

The Candidate's Field Manual:

The Candidate's Field Manual is the Veterans Campaign signature guidebook and the only campaign manual designed specifically for veterans. At nearly 200 pages of veteran- oriented strategies, anecdotes and advice, including a comprehensive directory of elected veterans, it is a must have for any serious candidate. With submissions from members of The Truman National Security Project, the former director of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, and nationally recognized political fundraisers, consultants and campaign staff, the Field Manual will give you the information to build a successful campaign. Each campaign workshop participant receives a free Field Manual.

Veterans Campaign is always trying to expand and improve the Manual to better equip you to succeed. With that in mind, a new chapter on issues unique to military spouses is offered for Homefront Rising 2019 attendees.

Why Military Spouses Should Run

By Libby Jamison

Military spouses are uniquely positioned to run for office. Like their spouses in uniform, they are a diverse community, service-oriented, and skilled at problem-solving with limited resources. Although frequent military moves are an obstacle to geographic stability for active duty families, there are many military spouse qualities which make them excellent candidates once established in a community:

- Military families have strong personal and social media networks spanning multiple states.
- Living in multiple locations gives military spouses valuable insight on different approaches to education, employment, social services, and other community needs.
- On average, military spouses are more educated than their civilian counterparts.
- Military spouses intimately understand the consequences of U.S. foreign policy.
- The military spouse narrative implies integrity, service, and commitment.

Military spouses have a long history of calling upon elected officials to meet the needs of servicemembers and military families. In 1969, the National Military Families Association was founded by a handful of military wives who wanted to make sure their widowed friends were properly cared for. Two years later, the Survivor Benefit Plan became law, providing an option for a continuous lifetime annuity for dependents of retirees. This story has been repeated over and over on issues from military spouse employment to supporting military caregivers to resources for Gold Star families.

While military spouses are powerful advocates, the number of military spouses in elected office is miniscule. Nikki Haley served as Governor of South Carolina while her husband served in the state's National Guard. Former Senator Kelly Ayotte and current Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers are married to former Naval aviators. Army veteran spouse Jocelyn Benson was elected as Michigan's Secretary of State in 2018. Representative Pete Strauber, elected to the 116th Congress, is married to an Iraq War veteran. Others serve at various levels of government across the country.

Military families and our greater communities would be well-served by increased numbers of military spouses running for office. As a community comprised of approximately 91 percent women, increased military spouse representation would also assist in achieving gender parity in elected positions.



Special Considerations for Military Spouse Candidates

Most of the material in this manual is also applicable to military spouses. However, there are several considerations that uniquely apply to military spouse candidates. This chapter will explore the distinct challenges and recommended strategies for military spouses seeking elected office.

Deciding to run

Active duty military families move on average every two-three years based upon the needs of the Department of Defense (DoD). For a military spouse building community ties in advance of a campaign, frequent locations are a challenge to establishing a presence. Before running, you must decide whether to do so while still subject to Permanent Changes of Station (PCS) or to wait until your active duty spouse leaves active duty. Reserve and National Guard spouses face similar decisions when factoring in potential deployments or relocations to advance a servicemember's career.

As with any potential candidate, timing plays a significant role in deciding when and where to run. Potential candidates should be monitoring when a seat opens and who else is running. Military spouses must think about their experience (paid and volunteer), the issues which matter the most to them and their community, and the time commitment required when deciding on when to run and at which level (local, state, or federal). You should also research applicable election and residency laws, district demographics, the history of previous elections, and how much money previous candidates raised.

Military spouses who plan on running while the servicemember remains on active duty should be prepared to address concerns about future relocation orders during a term of service. While geobatching (an unofficial term for “geographic bachelor” used when a military family chooses to live in a different location from the servicemember) is a reasonable option elected by military families for a variety of reasons (school, jobs, etc.), it may be a foreign concept to many civilian families. Part of your communications plan should include a response to these concerns.

It is also helpful to have a family conversation about balancing a campaign and household obligations. Will training and deployment schedules interfere with childcare needs? Are there friends and family nearby to help with the campaign or childcare? Will you continue working or can the family afford to lose your income during the campaign?

In 2018, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) ruled that federal candidates can use campaign funds to pay for childcare costs related to running for office. To date, eight states, including New York, Louisiana, and Kentucky, have ruled similarly for state-level candidates. State House candidate Caitlin Clarkson Pereira recently made headlines after the Connecticut State Elections Enforcement Commission ruled that she could use privately raised campaign funds, but not public funds from Connecticut’s Citizens’ Election Program for child care. She is appealing that ruling, with support from the Lieutenant Governor.

Military spouse candidates also shouldn’t discount the military community when it comes to supporting a fellow spouse. Don’t be afraid to ask for help, but be honest about the financial, family, and military obligations that will weigh against the needs of campaign.

If you decide that the time isn’t right to run at your current duty station, don’t let that time go to waste. You can still establish your credentials, grow your network, and prepare to run at a later date. Seek out community boards or appointments that coincide with the length of your time at that duty station. If you find yourself at a remote location or overseas, don’t discount the value of volunteer service. Organizing the Family Readiness Group or working with the Parent Teacher Association demonstrates leadership and problem-solving skills.

Building your network

Whether you run while your servicemember is still on active duty or wait until after separation from the service, it is critical to build a support system in advance of launching a campaign. Military spouses have an advantage to many others in this regard, with the ability to build a large network across multiple locations. While contacts in jurisdictions outside of the electoral district cannot vote for you, they can donate!

Don't wait - start collecting names and contact information now with something as simple as a spreadsheet or a Mailchimp account. Social media is a useful tool for military families to remain connected, even after a PCS. Consider a LinkedIn account to maintain professional contacts as well as Facebook or Instagram for more personal interactions. If recognized as Military Spouse of the Year or another honorary title or appointed to a panel or commission, think about establishing a Facebook public figure page that can be converted for campaign purposes.

Rules and regulations

Previous chapters discuss in detail the rules and regulations when it comes to service- members engaging in the political arena. Be sure to familiarize yourself with these prohibitions on servicemember's participation in the political activity, including:

- Participating in partisan fundraising activities;
- Speaking at a partisan political gathering;
- Wearing their uniform at a campaign or election event; and
- Soliciting votes or advocating for a partisan party, candidate or cause, including on social media.

If your servicemember is on active duty, he or she is prohibited from even working behind the scenes on your campaign. The good news is that your servicemember can display a normal-sized campaign bumper sticker on his/her car!

While these regulations do not apply to military spouses, it is important to keep in mind the various restrictions on partisan activities for servicemembers as you form your campaign message and communications plan. You don't want to get your spouse or other servicemembers in trouble and your opponent will be looking for opportunities to point out mistakes, so be sure to comply with the applicable regulations. If you use images of your servicemember spouse in uniform or reference his/her rank, grade, and service affiliation, you must consult DoD Directive 1344.10 and include an appropriate disclaimer. Your campaign must not give the impression of official sponsorship, approval, or endorsement by the military.

Importantly, there are also restrictions that apply to you as a military spouse if you are running for office while living in base housing. You may not display partisan political signage visible to public in military installation housing. Candidates may not use installation or facilities for campaign activities. Arguably, this means that all your campaign planning and fundraising must take place away from your residence if it is on base. Consider requesting an opinion from the base legal office if you want to conduct any campaign activities at home, even simple volunteer meetings or fundraising calls. Election oversight entities like the FEC require a physical address for the campaign. Since your staff and volunteers may not have base access anyway, establishing an accessible office away from the installation is important.

Talking service as a military spouse

As the manual has already discussed, military service alone is not enough to propel a campaign to victory. Likewise, military spouses cannot rely solely on a narrative of service. As you prepare to run, consider your experiences and expertise gained as a military spouse (and your other roles) and how that relates to the issues that are relevant to your community. For example, if you are running for a school board position, talk about your experiences enrolling your children in different schools as you moved around to different duty stations, what was good or bad about those districts, and how it helped shape your approach to education policy. If you have struggled with navigating the Tricare system, you can talk about those issues as a segue into a healthcare discussion. It is easier to start talking about things that are familiar to you and your role as a military spouse is probably part of that comfort zone.

Be prepared for the media and the public to talk about your spouse's service first and your accomplishments and goals second. Have a strategy in mind to open with your story of service - it can be a powerful tool to garner recognition and establish your credentials - but have a narrative ready to shift the conversation to the issues that matter in the campaign and the community.

Carpetbagging

A frequent concern heard from military spouses is how to address allegations that they are not originally from a district or haven't been there long enough to represent its constituency. Veterans face similar issues when running in a new location after years of service around the globe. Look no further than the carpetbagging accusations made against Amy McGrath in the 2018 Congressional race.

The good news is that these types of attacks frequently backfire. While you will have to make an effort to build community ties before running, do not let this concern stop you from engaging in your new home. Most citizens understand and appreciate that you are committing to a location as your new home.

For a solid example of a response to this type of allegation, see the statement from Allison Russo, a military spouse elected to the Ohio House of Representatives in 2018, after another candidate jabbed at her prior residency and involvement in public service. While speaking out on a misleading mailer, her opponent made sure to point out that (then candidate) Russo was not a resident of the State of Ohio nor involved in public service during the period in question. Representative Russo responded powerfully as follows:



STATEMENT FROM ALLISON RUSSO ON FALSE ADVERTISING IN HER RACE

October 11, 2018

I'm glad that Erik Yassenoff called out the lies in the Ohio Republican Party's recent advertising. Candidates should certainly be held accountable for their voting record, but what ORP had in their mailer about my record was pure fiction. Mr. Yassenoff and I agree that alternative facts and falsehoods have no place in our campaign.

Sadly, the ORP also has a long history of diminishing the experiences of women who run for public office, which is why I am deeply disappointed that Mr. Yassenoff used his statement calling for "civility" as an opportunity to both call out my Ohio residency and belittle my history of public service. What Mr. Yassenoff failed to acknowledge is that I am married to a combat veteran and a former federal law enforcement officer. While my husband was active duty, this meant multiple assignments and moves for our family to North Carolina, Germany, Delaware, and, later, the Washington, D.C. area, where, as a civilian, he worked in the U.S. Intelligence community on counter-terrorism operations. Once my husband finished serving his country in those capacities, we chose to settle in this district to raise our family.

I would also remind Mr. Yassenoff that public service is not limited to holding political office or political appointment. While my husband was repeatedly deployed overseas and I was raising our two oldest children, I was also working on the healthcare needs of our men and women in uniform. I have spent nearly 20 years working with the Department of Defense's Military Health System and TRICARE program. My history as a military spouse and health policy expert has deeply shaped my approach to public service and public policy. Mr. Yassenoff's statement shows a profound disconnect from both non-political forms of public service and the sacrifices made by Ohio's veterans and military families every day. I understand that it can be difficult to grasp the depth of these sacrifices and challenges if you have never directly experienced them, but those are exactly the types of biases and misperceptions that I hope to address in the Ohio House.

Until then, I will continue to focus on my own campaign, talking to voters about the issues that people in this district care about - affordable health care, job creation, and a good education for every family in our state.

Conclusion

Military spouses are a unique and underrepresented population well-equipped to serve our communities in elected office. Regardless of where your servicemember's career journey stands, it's never too early to start building your network, organizing your contacts, and connecting to your community in preparation for a run for office. A military spouse narrative does not guarantee victory, but your story of service, commitment to country, and experiences with diverse and different communities lays the foundation for a successful campaign and meaningful public service.