

IN THE NEWS

Political activities can clash with Air Force

Some things to remember this election season

By Capt. Aaron Reed
437 AW Legal

Once every four years, military members have the chance to do something very unique. They have the right to help select their boss for the next four years.

Most people do not get to elect their boss, manager or chief executive officer, but the U.S. military offers that rare opportunity through the presidential voting process. So take advantage of this constitutionally guaranteed right, and vote. But remember, military members also have certain unique restrictions that limit their political activities.

The American system of government is partly based on the belief that the daily activities of government should be separate from political activities. This is especially true when it comes to the military, because the armed forces depend on public confidence in the civilian control of the military.

While it's obvious that America's political leaders do not wear uniforms and its military leaders are not elected politicians, it is not always clear what military members can and can't do in the area of political activities.

Air Force Instruction 51-902 gov-

Tent

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and to show some leadership presence. The tent will also contain a variety of brochures and items related to the base's mission and the Air Force.

"We'll have a good mix of junior and senior, enlisted and officer members in the mentor tent," Udoaka said. "We have found that the younger people usually want to speak with someone who just finished basic training and who has similar experiences. We will have people in the tent who have a deep sense of duty, honor and country and who are good at telling the Air Force story."

Along with the mentor tent, Udoaka is working up a group of Air Force members to speak at local schools and share what the Air Force is all about.

"While at the schools, we'll not only talk about the mentor tent and the air expo, but also our jobs, the Air Force

erns political activities by members of the Air Force. It is important to note this is a punitive instruction, and violations of it are punishable under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Article 92, Failure to Obey a Lawful Regulation. If any questions come up, it is always better to ask what the answer is than to press on blindly and unintentionally violate the AFI.

The primary question to remember when trying to figure out if a certain political activity is permissible within the regulations is to ask, "Does this activity associate a uniformed service member with a partisan political cause or candidate?" The most obvious restrictions that exist are prohibitions against trying to use official authority to influence the outcome of an election, running for or holding civil office and engaging in partisan political activity. The key question to resolve when applying the AFI is, what is "partisan"?

A partisan political activity relates to:

- Particular candidates
- Issues representing national or state political parties

These activities are more closely restricted by government regulations than nonpartisan ones. Some examples of prohibited activities are:

- Assisting a candidate or party in

an election by helping with the campaign

- Speaking on a candidate's or party's behalf
- Engaging in fundraising activities
- Attending any candidate or party activity in uniform
- Displaying large banners or signs on a vehicle

Nonpartisan political activities are ones that involve singular political issues such as constitutional amendments, a state or local referendum or a municipal ordinance. It is generally permissible to participate in these kinds of activities as long as members do not do so in uniform, use government facilities or resources to do so or imply any endorsement of their activity by the military.

It is important to remember the various regulations when participating in the political process and to consult the text of the regulations whenever a questionable activity arises. Sometimes it can be very difficult to know exactly what is allowed. For example, it is legal to donate money to a political organization or committee favoring a particular candidate or slate of candidates, but it is not legal to make a donation to a partisan political candidate or receive a donation from any federal government employee in an effort to promote a political objective or cause.

Knowing the difference between these similar types of situations can be crucial.

Another example, it is perfectly within the regulations for someone not in uniform to attend political meetings or rallies or join a political club and attend its meetings. However, a military member can't serve in any official capacity or be a sponsor of a partisan political club or march or ride in a partisan political parade. Although these are just a couple of examples, they illustrate how difficult it can be for military members to distinguish what is allowed under the instructions and what is not.

If any particular questions arise, remember to first consult the AFIs and then call the Charleston AFB Staff Judge Advocate's office at 963-5502, to get the answers.

(Author's note: This is the first in a series of Preventive Law articles from the staff judge advocate's office. Please submit any questions or concerns that you would like to see addressed in future articles to: 437 AW/JA 102 E. Hill Blvd, Ste. A, Rm 135, Charleston AFB 29404, or drop off suggestions at the office in Bldg 1600.)

VOTE



and the importance of them staying in school and getting good grades," said Udoaka.

"Right now, I have about eight mentors signed up and that should be enough to cover the air expo," he continued. "Any more volunteers will go out into the schools to talk up the air expo and meet with the kids. Our biggest criterion in selecting folks is that they have a strong desire to mentor kids and to serve their country."

Master Sgt. Barbara Sullivan, superintendent of the 437th Medical Support Squadron has previously served as a mentor in Texas at a shopping mall in 1991 and 1992, and she visited numerous high schools in Alabama in 1997. She volunteered to be a mentor for the expo.

"I volunteered mainly because I want people to know that what we do counts," said Sullivan. "You get great personal satisfaction and it is not just for the pay, education and benefits. Serving in the military is career building for your future whether it's for 4 or 20 years."

She said she has learned from previous mentor booths that people have misperceptions about pay, benefits and the Air Force in general. "Some people think we don't pay taxes on our pay and all of our housing is provided free," Sullivan said. "Others think that the only people in the Air Force are pilots, and they are surprised to learn the Air Force offers a variety of support career areas."

Anyone interested in becoming a mentor should contact Capt. Ita Udoaka at 963-5524.



Sukkoth-The Festival of Booths Shemini Atzereth-The Eighth Day of Assembly Simchat Torah-The Rejoicing of the Law

Sukkoth, usually translated as Tabernacles, or Festival of Booths, culminates the Jewish Fall Holy Day period. Following Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, with their somber mood of repentance and introspection, this Holy Day festival arrives five days later accompanied by rejoicing and celebration at sundown, Oct. 13.

On this festival the Jewish people are commanded to build a Sukkah, or hut, a simple booth, and make it "home" for the week. The Sukkah represents the frail and makeshift huts in which Jewish ancestors dwelt during their 40 years in the desert following the Exodus from Egyptian slavery. It is supposed to remind Jews of the frailty of life and dependence on God.

The Holy Days of Sukkoth also commemorates the fall harvest, the final gathering of produce before the winter months.

The eighth day of festivities, called Shmini Atzereth, is characterized by a memorial service. The ninth and final day is called Simchat Torah, "The Rejoicing of the Law," and marks the joyous outpouring of fervor at completing the cycle of public readings of the Torah, and beginning the cycle of reading anew with the Book of Genesis.

The Holy Day period of Shmini Atzereth and Simchat Torah commences at sundown, Oct. 20, and concludes at sundown, Oct. 22.

For information regarding worship opportunities during this period, call the wing Jewish lay leader, Airman 1st Class David Winner at 963-2103 or the base chapel at 963-2536. *(Submitted by Airman 1st Class David Winner.)*

