

Marine back on Facebook after fueling debate

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(AP) -- A Camp Pendleton Marine has relaunched his Facebook page criticizing President Barack Obama's health care policy after prompting a controversy over free speech that won him the support of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Sgt. Gary Stein took down his "Armed Forces Tea Party" page on Tuesday after he was called back to base.

Stein, 24, of Temecula said his superiors asked him to review Defense Department policy on political activities after they learned he was scheduled to give an interview to MSNBC about his Facebook page.

Stein relaunched the page Wednesday. By Thursday, it had nearly 500 fans and had received a flurry of comments, most praising him.

Stein can continue to administer the Facebook page as long as he doesn't violate the Pentagon's directive on political activities, Master Gunnery Sgt. Rhys A. Evans, a spokesman for the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, said Thursday.

"We're not in any means trying to censor Sgt. Stein. Not at all," Evans said. "More than anything, we just want to make sure that he was informed so that he doesn't venture into further (actions) where he would violate any rules."

Stein wasn't threatened or ordered to take down his page, nor will he be

investigated or disciplined, Evans said.

"It was just a matter of Marines taking care of Marines," Evans said.

In an effort to keep the military from appearing to interfere with politics, Pentagon policy prohibits active-duty service members from taking part in partisan political fundraising, vote-solicitation or campaigning.

They also cannot speak before a partisan political gathering, run a partisan political club or take part in any broadcast or group discussion as an advocate or opponent of a partisan political party, candidate or cause.

On Wednesday, the ACLU's San Diego chapter sent a letter to the San Diego County base contending that Stein's being recalled to base Tuesday before he was to appear on MSNBC chilled his First Amendment rights.

In a statement, the chapter argued that service members have a right to "discuss and critique the government's policies and conduct."

Stein, a meteorologist with the expeditionary force who did a tour of duty in Iraq, said Wednesday that he may tone down his [Facebook](#) page and probably won't identify himself on it as an active-duty Marine.

"I haven't done anything wrong to even think about doing anything different, but I'll take a little more caution in what I say and make sure I put things tactfully," Stein said. "And make sure I explain that when I put something on there, these are my views and not the view of the Marine Corps."

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