Follow Rules of Nonpartisanship

The American Legion shall be absolutely nonpolitical and shall not be used for the dissemination of partisan principles nor for the promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public office or preferment. Failure of a post to do so may endanger their non-profit status. This does not mean that individual members are forbidden to show partisanship. Just remember if partisanship is shown, it must be independent of association with a Legion post and its voter registration and GOTV efforts.

Federal election laws require that any registration drive conducted or sponsored by a corporation, labor union or trade association be nonpartisan. The Internal Revenue Code mandates strict nonpartisanship of all such activities by organizations eligible to receive non-profit, tax-exempt status under the IRS Code. There are many things, however, Legion posts MAY do that can contribute significantly to The American Legion's Get Out The Vote program:

- Conduct voter registration and nonpartisan GOTV campaigns.
- Educate the public on issues and encourage participation in the political process.
- Educate all candidates and political parties on your issues.
- Host or participate in nonpartisan candidates' forums.
- Make presentations on your organization's issue to platform committees, campaign staff, candidates, media and the general public.
- Work on behalf of any germane ballot measure.
- Continue your normal lobbying on issues.

Posts **CANNOT** endorse or oppose a candidate for public office, coordinate activities with a candidate, make contributions of money, time or facilities to candidates, or manage, fund or organize a Political Action Committee.

Nonpartisan registration and GOTV drives may be directed at either the general public or a defined population group, such as young adults or minority citizens. In a nonpartisan drive, registration and voting assistance, information or materials must be offered and available to all, regardless of which candidate or party they support.

Volunteers working on a 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 engaged in nonpartisan activities for their post. Any campaign materials should be removed from areas where nonpartisan activities are taking place.

Partisanship is not a dirty word. As individuals, Legionnaires may be as partisan as they like, but they must do so without the Legion cap and without a direct connection to an American Legion post.

Suggested Planning

A post-organized GOTV program may be as basic or as elaborate as the post desires. Any GOTV program will be a success as long as there are clear goals, possibility to achieve them and a strong commitment from everyone involved.

Planning a GOTV program will vary from state to state based on deadlines for voter registration, primaries and runoff elections. At the first meeting, set the goals and objectives based on your state's deadlines for voter registration, primaries, and Election Day. After the initial meeting, send a news release to the media announcing the formation of your GOTV committee, its general purpose and provide information about your program. Milestones for your program should be based on your state's voter registration deadline, party primaries, and Election Day.

First Milestone

- Have a comprehensive plan to follow in the organizing state of the program. Include goal and objectives
- Develop a roster of qualified and interested volunteers
- Organize subcommittees and assign responsibilities
- Begin the drive by issuing voter registration reminders
- See if your post is needed as a polling location

Second Milestone

- Continue registration drive
- Begin issuing news releases on GOTV activities
- Contact businesses and organizations
- Identify those who may need assistance with absentee voting

Third Milestone

- Distribute any GOTV promotional materials
- Begin ad campaign (newspaper, TV and/or radio)
- Hold a benefit activity to raise funds for the program
- Identify and publicize all of the polling locations near your local post

Fourth Milestone

- Conduct a survey of local issues
- Hold a public forum or debate for candidates
- Identify and publicize handicap access points at polling locations near your local post

Fifth Milestone

- Increase radio and TV public service announcements
- Make arrangements for transportation and care giving
- Remind volunteers of the need for assistance

Sixth Milestone

- Intensify all public relations efforts
- Hold a candidates forum/debate

Election Day

- Wear your Legion cap to the polls to vote, but in doing so remember not to wear any political campaign materials

After the election

- Report the successful results of your post's GOTV efforts to the media.
- Keep a record of what worked well for your post's next GOTV program!

For information on your state's voter registration and primaries, visit The American Legion's Legislative Action Center online at ***http://legion.capwiz.com/election/home/.***

THE AMERICAN LEGION

P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
gotv@legion.org

www.legion.org

Stock# 20-006 Artwork# 187ACY1212

THE AMERICAN LEGION

GET OUT THE VOTE

LEARN HOW YOU AND YOUR AMERICAN LEGION POST CAN HELP "GET OUT THE VOTE"

THE AMERICAN LEGION GET OUT THE VOTE

A Message from the National Americanism Commission Chairman

Fellow Legionnaires:

Elections are important to our Republic and each year many local, state and national elections will dot the landscape. As citizens of this great nation, it is our duty and responsibility to exercise this right of franchise by casting our ballots and encouraging others to do so as well. It was on this premise that The American Legion's "Get Out the Vote" program was initiated shortly after the organization's inception. It remains just as important today as in elections past.

The National Americanism Commission encourages American legion posts and their members to become involved in their local and state elections as well as the midterm elections. Post involvement may come in the form of voter registration drives, sponsorship of town hall meetings and forums, simply promoting voter participation and other "Get Out The Vote" activities. Legionnaires at all levels may be significant players in the electoral voting process by serving as poll volunteers, poll workers, and by getting potential voters registered and out to the polls to exercise the right to vote.

All Legionnaires should demonstrate commitment for continued service to this country by being politically active as individuals, and most importantly, exercising their own right to vote. Do vote in all of your local, state and federal elections.

By working together as an organization we can make a difference by promoting an informed populace, participation in our government and involvement in its electoral process. We cannot forget that our government is "of the people, by the people and for the people" and our democratic republic can only function when "we" the people participate. With your help, The American Legion will once again clearly cast its vote for democracy.

- Chairman, National Americanism Commission

Joe Caoutte

Joseph E. Caoutte

In 1920, The American Legion was only one year old. Meeting in convention at Cleveland, Ohio, the fledgling organization took on a challenge to get Americans to the polls to vote on Election Day. That effort was intended to combat a growing apathy among Americans about its government. Those same challenges still exist today. It is still important that Americans be a politically informed citizenry, that they register to vote and vote every Election Day. That participation ensures a strong Republic.

The American Legion encourages its posts to sponsor activities to help voters be informed and involved each political season. Why? Because the Preamble to The American Legion's Constitution says, in part, that we exist "…to perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism…and to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation…"

An important part of any community-oriented campaign is the appointment of a strong, knowledgeable, enthusiastic person to coordinate the activity. This individual should be prepared to combat excuses, counter apathy, provide understanding, encourage participation and set the example.

Does this sound like an overwhelming responsibility? It's not. Any effort to activate an entire community involves four elements. They are: 1) The citizenry must realize that what they do will benefit them; 2) They must understand what is expected or required of them; 3) They must know clearly and simply how to go about it; and 4) They must set an example for America's youth.

"It's not the hand that signs the laws that holds the destiny of America. It's the hand that casts the ballot."

- President Harry S. Truman

Where to Begin…

The first step in organizing a Get Out The Vote (GOTV) program is to get a commitment from post officers. Your post may choose to develop a GOTV program that is as basic or as elaborate as desired. The next step is to organize within the post by forming a committee of interested Legion Family members and then assigning duties and responsibilities to distribute the workload. Post organization of a GOTV program might include one, a few or all of the following suggested activities:

Canvassing: for GOTV to be effective it needs personal contact with potential voters to stir interest and get the electorate to the polls. Secure assistance and permission from election officials to see if the law permits volunteers to act as deputy registrars or to distribute applications for mail registration. Personal contact may be door-to-door, phone, mail, or at a booth or registration table at public places or your own post.

Schools: make contact with local school(s) or school board(s) to promote GOTV in the education community. Ask if you may encourage 18-year-old citizens to register to vote, conduct a school assembly on citizenship responsibilities, or conduct "mock" elections with students—the possibilities are endless!

Transportation: focus on providing free transportation to the polls for those who may lack transportation, such as the elderly or physically handicapped. Posts can partner with auto dealers or car rental agencies to provide use of automobiles or vans. Volunteers could use their own reliable personal vehicles. Only drivers with good driving records and skills should be recruited. The contact number should be widely publicized and personal contact may be made with nursing homes, assisted living facilities, etc., to promote the opportunity.

Care giving: American Legion posts can "sit" with children, the handicapped or the elderly in place of an eligible voter if it makes a difference as to whether that caregiver can get out to the polls or not.

Business and Labor: seek cooperation of community businesses and labor groups to place registration and voting reminders in businesses and factories. Cooperative newspaper ads promoting registration and voting information may be sponsored by the post or by several businesses. See if voting reminders can be placed on restaurant menus and placemats, or on banking or other business statements. Suggest businesses offer a discount to those showing their voting registration card a week prior to the election.

Forums, Debates or Information Assemblies: Care must be taken to assure that any forum, candidates' debate or assembly sponsored or held in the Legion post is open to the public and that invitations are extended to all respective candidates. Candidates should not be invited to speak at or during an official meeting of The American Legion. By nature, The American Legion is nonpolitical and can neither engage in partisan politics nor promote candidacy of any person for public office. By limiting the number of candidates at a forum or meeting not open to the public, a post may be inviting embarrassment and possible legal action. Enlist the aid of a neutral party. The Legion can sponsor the event, but conduct of it may be best left to a mutually agreed upon and experienced moderator.