

# Elections - What you can and cannot do

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## **Elections - What you can and cannot do; politicking rules for government employees**

Oct. 9, 2008 -- With election activity steadily picking up, defense officials remind members of the military and Defense of Department civilians that they're subject to rules regulating their involvement in political activities.

Gone are the days when the military posted troops at the polls after the Civil War, an act that Steve Epstein, director of the DoD General Counsel's Standards of Conduct Office, said intimidated many southerners into not voting.

Today, Epstein said two sets of rules help protect the integrity of the political process: a DoD directive for active-duty service members and the Hatch Act for federal civilians. These rules keep the military out of partisan politics and ensure that the workplace remains politically neutral, he said.

### **Voting encouraged**

That's not to imply that military members and civilian employees can't participate in politics. Epstein said DoD encourages both groups to register to vote and vote as they choose, and to urge others to vote. Both groups can sign nominating petitions for candidates and express their personal opinions about candidates and issues-- but only if they don't do so as representatives of the armed forces. Also, all federal employees can make contributions to political organizations or candidates.

### **Dos and don'ts**

Beyond that, the list of dos and don'ts differs widely, depending on whether the employee is an active-duty service member, a rank-and-file Civil Service employee, a political appointee or member of the career Senior Executive Service, Epstein said.

Of all DoD employees, the men and women in uniform have the most restrictions regarding political activity, he explained. A 1993 revision to the Hatch Act freed most Civil Service employees to engage in political activities outside the workplace that were once forbidden, although many restrictions still apply.

For example, service members as well as government civilians can attend political meetings or rallies. Military members can attend only as spectators and not in uniform. They're not permitted to make public political speeches, serve in any official capacity in partisan groups, or participate in partisan political campaigns or conventions.

On the other hand, civilian employees governed by the Hatch Act may be active in and speak before political gatherings or serve as officers of political parties or partisan groups. They also are permitted to manage campaigns, distribute literature, write political articles or serve as a spokesperson for a party or candidate.

Military members generally aren't permitted to campaign for a political office. Civilian employees are, as long as it's a nonpartisan election.

While the dos and don'ts concerning political activity may vary, Epstein said the basic rules hold true for all DoD workers. They can't use their position to influence or interfere with an election. And they can never engage in political activity on the job, in a government vehicle or while wearing an official uniform.

Federal employees ***may***-

- be candidates for public office in nonpartisan elections
- register and vote as they choose
- assist in voter registration drives
- express opinions about candidates and issues
- contribute money to political organizations
- attend political fundraising functions
- attend and be active at political rallies and meetings
- join and be an active member of a political party or club
- sign nominating petitions
- campaign for or against referendum questions, constitutional amendments, municipal ordinances
- campaign for or against candidates in partisan elections
- make campaign speeches for candidates in partisan elections
- distribute campaign literature in partisan elections
- hold office in political clubs or parties

Federal employees ***may not***-

- use official authority or influence to interfere with an election
- solicit or discourage political activity of anyone with business before their agency
- solicit or receive political contributions (may be done in certain limited situations by federal labor

- or other employee organizations)
- be candidates for public office in partisan elections
- engage in political activity while:
  - on duty
  - in a government office
  - wearing an official uniform
  - using a government vehicle
- wear partisan political buttons on duty

More details about restrictions on DoD military and civilian employees' political activities are posted on the DoD Web site at [www.osc.gov](http://www.osc.gov).

### **Military, civilian voting assistance**

Military can get help obtaining ballots from their home states and more from the Federal Voting Assistance Program. The voting assistance officers are armed with federal postcard applications and the 2008 Voting Assistance Guide. The guide is also posted on the Federal Voting Assistance Program Web site at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov).

Civilians who need voting assistance can pick up registration forms at local post offices, county libraries, school guidance counselors and the Motor Vehicle Administration.

There are also people at Carlisle Barracks who can assist.

- Installation VAO: Mr. Elton Manske, DHR, Room 111 Upton Hall, 245-4898
- TRADOC/AWC VAO: Maj. Steven Toth, Collins Hall Room B010, 242-3265
- Dunham VAO: Capt. Jane Hicks, Dunham USAHC Suite #1, 245-3658

Want more information on rules for [military](#) or [civilians](#)?

*(Editors Note: Information used in this story was obtained from a DoD release)*