



VFW Urges Military Veterans' Community to Vote

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the nation's oldest major veterans' organization is urging more than 50 million Americans in the military veterans' community to get out and vote this November.

"We represent one of the largest voting blocs in the nation, but our calls to action on Capitol Hill and in the White House are meaningless if we don't make our voices heard and our votes count," said Glen Gardner, the national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries.

Both Republican and Democratic candidates for president, and those running for House and Senate seats, are heavily courting the military vote this year. At stake nationally are more than 50 million votes from a military voting bloc of 23.5 million veterans, 2.2 million uniformed personnel and their families, despite national polls that would suggest the military vote is statistically even politically and ideologically.

Three CNN/Gallup/USA Today polls taken during the 2004 presidential campaign revealed that 47 percent of America's veterans aligned themselves politically as Republican, 42 percent as Democrat and 11 percent as Independent. Ideologically, they identified themselves as 43 percent conservative, 43 percent moderate and 16 percent liberal. More important, however, is the fact 74 percent of veterans voted in the 2004 presidential election compared to 63 percent of the general population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"The military veterans' vote matters because we are traditionally strong on national defense, homeland security, and people programs that take care of our nation's veterans, military personnel and their families," explained Gardner, a Vietnam veteran from Round Rock, Texas.

The VFW national commander has encouraged his 2.2 million members to wear their VFW or Auxiliary caps to political campaign rallies as a visible reminder that the veterans' vote counts. What he does not want is for the national organization to be perceived as politically partisan or supportive of one candidate over another.

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“The VFW is a nonprofit veterans’ service organization that is prohibited from endorsing political candidates,” he explained, “but our membership has free rein as Americans to campaign and vote for the candidates of their choice. They have a vested interest – a duty – to ensure that everyone knows that veterans matter, veterans care and veterans vote.”