



The Legislative Program Guide

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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, DoD, VA, and other offices/agencies as appropriate. Every AFSA member is a key player 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, we are 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, DoD, VA, and members in other offices/agencies as appropriate. Members of Congress face a wide variety of issues, and because less than 20 percent of the congressional members have any military (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserve) experience, it is 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 duty, retired, and veteran military members are extremely important in assisting congressional members in acquiring specific knowledge. This can easily be done through the AFSA Legislative Action Center. 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 Executive Director are the only AFSA personnel authorized to speak on AFSA's behalf. The Executive Director 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 Executive Director's direction, is the office of primary responsibility and serves as the intermediary on behalf of the International President and Executive Director 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 9, Section 3 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 solicits 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 Committee or Council meeting) review. The International Legislative Committee drafts the proposed AFSA Legislative Platform and presents it to the AFSA International Executive Council and delegates at the annual International meeting for their approval.

Division/Chapter Legislative Committee Representative: AFSAM 100-2, Principle 10 lists legislative as one of the required activities for a chapter and division. The person performing this extremely important (AFSA Pillar Legislation) role has a tremendous duty and responsibility. The Division/Chapter Legislative Committee Chair or representative is responsible monitoring national legislation through the AFSA Legislative Action Center (<http://www.hqafsa.org>) and the Library of Congress-Home (<https://www.loc.gov>) affecting military members and their families; keeping the 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. This is now typically done through the AFSA Legislative Action Center and the tool, Voter Voice. The division legislative committee chair should maintain liaison with other organizations within the division's region concerned with military or veterans' affairs. Also, communication with the AFSA International Legislative Committee is absolutely vital to program success.

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

- Keep membership aware and educated on issues affecting them on the various local levels of the state(s), districts, counties, and cities within their chapter areas

- 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/DRU Liaison; and
- Encourages and assists in letter-writing campaigns on legislative issues, especially when AFSA Headquarters calls for action. (This can easily be done through the AFSA Legislative Action Center.)
- Participate and promote AFSA's Legislative Awareness Week.

Note: It is imperative that AFSA remains “politically non-partisan” and not support or oppose any individual candidate for political office. Members are still free to voice their opinion concerning candidates when not speaking or representing AFSA. Moreover, members can and should voice their opinion on legislation and issues affecting AFSA members and their families.

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, and phone calls in response to solicited requests and calls for action can make the difference between legislative failure and success. On the local and state level, such communication is no less important. Again, this is typically done through the AFSA's Legislative Action Center and the tool, Voter Voice.

Headquarters Empowerment: Each year, the delegates at the annual AFSA International meeting mandate that the Executive Director, 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.
- If the proposal is a DoD or Air Force policy then it will not make the platform but will be worked through the International President and Executive Director during visits and meetings with the CSAF and CMSAF.
- 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.

- 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, please determine if the issue is already a part of the Legislative Platform or currently being worked by AFSA M&GR Staff. You can do this by reviewing the Legislative Platform (www.hqafsa.org), then clicking on the Legislative tab in the top blue bar. A quick phone call or e-mail to the Legislative Committee Chair or AFSA M &GR staff will answer the second part. One should not submit a proposal for an item that is already on the platform unless there is a significant change or the item needs expanded or possibly removed. 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 division/chapters may submit a legislative proposal to AFSA Legislative Committee or the AFSA M&GR Staff. 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, then the appropriate AFSA division president, then the AFSA Legislative Committee or to the AFSA M&GR Staff. After appropriate research, legislative proposals are provided to the AFSA International Executive Council through the AFSA 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 may 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. Moreover, the delegates typically vote at the convention to authorize the AFSA Staff to act on any new or important legislative issues that may arise that impacts or affects the general well-being, values, or benefits of the general membership.

Outside Involvement and Partnership: Often times it is important for AFSA to partner with other professional military organizations such the Military Coalition which we are a member. The Military Coalition is comprised of 32 organizations representing more than 5.5 million members of the uniformed services--active, reserve, retired, survivors, veterans--and their families. This coalition and partnership often gives us a greater voice and impact on Capitol Hill. Occasionally we may partner with one or two professional organizations in order to garner a stronger voice, or it is an issue that may not directly impact the other services. AFSA and the Military Coalition or other professional organizations do not always agree on issues. In those rare cases, AFSA will always yield to desires of our association and membership.

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. Additionally this may allow access to an often untapped pool of potential

members for the Air National Guard. Likewise, most states have a military and government affairs committee consisting of local veterans, retirees, guard, and other civic leaders. This is another great untapped source of information and assistance on the local level that is easy to leverage.

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 such as the AFSA Headline Roundup and the AFSA Washington Report as a reference for issues and insights on current legislative initiatives and issues on Capitol Hill and in the Air Force. Moreover, the AFSA Legislative Action Center and our Advocacy Campaigns on Voter Voice should be a primary tool for your legislative arena. Representatives should feel free to contact the International Legislative Chair or M&GR for clarification on legislative issues. In addition, members, legislative representatives/chairs should again use the AFSA Legislative Action Center and the Thomas Library of Congress to track/read federal legislation. Following are other resources that are helpful in conducting a successful legislative program.

News Media: The news media regularly provides 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 M&GR Staff if you are unsure of the issue and validity of the item. Most importantly, AFSA must remain neutral and non-partisan; if information is biased or tainted it should not be used.

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 or let them know where this information can be obtained on the AFSA website. 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 10, 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. The simplest and easiest tool for your use in the legislative process is the AFSA Legislative Action Center and Voter Voice.

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 Executive Director 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; give the subject, the time needed, and identify those who will be attending the meeting. Ask for as little time as is required; it's easier for a staffer to schedule brief meetings than a lengthy one.
- 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 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 and discuss/ask questions.
- Be factual, professional, tactful, and concise. Don't be emotional.

- Ask for favorable consideration, thank them for their time and leave.

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 (the AFSA 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 literary 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 the AFSA International Legislative Committee or 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* and DoD Directive 1344.10, *Political Activity by Members of the Armed Forces*. AFSA officials and members must be aware of these provisions to ensure that legislative involvement is vigorous yet, all the 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 nonpartisan as directed by our 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, *Public Affairs Community Relations Policy* 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."

Final Thoughts: The focus of the Air Force Sergeants Association is on improving the quality of the lives of current and past total force enlisted Airmen and their families. We primarily do this through our legislative advocacy program. AFSA has four registered lobbyist who work hard in Washington to influence Congress and the Administration to amend Public Law--to create, maintain, and protect quality-of-life programs. The chapters have an important role in the grassroots infrastructure that supports the Headquarters' important work. A strong Legislative Program at the chapter level is extremely important and the heart and soul of the legislative program.