



AMERICANISM eBulletin



An electronic update of the Americanism Commission

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Maintaining American Legion Nonpartisanship



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Americanism Commission

This year ushers in a presidential election. And while American Legion posts are encouraged to promote “Get Out the Vote” (GOTV) efforts, it is important to remember to remain nonpartisan in the process.

The American Legion is a nonpolitical, nonpartisan organization but advocates for all U.S. citizens to register and vote in all elections. The American Legion does not show preference for or against any particular candidate or political party.

Since its inception in 1920, The American Legion’s Get Out The Vote program has encouraged Americans to exercise their right to vote and help others understand the importance of the electoral process. The program suggests activities on how American Legion posts can increase voter turnout such as calling potential voters to get to the polls, volunteer in their communities by providing rides to and from the polls if necessary, use social media to share information about poll locations and times, and place newspaper ads or public service announcements in local media that promote registration and voting.

To help with GOTV efforts, American Legion Family members can download The American Legion’s “Get Out the Vote” and “Vote, America” brochures at www.legion.org/vote/publications. GOTV public service announcements and news releases are also available.

You can still encourage voting registration and participation while remaining nonpartisan, and here's how and why.

Q: How can an American Legion post avoid the appearance of partisanship when conducting GOTV activities?

A: Volunteers working on an American Legion-sponsored registration and voting drive should not wear campaign buttons or make their personal views about candidates, parties and issues known in any way while they are engaged in nonpartisan activities for their post. Campaign materials or literature should be removed from an area where nonpartisan activities are taking place.

Q: Can a member be active in a campaign when the Legion has to remain nonpartisan?

A: As individuals, Legionnaires can be as partisan as they like. Legionnaires engaged in partisan activities – such as attending a candidate’s rally – should do so without wearing the American Legion cap or other Legion attire. When working for the Legion post, a member must treat all candidates equally without making candidate endorsements. To do otherwise will endanger the post’s nonprofit status with the IRS.

Q: Why can’t The American Legion endorse a candidate?

A: Federal election laws require that any registration drive conducted or sponsored by groups like The American Legion be nonpartisan. In other words, the IRS mandates the strict nonpartisanship of all such activities by organizations eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions under Section 501(c)(19) of the Code. Failure to do so could endanger an American Legion post’s nonprofit status. A nonpartisan organization does not support, oppose or provide aid to any candidate for public office or to any political party. In a nonpartisan drive, registration and voting assistance, and information and materials must be offered and made available to all, regardless of which candidate or party they support.

(Reprint of American Legion digital article “American Legion reminds you to vote in 2020”, February 03, 2020)