

Legislative Program Brochure



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LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

Objective: To provide a "professional, honest, collective voice" for all Total Air Force (Air Force Active Duty (AFAD), Air National Guard (ANG), Air Force Reserve Command (AFRC)) enlisted personnel in active, retired, or veteran status, and their families by educating elected leaders and staffs, Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) leaders and staffs, and the general public regarding plans, programs, legislative initiatives, and personal sacrifices in efforts to improve Air Force enlisted members quality-of-life benefits and programs.

Responsibilities: The AFSA International Legislative Program is the "unified voice" of the membership. Through guidance from the governing body and the delegates in attendance at the annual International meeting, AFSA International

carries out the legislative program at the federal level to include the White House, Congress, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and other offices/agencies as appropriate and necessary. All AFSA members are key players in the success of the program because there aren't enough military voters (due to mission and distribution) in most congressional districts to influence federally elected representatives by their power as a local voting bloc.

Although AFSA is non-partisan, AFSA is very successful because AFSA uses its collective power to influence the outcome of legislative and programming decisions. AFSA does this by educating elected officials and their staff members, Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs officials, and members in other offices/agencies as appropriate. Members of Congress face a wide variety of issues, and because less than 18 percent of the congressional members have any military (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserve) experience, it is very difficult for them to have detailed knowledge of all issues before them. AFSA provides a source of specialized knowledge, while placing on record the needs and beliefs of its membership about contemplated legislation and programs affecting the enlisted corps and their families. Letters from active, retired, and veteran military members are extremely important in assisting congressional members in acquiring specific knowledge. It is this combination of collective power, clear and factual communications, and elected and military leader education regarding important issues that leads to success and improved benefits for the enlisted corps.

It is important to note that the AFSA International President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) are the only AFSA personnel authorized to speak on AFSA's behalf. While others can repeat AFSA's already-established positions, only the International President and the CEO may expand on or redirect these positions. The CEO directs AFSA's registered lobbyists on the Association's position on issues so that AFSA is speaking from a united position on a particular subject.

The Military and Government Relations Directorate (M&GR), under the CEO's direction, is the office of primary responsibility and serves as the intermediary on behalf of the International President and CEO between AFSA's membership and federal leaders. AFSA International Headquarters is primarily responsible for AFSA's lobbying efforts.

AFSA Legislative Committee: AFSAM 100-1, Bylaw 10 and AFSAM 100-2, Principle 9, defines duties and responsibilities. The AFSA International Legislative Committee Chair works with the M&GR Director and the field activities' Legislative Chairs to address legislative matters. The Legislative Committee Chair notifies International Officers and Division Representatives of impending and related national legislation and recommends actions to be taken. The Legislative Chair continually encourages the submission of legislative proposals/issues by divisions/chapters. The AFSA Legislative Committee Chair and AFSA Headquarters staff consolidates these proposals for International Legislative Committee (normally at the AFSA Spring International Executive Council meeting) review. The International Legislative Committee, with assistance of the M&GR Director drafts the proposed AFSA Legislative Platform and presents it to the AFSA International Executive Council and to the delegates at the annual International meeting.

Division/Chapter Legislative Committee Representative: This person has an equally important role in regionally conducting the AFSA legislative program. The Division/Chapter Legislative Committee Chair/Representative monitors national legislation (<http://thomas.loc.gov>) affecting military members and their families; keeps division/chapters and their members informed regarding legislative developments of particular interest; and encourages and assists division/chapters and members in legislative letter-writing campaigns-especially when AFSA Headquarters issues a call for action. When feasible, the Division Legislative Committee Chair maintains liaison with other organizations, within the division's region, concerned with military or veterans' affairs. Also, communication with the International Legislative Chair is critical.

The division/chapter Legislative Activity Representative serves a critical role in the AFSA legislative program at the grassroots level. The division/chapter Legislative Activity Representative has these important responsibilities:

- Monitors local, state, and national legislation affecting military members and their families;
- With the division/chapter President, plans a strategy for the legislative portion of each upcoming division/chapter meeting;
- Keeps division/chapter members informed regarding legislative developments of particular interest;
- Cooperates fully with the Division Legislative Chairman; and Encourages and assists in letter-writing campaigns on legislative issues, especially when AFSA Headquarters calls for action.

NOTE: It is critical to always remain "politically non-partisan" and not support or oppose any individual candidate for political office. However, spokespersons can and should voice opinions concerning legislation and issues affecting AFSA members.

Grassroots Support: Support rendered to the legislative program by members of AFSA is essential to success in reaching our goals. On the national level, well-timed letters, e-mails, phone calls, and telegrams in response to headquarters guidance can make the difference between legislative failure and success. On the local and state level, such communication is no less important.

Headquarters Empowerment: Each year, the delegates at the annual AFSA International meeting mandate that the CEO, between International meetings, take all necessary action(s) to facilitate the success of AFSA's legislative programs.

Presenting Legislative Proposals: The AFSA membership directs the association legislative efforts; therefore, the AFSA International Headquarters looks to the membership for development of "proposals" that are designed to:

- Eliminate inequities based on policy or public law;
- Express opposition or support for a policy, program, or proposed legislation;
- Recommend change to a policy, program, or public law that would

enhance the attractiveness of an Air Force career, and the individual quality of life of service members and their families, both during and after their service; and

- Render support to worthy causes for those less fortunate, whether they be military, military dependents, or citizens in the AFSA community.

Developing a Proposal: First, determine if the issue is in the Legislative Platform or in work by AFSA Headquarters. Do this by reviewing the Legislative Platform (www.hqafsa.org). A quick phone call to the AFSA staff will answer the second part. It is inappropriate and shows a lack of involvement to submit a proposal on any issue that is already part of the Legislative Platform or in work by the Headquarters Staff. Next, answer the following questions:

- Does the issue only affect people in a local area or is it a broader (AF-wide, multiple bases, all retirees, most veterans, etc.) issue?
- How many and what category of people does the issue affect?
- Is the issue temporary in nature?
- What is the objective or preferred outcome to the proposed issue?

Submitting a Proposal: Individual members or AFSA/Auxiliary division/chapters may submit a legislative proposal to AFSA Headquarters. The proposal should clearly state:

- The background of the current practice or situation being addressed;
- The objective of the proposal;
- Those who are being affected or will be affected by a successful achievement of the proposal;
- Specific actions needed (including changes in policy or law) to achieve the proposal; and
- Anticipated benefits, costs, or ramifications if the proposal is achieved.

Legislative proposals must be coordinated through the appropriate AFSA division/chapter and the appropriate AFSA Division President to the AFSA Headquarters. After appropriate research, legislative proposals are provided to the AFSA International Legislative Committee for review and recommendation.

Proposals received by the International Headquarters or Legislative Committee after the AFSA Spring International Executive Council meeting, are held until the next scheduled Executive Council meeting. If adequate research can be performed to enable the International Legislative Committee to make an appropriate decision, the Legislative Chair may, upon approval of the International Legislative Committee and Executive Council, bring the proposal to the floor of the Annual International meeting for a vote. Copies of late proposals will probably not be available to the delegates in printed form, but presented verbally by the Legislative Chair.

Legislative Platform Adoption: All delegates attending the annual International

meeting vote on the proposed AFSA International Legislative Platform. Those proposals accepted become part of the coming year's AFSA Legislative Platform and form the basis for International lobbying and testimonial actions.

Involvement in Local and State Legislation: Divisions/chapters are encouraged to become involved in local and state legislative efforts. Their roles may be as follows:

- Monitor state legislation affecting active, retired, and veteran AFAD, ANG, and AFRC members and their families;
- Keep division/chapters within the state, and the division/chapter Representative/President informed regarding developments;
- Visit the state capital and, if possible, get on mailing lists for information bulletins/notices affecting the membership; and
- When feasible, maintain liaison with other local and state organizations concerned with military or veteran's affairs to obtain cooperation and support.

A key resource to involvement in State issues can be the State Command Chief Master Sergeant for the Air National Guard. The ANG is a "state" resource when not mobilized, and the person in this position is often a state native. These individuals can be great assets. Also, this may allow access to an often untapped pool of potential members.

AFSA Headquarters' role in support of local and state legislation is to provide limited guidance and support. Due to the uniqueness of local and state legislative programs, division/chapter legislative functionaries will provide primary development and support of these efforts. Caution must be taken when dealing with state and local issues to not in any manner give an indication local views represent the AFSA International (the entire Association) as supporting or not supporting the local effort.

A Successful Legislative Program: Division/chapter Legislative Representatives should retain legislative publications from AFSA Headquarters as a reference file to refresh their memory on the basics of an issue as developments occur or as questions arise from members. Representatives should feel free to contact the International Legislative Chair or M&GR for clarification on legislative issues, and to obtain updated information to provide division/chapter members during meetings. In addition, members, legislative representatives/chairs should use <http://thomas.loc.gov> to track/read federal legislation. Following are other resources that are helpful in conducting a successful legislative program.

AFSA Legislative Support Documents: AFSA International Headquarters publishes several e-documents to support the legislative program. Updated legislative information is provided on the AFSA Website (hqafsa.org), through Headline Roundups, Washington Reports, Alerts, and through the AFSA Magazine. Clarification can always be obtained by calling AFSA Headquarters, the Military and Government Relations Directorate at 800-638-0594, or by e-mail at staff@hqafsa.org. AFSA Headquarters also maintains its Legislative Action

Center on the Website to keep members informed on specific legislation and letter-writing campaigns.

News Media: The news media regularly provide up-to-the-minute information pertaining to congressional action. While Division/Chapter Presidents and Legislative Chairs should pay close attention to these developments, it is also important to call AFSA Headquarters **before** alerting the division/chapter membership or publishing information pertaining to a particular issue.

Legislative Programs at Division/Chapter Meetings: Follow AFSA Headquarters' lead by encouraging letters, e-mails, and phone calls to representatives. During each meeting try to initiate meaningful action members can take. Provide sample letters and have pertinent addresses and phone numbers available. Point out Action Alerts for letter-writing campaigns being pursued by AFSA Headquarters. The heart of AFSA's mission is lobbying; to be successful; the division/chapter must be an active part of the effort.

Representatives should coordinate with the Division/Chapter President to include "Legislative Issues" on the agenda. The goal is to inform members of the issues and get them involved because they are instrumental to any successful lobbying campaign. In addition, Division/Chapter Presidents should immediately share legislative-oriented material with the Legislative Trustees. Refer to AFSAM 100-2, Principle 11, Section 12.

Membership Involvement through Grassroots Lobbying: Grassroots lobbying is what concerned Americans do to influence their Legislators' decisions. It involves knowing facts about issues of concern and contacting elected officials by personal visits, letters, e-mails, or telephone calls. Such lobbying is important because the elected leaders must know the wishes of their constituents before they can respond appropriately. Additionally, grassroots efforts greatly increase AFSA's chances of legislative success by complementing and reinforcing the Headquarters' message. It is every citizen's right to influence how his/her elected representatives vote, and every citizen has the responsibility to speak up for good government.

Meeting with a Member of Congress: A personal visit with a Congressional member is an effective way to emphasize interest in an issue or bill. However, remember that only the AFSA International President or CEO may speak on AFSA's behalf. Also, when visiting Congressional members or testifying, AFSA division/chapter members or officers **cannot** state that they represent AFSA, but instead may state that they are members of AFSA and have discussed the specific issue with members of their specific division/chapter and the division/chapter's consensus is ... (state the position).

Tips to remember to have a successful, productive meeting:

- Make an appointment: state the subject to be discussed, the time needed, and identify those who will be attending the meeting. Ask for as little time as is required; it is far easier for a congressional staffer to schedule brief meetings than it is to schedule lengthier ones;
- When attending as a group, select a spokesperson to do the talking;

- Know the facts. If you're talking about a bill, know the number and title;
- Present the facts in a concise, orderly, and positive manner;
- If supporting legislation, relate its positive impact and the problems/inequities it corrects;
- If opposing legislation, relate its negative impact and, when appropriate, suggest alternatives.
- Leave fact sheets, if possible;
- Discuss and encourage questions:
- Be factual, be professional, be tactful, be concise; don't be emotional!
- Ask for favorable consideration, thank the legislator for his/her time, and then leave promptly.

Letters, E-Mails, and Telephone Calls to Congress: Constituents' letters, e-mails, and phone calls can be powerful and show concern about the issue. In many cases, a Constituent expressing a viewpoint can change a Legislator's mind, particularly when a Legislator is wavering on an issue. AFSA provides "sample" letters on its Web site, in its Legislative Action Center, on a variety of military- and veterans-related issues. These letters are templates to help individuals compose personal letters to their elected representatives. Sending the same "cookie-cutter" message may catch attention initially, but rarely much serious consideration. Telephone calls can also be very effective, especially when there isn't time for a letter. The impact can be just as effective and often more personal. To contact a member of Congress, call the U.S. Capitol switchboard, (202) 224-3121 (Senate) or (202) 225-3121 (House), and ask to be connected with the member's office. Regardless of the method, it is important to present the message effectively and objectively without undue emotion. Members should not be discouraged if, following their effort; the Legislator's vote is still unfavorable. For increased success, keep abreast of the issues and refer to AFSA's legislative brochures and other publications.

Special Legislative-Related Projects: Division/chapter members should participate in legislative-related activities. Examples of these activities are Legislative Awareness Weeks, letter-writing campaigns, legislator visits, POW/MIA recognition ceremonies, base enlisted and commissioned leaders informational visits, voter registration drives, and various civic ceremonies and activities. Having members involved in AFSA's important mission through related projects is essential to success. Contact AFSA's M&GR for specific dates, details, or guidance. Involvement leads to commitment, and the result is greater association effectiveness.

Political Activities of Active Members of the Air Force: It is essential that all active (AFAD, ANG, AFRC) members be aware of the allowable provisions of Air Force Instruction 51-902, Political Activities of Members of the U.S. Air Force. AFSA officials at all levels must be aware of these provisions to ensure that legislative involvement be vigorous while ensuring that prohibited, politically-related, actions do not compromise AFSA's program. Division/chapter members must be careful not to distribute any literature from partisan organizations (AFSA is NON PARTISAN AS DIRECTED IN THE BYLAWS). Organizations become partisan when endorsing or supporting candidates or proposals based on political party affiliation. AFSA does NOT endorse candidates or political parties. DOD

Directive 5410.18, clearly states the DOD's policy regarding the maintenance of partisan political neutrality:

"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."