Military members are expected and encouraged to be responsible citizens, to vote, and participate in the political process. At the same time though, such political participation is limited by federal law and Air Force Instructions. The appearance of military influence of the political process must be avoided.

AFI 51-508, *Political Activities, Free Speech and Freedom of Assembly on Air Force Personnel*, dated 12 October 2018, outlines both permissible and prohibited political activities that military may participate in and refrain from.

Permissible Activities

- Register to vote, vote, and express a personal opinion on political candidates and issues, but not as a representative of the AF or DoD
- Promoting and encouraging voting, without attempting to influence for whom or what the vote is cast.
- Joining a partisan or nonpartisan political club and attend its meetings when not in uniform, but not in any official capacity nor listed as a sponsor. The restriction on wearing the uniform to meetings also applies to retired and Reserve Component member.
- Joining a political club and attending club meetings or rallies when not in uniform.
- Attending partisan and nonpartisan political fundraising activities, meetings, rallies, debates, conventions, or activities as a spectator when not in uniform and when no inference or appearance of official sponsorship, approval, or endorsement can reasonably be drawn.
- Serving as an election official, if such service is not as a representative of a partisan political party, does not interfere with the performance of military duties, is performed when not in uniform, and receives SECAF's prior approval.
- Signing a petition for specific legislative action or a petition to place a candidate's name on an official election ballot, if the signing does not obligate the member to engage in partisan political activity and is done as a private citizen and not as a representative of the AF or DoD.
- Writing letters to the editor or a periodical expressing personal views concerning public, nonpartisan issues, without promoting a partisan political cause.
- Appointing voting officers.
- Wearing badges and buttons in civilian attire and off-duty.
- Displaying a political bumper sticker on a private automobile.
- Contributing to political parties or election committees.

- Participating in local nonpartisan political campaigns (e.g. issues relating to constitutional amendments, referendums, municipal ordinances) **when not in uniform** and not interfering with military duties.

Prohibited Activities

- Be a candidate or hold civil office.
- Participate in partisan political campaigns.
- Attend, as an official Air Force representative, partisan political events even without actively participating.
- Do radio or TV as an advocate for a particular candidate or cause.
- Distribute partisan political petitions, literature, badges, or buttons.
- Serve in any official capacity or be listed as a sponsor of a partisan political club.
- Perform clerical or other duties (including partisan voter transportation efforts) for a partisan political committee during the campaign or on election day.
- March or ride in a partisan political parade.
- Display large political signs, posters, or banners on POVs.
- Sell tickets for or otherwise actively promote political dinners and fund-raising events.
- Solicit or receive campaign contributions from other members of the military or civilian employees.

How are Violations Charged?

Violations are chargeable under Article 92, UCMJ, failure to obey a lawful order or regulation. Additionally, Article 88 of the UCMJ applies to commissioned officers and is punitive in nature. If you have any questions or doubt about the legality of any political activity, make an appointment with a legal assistance attorney at the 28th Bomb Wing Legal Office by calling 605-385-2329.