

## VOTE, VOTE, VOTE

AFSA Headquarters (April 13, 2006): In Capitol Hill Updates and articles in SERGEANTS Magazine, we often exhort our members to communicate with their elected officials. At other times, we urge them to present their case as a voting-determinant issue. This means that elected officials should know where you stand, what you expect of them, and the conditions upon which you will agree to vote for them in the future.

It is important that military members realize that they, too, are full citizens. They, too, have every right to communicate with their elected officials to present their individual preferences and to make their individual demands as citizens.

One very powerful tool that each citizen—including every military member—has is the power of the ballot box. However, this power cannot be implemented or “wielded” if the citizen does not care enough to register to vote and to take the time to go to the polls.

This November the seat of every member of the House of Representatives faces an election contest. One-third of the senators in the United States Senate similarly face reelection. It is incumbent on all AFSA members and all current and past military members, their eligible family members, and their survivors to go to the polls, to state their case, and to do their parts to elect members of the House and Senate who will best represent their (our) interests.

An active citizen who cares enough to shape the present laws and the future of our nation will (1) regularly communicate with Congress and instruct the members what issues to support, (2) be a registered voter and, (3) vote.

In an association like AFSA, voting is an important part of the legislative program. How so? Because although voting *per se* is not a legislative effort, elected candidates legislatively carry out the will of the people. It is, therefore, important that AFSA officials at all levels take the lead in getting military members registered to vote, and encourage all members to exercise the vote of their individual choice. AFSA legislative officials then do our best to continue to communicate the will of our members and to continue to educate those serving in Congress. We strongly encourage each current and past Air Force enlisted member, their families, and survivors to vote at their local polling places. For those away from home, additional information is provided below regarding absentee balloting.

## **General Information**

Each military installation has a Voting Assistance Office and, generally, a Voting Assistance Officer appointed by each unit/squadron. These individuals can provide specific information on voting in the local area, or registering and voting via absentee ballot, if appropriate. The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) is the most convenient method, accepted by all states as either an application for registration forms, for registration, or as an application for an absentee ballot. The forms are also available from the Voting Assistance Officer, and (s)he can provide individuals with the correct mailing address for the FPCA. In many states, you may be required to submit a separate FPCA for each election. Some states will accept a single FPCA for all ballots issued during an election year. *When in doubt, send a separate application for each election.* Generally, all election-related materials may be witnessed or sworn to before a notary, a U.S. commissioned officer or other officials authorized to administer oaths.

For voting purposes concerning military personnel, your “legal state of residence” is the last state in which you resided prior to entering military service or the state you claim as your legal residence. Even if you no longer maintain formal ties such as property ownership, the address is needed to place you in the proper voting district or ward. Therefore, be certain to enter the complete address of that residence, including street or rural route and number. Military personnel may vote in the state in which they are stationed if they change their legal residence to that state. Be advised, legal obligations such as taxation may be incurred when changing the state of residency. Before making a decision to change a state residence, it is suggested that you consult a legal officer. There are no provisions for personnel stationed outside the United States to vote where they are stationed.

The law entitles family members of a military member to vote absentee. Family members are considered to be in the same category as the absentee voter and generally follow the same procedures.

### **How AFSA Chapters Can Get Involved**

The Voting Assistance Officer has been provided with a Voting Assistance Guide listing deadlines for registering in each state prior to both primary and general elections. Additionally, the guide provides other information and forms for each state. You may obtain a copy of the guide through the local Voter Registration Office or the base Voting Assistance Officer. The base Voting Assistance Officer or local Voter Registration Office can also assist in the planning of your program, i.e., provide

information, handouts and (possibly) personnel to assist during the actual time of registration.

Training of chapter volunteers may be required. If so, the base Voting Assistance Office or the local Voter Registration Office can arrange that training. Plan far enough in advance so that all volunteers are trained prior to your voter registration day(s). The key is to plan your participation, approach the base voting officials, and volunteer your time.

Adequate supplies of materials to be distributed, such as Federal Post Card Applications and additional voting handouts, should be obtained as much in advance of the planned programs as possible. Materials can be obtained through the base Voting Assistance Officer or the local Voter Registration Office.

Work closely with base/local officials such as commanders, Command Chief Master Sergeants and voting officers. These officials can assist with many aspects of your program, including publicity, materials, and authorization to set up your booth. They may also provide an individual to witness the Federal Post Card Application forms on the day(s) of your event. They can also grant permission for you to attend Commanders Calls, NCO Wives Club meetings, and other meetings on or off base.

Use all available base/local media to publicize your voter registration campaign, providing the public with the places, dates, and times of your registration effort. Inform people in your local area of the importance of voting through chapter newsletters, base and local newspapers, daily or weekly bulletins, billboards, and bulletin boards. *Awareness is vital to the success of your campaign.*

With proper authorization, you may set up registration booths in key areas on the base, e.g., the commissary, exchange, recreation center, and the NCO Club. Potential off-base locations include shopping malls and supermarkets.

The following ideas are provided to help you get started:

- Work with other organizations in your area, such as the VFW, American Legion, and the League of Women Voters;
- Provide car pools to places of registration, if permitted;
- Sponsor a voter registration kick-off luncheon or dinner, and invite a guest speaker; and

- Make it your chapter's goal to register ALL AFSA/Auxiliary members and ALL military members and their family members in your area.

### **Awareness Responsibilities**

The Voting Assistance Officer is responsible to inform voters of the proper registration and voting procedures to follow, but individual voters are responsible for gathering information on candidates and issues. Such information is readily available in print and electronic media and in publications voters can obtain directly from candidates, political parties, or campaign offices supporting a particular political candidate or proposal.

### **Maintain Political Neutrality**

Chapter members must be careful not to distribute any literature from partisan organizations. Organizations become partisan when they endorse or support candidates or proposals based on political party affiliation. The Department of Defense's policy regarding the maintenance of partisan political neutrality is stated in DOD Directive 5410.18:

“The Armed Forces and Defense establishment belong to all the American people. The Department of Defense’s support of and participation in events and activities in the civilian domain will reflect the fact. . . (and such) support and participation must not directly or indirectly (A) endorse or selectively benefit or favor or appear to endorse or selectively benefit any private or individual group. . . ideological movement. . . political organization. . . or (B) be associated with the solicitation of votes in a political election.”

### **Absentee Voter Registration**

Your voter registration is effected by completing and mailing in your Federal Post Card Application. While these forms have changed somewhat over the years, your base Voting Assistance Officer will make sure yours is current and the right one to get you registered. Remember, consult with the base Voting Assistance Officer or local Voter Registration Office prior to distributing information or attempting to complete voting forms.

For more information on military members voting in state, local, and federal elections, important dates, information, and absentee voting procedures, go to the Federal Voting Assistance Website at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) or write to the Federal Voting Assistance Program:

Director  
Federal Voting Assistance Program  
Department of Defense  
Washington Headquarters Services  
1155 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1155

E-mail Address: [vote@fvap.ncr.gov](mailto:vote@fvap.ncr.gov)

Phone: 1-800-438-VOTE (8683); International Toll-free number are available at [www.fvap.gov/services/tollfree.html](http://www.fvap.gov/services/tollfree.html).

Air Force Voting Assistance Website:

[http://ask.afpc.randolph.af.mil/main\\_content.asp?prods3=1257&prods2=57&prods1=56](http://ask.afpc.randolph.af.mil/main_content.asp?prods3=1257&prods2=57&prods1=56)

For more information, consult your unit voting assistance officer.

### **Historical Voting Highlights**

1820: One electoral college vote kept President James Monroe from being elected President without dispute when he ran for a second term in 1820. He was so popular that all but one of the members of the electoral college voted for him. John Quincy Adams cast the one vote against Monroe. Adams stated that the reason he did this was "to make certain that only George Washington would ever have the honor of being elected President by a unanimous vote."

1845: One vote made Texas one of the United States. In 1845, the Republic of Texas asked to become part of the United States. Many Americans, however, feared that another southern state would bring trouble. When the Senate voted on this issue, a tie occurred. Then one senator changed his vote, and by this single vote, Texas became the 28th state.

1846: One vote decided on war with Mexico. In 1846, the Mexican army invaded Texas, and President Polk asked for a Declaration of War. The Senate did not want to go to war, and the declaration passed by only one vote. The United States won the war against Mexico and with that victory added five states—Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and California.

1867: One vote gave the United States the state of Alaska. The Alaska Purchase of 1867 was ratified by just one vote—paving the way for the territory to be America's largest state when it became part of the United States in 1958.

1868: One vote saved President Andrew Johnson from being removed from office. The House brought charges of impeachment against Johnson, but the Senate, which decides impeachment cases, found him innocent by one vote. Impeachment is the first step by which officials, such as the President, may be removed from office. President Johnson was not convicted by the Senate and, therefore, he was not removed from office.

1876: One vote gave Rutherford B. Hayes the presidency of the United States. In the 1876 presidential election, Samuel Tilden received a half million more popular votes than Hayes. The electoral college was not in agreement about who should be America's next leader. A special commission was formed to make the final decision. The commission decided: although Hayes had lost the actual vote by the citizens of the United States, he had won the electoral vote by just one ballot: 185 to 184.

1916: One vote in each of the voting districts of California reelected President Wilson. If Wilson's opponent, Charles E. Hughes, had received an additional vote in each one of California's voting precincts, he would have defeated Wilson.

1948: One vote per voting precinct gave Harry S. Truman the presidency. If Truman's opponent, Thomas E. Dewey, had received one vote more per precinct in Ohio and California, there would have been a tie, and the House of Representatives would have decided the election. And because Dewey had more support in the House than Truman, Dewey would have won.

1960: One vote per voting precinct would have elected Richard Nixon rather than John F. Kennedy President.

2000: The election on November 7, 2000, was the closest presidential race in history. In the final count, Governor George W. Bush of Texas won by 4 electoral votes, but Vice President Al Gore had won the popular vote by 337,576 votes. Bush was the first presidential candidate in more than a century to win the presidency while losing the popular vote. The deciding factor in Bush winning the election was a victory in Florida by just 537 votes over Gore!

