



DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1010

JUN 19 2012

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
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UNDER SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE
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DIRECTOR, NET ASSESSMENT
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SUBJECT: Civilian and Military Personnel Participation in Political Activities

As Election Day 2012 approaches, it is important that all DoD personnel – military and civilian – be aware of the limitations that exist when participating in political activity. All personnel are encouraged to carry out the obligations of citizenship. Eligible voters are encouraged to vote. With respect to other political activities, this notice provides a general overview of the rules and includes hyperlinks to more specific guidance.

Military Personnel

The primary guidance concerning political activity for Service members is contained in DoD Directive 1344.10 [[Guidance for Military Personnel](#)]. Generally, all Service members are prohibited from acting in any manner that reasonably gives rise to the inference of approval or endorsement of candidates for political office by DoD or the U.S. military. An example of this is wearing the uniform while engaging in political activity. Reservists and Guard members not on active duty have more latitude and may engage in certain political activities, provided they are not in uniform and do not otherwise act in a manner that gives rise to the inference or appearance of official sponsorship, approval, or endorsement of candidates for political office. All military personnel shall avoid any activity that may be contrary to the spirit or intent of the Directive.

In general, active duty Service members **may**:

- vote;
- express personal opinions about political candidates and issues, but not as a representative of the U.S. military;



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- join a political club and attend partisan and nonpartisan political meetings, debates, conventions, or activities as a spectator, when not in uniform;
- sign a petition to place a candidate's name on an official election ballot;
- make monetary contributions to a political campaign or party;
- display a political bumper sticker on a personal vehicle;
- write a letter to the editor or post a blog, stating a personal opinion (the opinion must specify that the stated views are those of the individual and not of the Department, and may not solicit votes for or against a partisan candidate);
- participate in nonpartisan activities that are not specifically identified with a political party, such as a referendum question or a municipal ordinance on for example, tax or environmental issues.

In general, active duty Service members **may not**:

- actively participate in partisan political activities, including fundraisers (mere attendance does not constitute participation);
- serve as an officer of a political club;
- speak at a partisan gathering or participate in any radio or television programs (including organized blog debates or discussions) that advocate for or against a political party, candidate, or cause;
- seek nomination or candidacy for civil office (see DoDD 1344.10 for limited exceptions);
- display a large political sign, banner, or poster (as distinguished from a bumper sticker) on a personal vehicle;
- display a political sign, poster, banner, or other campaign material visible to the public at one's residence on a military installation (including homes located in privatized housing);
- attend political events as an official representative of the Armed Forces unless authorized by the Service Secretary concerned.

The above does not constitute a complete listing of permissible or impermissible activities; reference to the specific language of DoD Directive 1344.10 is appropriate in all instances.

DoD Civilian Personnel

The Hatch Act and DoD policy govern civilian employees' participation in political activities. As a general matter, activity is political if its primary purpose involves activity directed toward the success or failure of a political party or organization or the election of a partisan candidate.

In general, all DoD civilian employees **may**:

- vote;
- express personal opinions about political candidates and issues;

- make monetary contributions to a political campaign or party (except while on duty or using government equipment);
- display a political bumper sticker on a personal vehicle;
- attend political events;
- sign a petition to place a candidate's name on an official election ballot;
- display a political sign at one's personal residence;
- participate in nonpartisan activities that are not specifically identified with a political party, such as a referendum question or a municipal ordinance on for example, tax or environmental issues.

In general, all DoD civilian employees **may not**:

- participate in any political activity while on duty or in a Federal building;
- use the insignia of a Government office or any aspect of one's official authority while participating in political activities;
- solicit, accept, or receive political contributions (regardless of when or where these actions take place);
- display campaign photos, posters, banners, bumper stickers, screen savers, t-shirts, buttons or other campaign materials in a Federal building;
- engage in political activity while using a Government owned or leased vehicle;
- host a fundraiser for a partisan candidate;
- run for public office in a partisan election.

Beyond these general guidelines, there are more specific rules that govern active participation in political activities. The majority of civilian personnel, (those specifically not subject to the additional restrictions below) including most General Schedule and all Schedule C personnel, are permitted to engage in a variety of partisan campaign activities in their personal capacity. For example, they **may** volunteer with a partisan campaign (during off-duty time and while not in a Federal building), attend and be active at political rallies and meetings, distribute campaign literature, and work at the polls on Election Day for a partisan candidate. They may also serve as a delegate to a national, state or local political party convention and even as an officer of a partisan campaign, provided they do not solicit, accept, or receive campaign contributions. [[Q & A – Less Restricted Employees](#)].

DoD Civilian Personnel Subject to Additional Restrictions

Certain civilian personnel are subject to additional, heightened restrictions and **may not** participate in partisan campaign activities. These employees include: (i) individuals appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate; (ii) non-career SES members; (iii) career members of the SES; (iv) contract appeals board members; and (v) all employees of the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. Employees subject to additional restrictions are, for example, prohibited from working for a partisan candidate or political party, serving as a delegate to a political party convention, holding office in a political club, organizing a partisan meeting or rally, distributing campaign material for a partisan candidate, or working at the polls on Election Day for a political party. [[Q & A – Further Restricted Employees](#)].

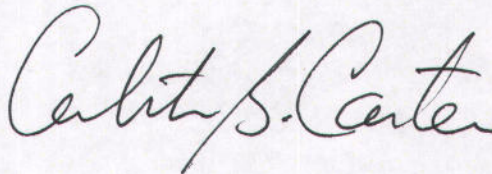
Campaign Activity at Military Installations

Guidance that addresses requests by campaign organizations to use military installations is issued by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. This guidance requires that all inquiries from campaign organizations be forwarded to a public affairs officer for review. Requests for access to a military installation by candidates for elected office are generally denied. However, requests by candidates and elected officials to participate in official activities not related to a political campaign may be allowed after review by legal and public affairs personnel. [[Public Affairs Guidance for Political Campaigns and Elections](#)]

Social Media

The use of social networking sites has greatly increased and is being used more and more for political purposes. Social media guidance for Service members, [[Public Affairs Guidance for Political Campaigns and Elections](#)] and guidance for civilian employees [[Social Media and the Hatch Act](#)] provides insight in this emerging area. The restrictions discussed in the guidance apply equally to all social media platforms.

This summary and linked detailed guidance should assist you in applying the rules to your particular circumstances and help you avoid inadvertent missteps that could harm the reputation of the Department. We expect each of you to review and comply with these rules. You are encouraged to consult with your local legal counsel if you have any questions regarding participation in political activities.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Carlisle S. Carter". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.