AMERICAN LEGION, VFW: FUND THE WAR

Morin, Kurpius urge Congress to remove excess legislation from defense appropriations.

The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars have a very simple message for Congress: pass a war-funding bill void of any extra legislation as soon as possible for the sake of U.S. troops serving in harm's way.

In a joint letter sent to House and Senate leaders on April 11 and delivered to every member of Congress, American Legion National Commander Paul A. Morin and VFW National Commander Gary Kurpius made their point crystal clear: “This critical funding request must be void of any language that directs the conduct of military operations or troop movements based on timelines established by Congress rather than the commanders on the ground, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or by the commander in chief.”

Morin and Kurpius told Congress they should consider and debate the president's fiscal year 2007 Defense Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill to Congress over two months ago. I don’t understand how some in Congress can play ‘chicken’ with troops’ lives, training, equipment and unit deployments that affect all our military families too. I just don’t get it, and I’m not alone.

“As leaders of our respective wartime veterans’ service organizations, we strongly encourage the removal of all restrictive language designed to influence the conduct of military operations and troop movements. Our knowledge about warfare and the evils of terrorism were learned in the hard school of experience. With all due respect to you and your colleagues – first things first, take care of the troops. They are the ones placed in harm’s way.”

“You were wrong to force a showdown with a president who vowed beforehand to veto any measure that contained artificial troop withdrawal language,” both commanders told Congress. “And you were wrong to add almost $20 billion, for programs unrelated to the war, on top of the $103 billion requested by the Defense Department.

In a nutshell, not funding direct combat operations is the same as having your hands tied in a knife fight, they said.

“Unrealistic restrictions and troop withdrawal timelines will tie the hands of our battlefield commanders to maneuver their forces,” Kurpius said. “That will break the morale of our troops in the field – and to those of us who have been there and done that, morale means everything in a war zone.”

Morin and Kurpius agreed that there are signs of hope and important,” Kurpius said. “So with all due respect to the small majority in the new Congress who voted to withdraw most of our 140,000 troops from Iraq next year – you are wrong.”

“Congress’ failure to fund the troops sends a clear message to them,” Morin said. “The commander in chief sent this bill to Congress over two months ago. I don’t understand how some in Congress can play ‘chicken’ with troops’ lives, training, equipment and unit deployments that affect all our military families too. I just don’t get it, and I’m not alone.

“Everyone wants the war to end, but how it ends is just as
Dispatch

COMMANDEER'S MESSAGE

New Congress, same resolve to protect the flag

When the Senate version of the flag amendment was defeated by a single vote a year ago, some thought The American Legion might give up on the cause we took up 18 years ago when the Supreme Court took away the right to protect Old Glory from desecration. But in fact, our resolve has never been stronger. We are not giving up, nor will we ever.

Early in the 110th Congress, House Resolution 12 was introduced in by Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., and referred to the Committee on the Judiciary. It now rests with the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

The language of H.J. Res. 12 remains uncompromised: "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." It's simple and to the point. It doesn't give Congress the absolute right to protect the flag; rather, it makes it possible for Congress to send an amendment to the 50 states for ratification. If the amendment passes - and enemies to it have introduced an amendment to ban flag burning in the Senate last summer wasn't a mortal blow last June 26 was the closest we've come to passage, but it was the fourth time the amendment failed when put to a Senate vote. The first step this year is to find Republican and Democrat sponsors alike; companion legislation to H.J. Res. 12 has yet to be introduced in the Senate. All 100 senators are fair game, whether or not they've supported the amendment in the past. Call them either at their Washington or state offices. Send them a letter, though you should know that mail sent to Congress undergoes time-consuming inspections before it can be delivered.

The easiest way to reach your elected officials is through The American Legion's Legislative Action Center at capwiz.com/legion/home/. Through the Legislative Action Center, you can reach any member of Congress via e-mail, as well as get updates on various pieces of legislation moving through both chambers.

Make your voices heard, as you have in the past. Contact your senators and urge them to introduce the flag amendment in this session of the 110th Congress. Contact your representatives and urge them to put their names next to H.J. Res. 12.

The narrow defeat of the flag amendment in the Senate last summer was a mortal wound; it was progress, at last bringing us to within one vote of our goal. It's going to take a strong grassroots effort to raise the flag amendment on the national agenda this year, as The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance did so effectively in 2006. In 2007, it's more important than ever to tell Congress that we are not going to back down on this one.

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National Commander

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Still Serving America
Does your post have a unique community program, an innovative recruiting method or a creative way of generating the legion message that could be implemented at posts across the country? Tell us how you post and its members are Still Serving America. In submitting your information, include your full name, address and telephone number. Send your items, labeled Still Serving America, to the correspondence address at left.

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The American Legion Library
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Veterans’ Affairs and Rehabilitation
(202) 861-2790
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Programs
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jailgovn@legion.org
www.baseball.legion.org
American Legion Child Welfare Foundation
(317) 630-1102
mail@legion.org

American Legion Endowment Fund
(317) 630-1321
ia@legion.org

Boys Nation
(317) 630-1207
rengel@legion.org

Family Support Network
(317) 630-1395
(800) 594-4098
familysupport@legion.org

Junior Shooting Sports
(317) 630-1249
mbsus@legion.org
Legion College
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National Emergency Fund
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ia@legion.org
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mbus@legion.org

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PLANNER

MAY
4-6 Auxiliary National Workshop in Indianapolis
5-6 SAL Spring National Executive Committee Meeting in Indianapolis
6 Child Welfare Foundation board of directors meeting in Indianapolis
7-10 Spring Meetings in Indianapolis
19 Armed Forces Day
24-27 "Race to the Top" event in Indianapolis
28 Memorial Day
31 End of Child Welfare Foundation award year

JUNE
14 Flag Day

JULY
1 Children & Youth reports due to National Headquarters
4 Independence Day
15 Child Welfare Foundation grant applications due to National Headquarters
30-28 American Legion Boys Nation in Washington
21-28 Auxiliary Girls Nation in Washington
26-28 National Membership Workshop in Indianapolis
26-28 Department Service Officers School in Indianapolis

AUGUST
7 Purple Heart Day
NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Reuniting a family

Guatemala Post 2 commander helps bring together a father and son.

By Robert W. Spanogle

Guatemala Post 2 Commander William J. "Bill" Shetz believes The American Legion's tradition of "veterans helping veterans" doesn't just apply to the norm, such as an American Legion service officer helping a fellow veteran file a Department of Veterans Affairs medical claim. To Shetz, it's helping out in any way possible, which is why the commander recently went to the trouble of helping reunite a father and his son.

On March 6, Shetz received a phone call from Alba Garzaro, who requested assistance in contacting her ex-husband, Gazzaro. Gazzaro had married Williams Charles Wilson, a U.S. Marine stationed in Guatemala in the 1980s, and they had a son together. The family moved to Hawaii when Williams was transferred to Okinawa for non-dependents tour of duty. Garzaro and their son, Kenet Montgomery Wilson, returned to Guatemala, and Garzaro and Williams eventually divorced. For years Kenet asked about his father, but Gazzaro didn't know how to contact Williams.

Now 22 years old, Kenet had renewed his interest in trying to contact his father, and Garzaro contacted the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City to start the search. Because of the Freedom of Information Act, embassy officials could not release any information. A friend of Garzaro's who works at the embassy suggested that she contact the American Legion in Antigua to see what if anything they could do. That led to the call to Shetz.

"When I was contacted, I was immediately concerned as to whether or not the father would want this reconnection.", Shetz said. "I thought it out for a day or two and then decided that I would try to contact the father and only if he was interested would I release the information to the mother and son."

Using the information provided by Garzaro, Shetz found a Web site from the town in Texas where Williams graduated from high school. He then did a name search on the white pages from the local phone book and came back with a long list of Williams from the area. Shetz came up empty, so he called Garzaro back and was able to get the name of Williams' mother. He was able to find her name through the white pages and called her. The call paid off, and Shetz was able to get a phone number for Williams.

"The first thing you worry about is getting a positive reaction from the dad," Shetz said. "I called the number provided, and Williams' current wife answered the phone. When she heard I was calling from Guatemala, the first thing she asked was 'Is anything wrong with my son?' Right then I knew that everything was fine. I responded no; however, his son would like to contact his dad."

Williams had kept a photo of Kenet, with a cross in front of it, on his bureau for years, but a home fire five years earlier destroyed all of the contact information that Williams had for Kenet. Williams was at work at the time, so Shetz made arrangements to call back later. Later that night Shetz called back, and after confirming the identity of Williams asked if he wanted to meet with Kenet. There was no question that Williams did; the two had made contact and are planning a reunion this summer in Guatemala.

"It feels great being able to help people like this, and no one knows how easy this was," Shetz said. "It may have taken an hour on the phone during a two-week period. It is my belief that this is what The American Legion is all about: helping veterans in any way possible."

Shetz easily could have told Garzaro that he couldn't help her, but that's not what he did. Instead, he exemplified what it means to help someone without any chance of personal gain. The joy Shetz got from bringing together a father and son was the biggest reward he could have hoped for.

NEW-LOOK

LEGIOn WEB SITE

If you haven't visited www.legion.org lately, it's time to do so. An ongoing project to make the site more user-friendly is off and running. New features include video streaming and a "current-events" page where visitors can catch the latest American Legion happenings and interact with National Headquarters.

www.legion.org

MEMBER BENEFITS

A new way to save on prescriptions

Introducing The American Legion Prescription Discount Card

By Robert W. Spanogle

The American Legion Prescription Discount Card administered by Caremark is now available and will soon replace the existing program offered by RxAmerica. If you currently use the prescription discount card program, don't worry. Simply present your current American Legion or SAI membership card to the pharmacist along with your prescription to keep saving until you receive more information about the new program in July 2007.

When you use your new prescription discount card, you will automatically receive a special CVS ExtraCare program card. Your special ExtraCare program card offers 20-percent savings off CVS-branded products in all CVS/pharmacy stores nationwide. Simply show your special ExtraCare program card at the time of purchase to receive this discount.

Your new prescription discount card will be good for your entire household — including pets. Look for more information about the program beginning in July 2007. This plan is not insurance. Discounts are only available at participating pharmacies.

ARMED FORCES DAY

'Taps' volunteers needed

Hundreds of volunteer brass players are being recruited to perform the 24 notes of "Taps" in recognition of Armed Forces Day on May 19 this year at national cemeteries, state veterans cemeteries and U.S. battle monuments overseas. The project, "Echo Taps Worldwide," is jointly organized by the Department of Veterans Affairs Cemetery Administration and Bugles Across America to honor and remember U.S. veterans through a worldwide performance of "Taps."

During the event, players will form a line through the cemetery and perform a cascading version of "Taps." Brass players of all ages are encouraged to perform at the cemetery of their choice. Schools and other organizations are also invited to participate in the tribute.

The first large "Echo Taps" event occurred in May 2005, when 674 brass players from 30 states lined 42 miles of road between Woodlawn National Cemetery in Elmira, N.Y., and Bath National Cemetery in Bath, N.Y. Playing "Taps" in cascade, it took nearly three hours from the first note played at Woodlawn to the final note of "Taps" sounded at Bath. Last Veterans Day, players performed "Echo Taps" at 52 national cemeteries and state veteran cemeteries in preparation for the upcoming event. This time, buglers around the world will participate, including those playing at U.S. battle monument cemeteries overseas.

American Legion family members are encouraged to volunteer as buglers and work with local VA Volunteer Services representatives and local cemeteries to promote Echo Taps Worldwide. Interested volunteers may register online at www.echo taps.org.

THE ARTS

Film Festival approaching

Washington will play host to the first annual GI Film Festival on Memorial Day weekend, featuring classic and first-run films from international and domestic filmmakers that celebrate the heroes of the U.S. Armed Forces and their worldwide struggle for freedom and liberty. The three-day festival will be May 26-28 at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center.

The American Legion plans to staff a booth at the GI Film Festival. The event is open to the public. For more information about the inaugural GI Film Festival, go online to www.gifilmfestival.com.

Also, Legionnaires are urged to vote for the film they believe best exemplifies the spirit of the U.S. fighting men and women. The movie can be from any war era and should exemplify the honorable nature of military service. Voters will be accepted until May 12. The winner will be announced at the GI Film Festival in Washington on Memorial Day weekend. Results will also be published in The American Legion Magazine and online at www.legion.org.

To vote, send the title of your pick for "Best War Movie Ever" to: Best War Movie c/o The American Legion Magazine P.O. Box 1055 Indianapolis, IN 46206 Or e-mail your vote to: magazine@legion.org

Voters are also encouraged to include a few paragraphs about why they believe their choice merits the honor. Due to volume, submissions will not be acknowledged with mailed responses.

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To order, go online to www.emblem.legion.org
or call (888) 453-4466.
MEMBERSHIP

NOT JUST NUMBERS

Chairman Linda Perham says it's vital to transfer DMS members out of the headquarters post sooner rather than later.

“Believe that it's our duty to make sure that we get the local blue-cap Legionnaire hooked up with him or her local community's veterans service organization,” Perham said. “It's for the good of the veteran, for the good of the post and for the good of the local community. Those Legionnaires need to at least know about their local post. It doesn’t do them any service to keep them in a holding area where they can't touch the lives of others and be reached by others.”

Barlett, a U.S. Navy veteran, took some time transferring to a local post, first to Post 19 in Novi, Mich., and then to Post 79. He joined The American Legion in 1989, but college, law school, his family and a full-time job took up all of his time for the next 12 years.

But after transferring to Post 19, he immediately became active, attending National Legion College in 2002 and serving as post commander, post adjutant, district commander, and department public relations chairman and assistant judge advocate.

“I think the DMS program is an integral part of our membership efforts,” said Barlett, a multiple Gold Medal winner who is now Web-designing for us. Those people setting in the headquarters post could use those members toward their quota,” she said. “We got 79 percent of our DMS members into local posts. We got one member who wanted to do Web-site design for us. We had another who wanted to do public relations for us. Those people setting in the headquarters post are just waiting for someone to call them. It’s like a holding area.

Randall L. Mitchell, Perham’s predecessor on the M&PA Committee and now the Department of Tennessee see commander, was brought into the American Legion through a DMS mailing that came to him while he was finishing his service in Operation Desert Storm. He made the decision to go from the headquarters post to Post 127 in Hohenwald, Tenn., after buying fireworks during an American Legion fundraiser.

“I always made it a point to buy my fireworks from them, and this one particular year the guys selling it were the local assessor, the mailman I’d grown up with, and a man who owned an extermination business,” Mitchell said. “They all knew me, saw my name on a list and said they had a spot for me. I joined and immediately became active.

Mitchell served as post commander, district adjutant, district commander and department membership chairman before moving to the National M&PA Committee. He said you never know where the next American Legion leader is going to come from.

The headquarters post is a good place to start looking.

“When your post membership team is given that list of DMS members, they are real people on that list,” Mitchell said. “You ought not turn down that opportunity. If you transfer 10 DMS members in and get one good member, that one good one may make a difference down the road.”
Veteran job fairs provide opportunities

The American Legion has three official partners in the promotion and execution of job fairs for veterans and servicemembers preparing to transition from military to civilian life, along with their spouses. These partners are RecruitMilitary, Military.com and The New York Times Job Market. All are conducting veteran job fairs around the country this year with full support from the American Legion.

American Legion departments and posts near the sites of the job fairs are encouraged, if they have not done so already, to have representatives present at the events.

Booth space is provided to the American Legion. Past job fairs have proven successful at raising awareness of American Legion programs and building membership.

When it partnered in a November veterans job fair with the state’s Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, The American Legion’s Department of Maryland gained 15 new members. “It really is a winning situation for everyone,” said Ed White, chairman of the American Legion Department of Maryland Veterans Employment Committee.


WEB RESOURCES
www.recruitmilitary.com/careerfairst
www.nytimes.com/marketing/jobmarket/jobfair/saluteourheroes/
military.nationalcareerfairst.com/

FUTURE VETERANS JOB FAIRS

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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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VA looking for living World War I veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs is seeking help in determining how many World War I veterans currently are alive in the United States. The number of known living World War I veterans stands at four, and none of the four has been on the VA benefits rolls.

VA is asking anyone who knows of a surviving World War I veteran, one must have been on active duty between April 6, 1917, and Nov. 11, 1918. VA is also looking for surviving Americans who served in the armed forces of allied nations.

Information about survivors can be e-mailed to www.va.gov, faxed to (202) 273-6702, or mailed to the Office of Public Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs (80), 810 Vermont Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20420.

The four known surviving World War I veterans are John Babcock, 102, from Puget Sound, Wash.; Frank Buckles, 106, Charles Town, WV;; Russell Coffey, 108, North Baltimore, Ohio; and Harry Landis, 107, Sun City Center, Fla.

MEMBER BENEFITS

Partnership provides travel benefits for Legionnaires

American Legion Travel is the premier air travel service for The American Legion. It's a unique partnership between The American Legion and nuTravel, Inc. and is designed to provide American Legion members and their families with exclusive leisure travel benefits both online and through travel agents.

nuTravel is a leading leisure travel company that provides benefits and discounts to its customers with supreme service and savings for all their travel needs. Through the partnership, American Legion Travel provides its members with a benefit that includes booking flights, hotels, rental cars, vacations, packages and cruises for both personal and business travel needs. Travel to anywhere in the world; members can take advantage of deals to vacation spots like Mexico, the Caribbean, Europe or even Australia. With the addition a partnership with Club Med Vacations, members can save up to 30 percent on a Club Med Vacation. To find out more about the Club Med Vacation benefit, log on to The American Legion Travel site at www.AmericanLegionTravel.com or call our Club Med Specialist at (914) 848-4566, ext. 40.

American Legion Travel has become an easy way for members and their families to find the best bargains to plan their travel, whether online or through our live travel agents. Today, this service is available to an estimated number of 2.7 million American Legion member households, and a percentage of the income generated goes to support American Legion member benefit programs.

American Legion Travel guarantees that you'll get the best price every time. If you book a trip and find a better price elsewhere for the exact same trip within 24 hours, you will be refunded the difference. The Best Price Guarantee is available to travelers who have booked travel or on or after Jan. 15, 2007. To find out more information about the terms of this guarantee, please log on to www.AmericanLegionTravel.com and click the price-guarantee link.

Visit www.AmericanLegionTravel.com or call (800) 676-1004 to speak to a travel specialist.
The above poster, representing the four pillars of The American Legion, is currently available through American Legion Emblem Sales for $2.95, plus shipping and handling. To order, go online to www.emblem legion.org or call (888) 453-4466.

A Strong National Security
Taking Care of Veterans
Mentoring Youth
Promoting Patriotism and Honor

This is our vision for a strong America.

Come share the vision with us.

Veterans Serving America.
Learn more at:
www.legion.org/fourpillars
### 2006 NEF CHALLENGE

<table>
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### 2006 CAF CHALLENGE

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*To donate to the NEF and CWF: The American Legion P.O. Box 0414 Indianapolis, IN 46206*

*To donate to the Creative Arts Festival: American Legion Auxiliary 777 N. Meridian St. Indianapolis, IN 46204*
National Commander Paul A. Morin joins the top three finishers onstage at the 70th Annual American Legion National High School Oratorical Championship in Indianapolis. From left are first-place finisher Co'Relous Bryant, runner-up Ashley Butman and third-place finisher Jared Canfield.

### FLORIDA SENIOR CAPTURES ORATORICAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Co'Relous Candal Bryant made a strong case for his belief that the youth of America have a lot to offer their country when he, himself, showcased what a young man can do at the podium with a message to deliver. On April 15, Bryant won the 70th Annual American Legion National High School Oratorical Championship in Indianapolis. He emerged victorious from a field of 53 department champions who competed over a two-day period. The first Florida winner since 1978, he earned an $18,000 college scholarship.

"Often the youth of America are condemned and judged, and there is so much teen violence, but The American Legion is all about finding the good youth and making them examples for the rest of America," said Bryant, who also was the Department of Florida's Boys State governor this year. "As an African-American male, to have this opportunity in American society is humbling. I thank The American Legion from the bottom of my heart."

Ashley Lauren Butman, a home-schooled senior from Cumming, Ga., earned a $16,000 scholarship for second place. Jared Carson Canfield, a junior from Canfield Academy in Naperville, Ill., placed third and took home a $14,000 college scholarship.

In each round of the competition, orators delivered a rehearsed 8-to-10-minute address and a randomly assigned 3- to 5-minute oration on a constitutional topic, each without the benefit of notes, and in front of a live audience and judges.

The American Legion High School Oratorical Championship was developed to encourage young people to improve their communications skills and to study and understand the U.S. Constitution.

In his winning oration, "The Power of the People," Bryant described America as a "City on a hill. We are positioned up on a mountain, and we allow our light to cast out and illuminate the rest of the world. The source and power behind that light is the Constitution. It puts the power in the hands of the people."

Bryant, a senior at Stanton College Preparatory School, summed up his speech by challenging all Americans to be more active in government. "Look into the eyes of America and find out what works," he said. "Pity never accomplished anything, yet if you take the pride and example that your country gives you and apply it to the other areas that aren't as privileged, America works."
**DATALINE CAPITOL HILL**

**House, Senate pass fiscal 2008 budget resolution**

By Jimmie Foster

When the president sent his fiscal 2008 budget proposal to Congress in February, it seemed at first blush that the Bush administration had finally recognized the true needs of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Discretionary funding recommendations for VA reflected a $2.9 billion increase from fiscal 2007 funding.

However, the bulk of that increase includes fiscal assumptions by administration officials — proposed and defeated last year — that The American Legion found unacceptable. These proposals include:

- Changing annual enrollment fees ranging from $250 to $750 to veterans in Priority Groups 7 and 8 regardless of other health insurance coverage, based on family income.
- Increasing pharmacy co-payments for certain veterans from $7 to $15 per prescription.
- Continuing prohibitions for enrolling any new Priority Group 8 veterans.
- Eliminating the practice of reducing VA first-party co-payments to debt collections recoveries from third-party health plans.

Rather than consider ways to allow the VA health-care system to accommodate the veterans currently using it, the White House budget seeks to drive tens of thousands of veterans away from the health-care system. In addition, nearly 1 million Priority Group 8-eligible veterans are barred from enrolling in the VA medical system. The American Legion vehemently opposes these administration proposals.

On March 1, both the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees sent their VA budget recommendations for fiscal 2008 to their respective budget committees. The VA panels’ proposals both call for $41 billion for VA discretionary funding. This amount is a $4.6 billion increase from fiscal 2007 levels and a $1.6 billion increase from the president’s budget proposal. Both committees rejected the proposed prescription co-pay increase, the proposed enrollments fees, and the continuing ban on enrollment of Priority Group 8 veterans.

The chart below tracks VA discretionary funding for fiscal 2007, proposed funding in the president’s 2008 budget resolution, and, The American Legion’s fiscal 2008 proposal as presented in testimony by National Commander Paul A. Morin last September and again in March.

On March 23, the Senate passed its version of the fiscal 2008 budget resolution, S. Con. Res. 21. The vote for passage was 52-47. The House version of budget resolution, H. Con. Res. 99, passed the House on March 29 by 216-210. Both chambers’ budget blueprints call for $43.1 billion in discretionary funding for VA, an increase of $6.6 billion from the fiscal 2007 amounts.

House-Senate conferences must now work out a version that each chamber can support. Once this is accomplished, a final blueprint for the Appropriations Committees will be in place. It should be stressed that the budget resolution is not law but merely the blueprint for spending bills.

**Emergency DoD supplemental bill faces veto threat**

On March 23, by a vote of 218-212, the House passed H.R. 1591, a $123 billion emergency Department of Defense supplemental appropriations bill for fiscal 2007. Six days later, the Senate approved the measure 51-47.

The president’s original request contained $97 billion in funding to sustain military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the global war on terrorism. However, the final version of H.R. 1591 contains provisions that The American Legion finds unacceptable. Both the House and Senate inserted deadlines to remove U.S. military forces from Iraq by 2008, provided that certain benchmarks were met. The language contains deadlines for withdrawal binding, while the Senate’s wording is not obligatory.

President Bush has vowed to veto any supplemental bill that contains these deadlines. Considering the narrow margin of passage in both chambers, there is a strong likelihood that his veto will be sustained.

The president has publicly urged Congress to send him a supplemental funding measure that continues to support the armed forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and the global war on terrorism, but without any deadlines for troop withdrawals.

The American Legion supports funding the ongoing costs of war as recommended by the president and military commanders on the ground. The American Legion launched a major grassroots campaign to influence members of Congress in their deliberations on H.R. 1591.

"Wounded Warrior" measure passes House, awaits Senate

On March 28, the House unanimously voted to pass H.R. 1538, "the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act." This legislation seeks to address the problems facing wounded U.S. service members and to improve their transition from the military to VA.

Since the beginning of the global war on terrorism, U.S. servicemembers injured in combat have faced difficulty receiving proper care at military medical centers across the country. In addition, many are experiencing delays in the processing of their records from DoD medical care to the VA medical system. H.R. 1538 responds to these concerns by doing the following:

- Providing U.S. servicemembers with an assigned medical-care case manager, whose caseload will be limited to prevent extensive backlogs.
- Providing medical advocates to stand with servicemembers before medical evaluation boards.
- Providing a toll-free hotline that U.S. servicemembers and their families can use to report inadequacies in care, stipulating that complaints called into the hotline must be investigated and a plan to remedy them be in place within 96 hours.
- Establish a DoD pilot program to ensure that servicemembers have a seamless transition from the military to VA by requiring a more efficient movement of medical records and a better process for separated or retiring troops.
- Require DoD and VA to work together to improve their disability evaluation systems, hopefully ending a lot of the current backlog.
- Authorize $50 million for wounded U.S. servicemembers’ support programs.

"The Wounded Warrior Assistance Act… provides the people, training and oversight mechanisms needed to ensure that our wounded warriors feel secure that they will always receive committed quality care and that the system will not fail them." House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner, D-Calif., said.

"The legislation also sets the stage for much needed reform of administrative processes that will restore member confidence in the integrity and efficiency of the disability evaluation system and begin the process of achieving a truly seamless transition of servicemembers to the Department of Veterans Affairs programs," Filner added.

The measure now awaits Senate passage.
A series of uncovering life-threatening neglect at two Tennessee state veterans homes and led to the correction of the problems has earned Nashville News Channel 5 (WTVF-TV) The American Legion's annual Fourth Estate Award.

One of the major criteria for winning the award is demonstrated impact of the reporting. Channel 5 investigative reporter Jennifer Kraus' series led to a state investigation, attention of the Tennessee legislature, and intervention by Gov. Phil Bredesen that resulted in the implementation of new practices at both homes.

"Your reports directly led to correction of life-threatening violations that likely saved the lives of veterans under their care," National Commander Paul A. Morin told Channel 5. "Journalism doesn't get any better than that."

The Channel 5 series led state inspectors to spend more than a week investigating the reports. They found more than half of the residents at one veterans home with severe to extreme bedsores. The state found the community, "Their investigation of this state's veterans homes uncovered serious abuses. Our veterans deserve better. I am hopeful that the work by News Channel 5 will bring about real change. News Channel 5 will not stop until those veterans homes deliver the best quality of care for our veterans."


Jennifer Kraus and our News Channel 5 Investigates Team, this was more than just reporting a news story. And by exposing the problems we found, the resulting changes will hopefully protect those who have given so much to protect us all."

Channel 5 News Director Mike Cutler praised Kraus and her colleagues.

"Jennifer Kraus and our News Channel 5 Investigates Team work hard to make a difference in this community," Cutler said. "Their investigation of this state's veterans homes uncovered serious abuses. Our veterans deserve better. I am hopeful that the work by News Channel 5 will bring about real change. News Channel 5 will not stop until those veterans homes deliver the best quality of care for our veterans."

The television station had a responsibility to report the problems, Kraus said.

"When those who have served and sacrificed for our country are neglected, we all have a duty and responsibility to ensure that these veterans get the care they not only require but deserve," she said. "For the News Channel 5 Investigates Team, this was more than just reporting a news story. And by exposing the problems we found, the resulting changes will hopefully protect those who have given so much to protect us all."

TAPS

Lawrence A. Bastian
St. Croix, Virgin Islands

Lawrence A. Bastian of Post 153 (Department of Puerto Rico) passed away March 28 at age 71. He was a Korean War Army veteran.

Mr. Bastian served in several department positions. He also served as National & Homeland Security Council vice chairman from 2003 to 2006 and the National Cemetery Committee national commander's representative from 2005 to 2007.

Robert F. Bittner
Meyersdale, Pa.

Robert F. Bittner of Post 112 (Department of Pennsylvania) passed away March 23 at age 81. He was a World War II Army veteran.


Mr. Bittner was a member of the National Membership & Homeland Security Council from 1956 to 1959, the National Security Training Committee from 1952 to 1953 and 1955 to 1956, the National Security Training Committee Advisory Board from 1951 to 1952 and 1955 to 1956, the National Security Training Committee Liaison Committee from 1962 to 1963, the National Law & Order Committee from 1963 to 1964, the National Distinguished Guests Committee from 1965 to 1966, and the National Security Commission Liaison Committee from 1962 to 1963.

Linn E. Gregg
Ossian, Ind.

Linn E. Gregg of Post 111 (Department of Indiana) passed away March 1 at age 82. He was a World War II Korean War Navy veteran.

Mr. Gregg served as National Distinguished Guest Committee vice chairman from 1990 to 1994. He also was a member of the National Education and Scholarship Committee from 1960 to 1961, the National Veterans Preference Committee from 1961 to 1964, the National Membership & Post Activities Committee from 1979 to 1980 and the National American Legion Council from 1960 to 1961.

Leroy S. Lakey
Charlotte, N.C.

Leroy S. Lakey of Post 353 (Department of North Carolina) passed away March 30 at age 82. He was a World War II Army veteran.

Mr. Lakey served in several department positions, including department commander from 1964 to 1965. He also served as National & Homeland Security Council vice chairman from 1963 to 1964, National Executive Committee from 1963 to 1964, and National American Legion Insurance Committee chairman from 2000 to 2007.

Mr. Lakey was a member of the National Education & Membership Committee from 1959 to 1966, the National Homeland Security and Civil Preparedness Committee from 1962 to 1963, the National Law & Order Committee from 1963 to 1964, the National Distinguished Guests Committee from 1965 to 1966, the National Americanism Commission Liaison Committee from 1969 to 1970, the National Resolutions Subcommittee from 1968 to 1969, the National Security Training Committee from 1960 to 1961, the National Security Committee Liaison Committee from 1979 to 1980 and the National Foreign Relations Council national vice chairman from 1979 to 1980.

John J. Mulkern
Mourton, Mass.

John J. Mulkern of Post 78 (Department of Massachusetts) passed away March 13 at age 80. He was a Korean War Navy veteran.

Mr. Mulkern served in several department positions, including department commander from 1955 to 1956, as well as alternate National Executive Committee from 1981 to 1982, National Foreign Relations Council vice chairman from 1960 to 1962, National Executive Committee from 1981 to 1982, and National Legislative Council chairman from 1982 to 1983.

W. Dudley Robbins
Willard, N.C.

W. Dudley Robbins of Post 165 (Department of North Carolina) passed away March 13 at age 86. He was a World War II Army veteran.

Mr. Robbins served in several department positions, including department commander from 1957 to 1958. He also served as alternate National Executive Committee from 1966 to 1967, National Executive Committee from 1966 to 1967, National Security Commission Liaison Committee from 1967 to 1973, the National Resolutions Subcommittee from 1968 to 1972, the National Security Commission Liaison Committee from 1971 to 1972, the National Resolutions Assignment Committee from 1971 to 1972, the National Legislative Council from 1984 to 1985, 1989 to 1990 and 1994 to 1997, and the National American Legion Insurance Committee from 1994 to 2001.

FOURTH ESTATE AWARD WINNERS

1980 Hy Rosen, Editorial Cartoonist, Albany Times Union
1981 ABC News
1982 Newsweek magazine
1983 The Sacramento Union
1984 K-SPAN
1985 Life magazine
1986 KRON Radio, St. Louis
1987 ABC Radio News
1988 Bill Cain/Florida Today
1989 Mary Beth Pfeiffer/The Psychologies Journal
1990 Margaretta A. Irwin/ The Psychologies Journal
1991 Michael Teleky, Tamara Welch/The Bakersfield Californian
1992 Philip Dine/St. Louis Post-Dispatch
1993 Fortune magazine
1994 KSWW-TV, Wichita, Kansas
1995 Marcia Stepanek, Charles J. Lewis/ Hearst Newspapers
Washington Bureau/Albany Times Union
1996 High Road Productions, Palo Alto, Cal.
1997 Robert Chrestie, WPLS, Ohio
1998 The Times, Mesa, Ariz.
1999 Jerry Mitchell, The Clinton-Ledge, Jackson, Miss.
2000 Dateline NBC, Washington, D.C.
2001 Chronicle-Telegram, Marion, Ind.
2002 Dayton Daily News, Dayton, Ohio
2004 Mark Benjamin, United Press International
2005 Laura Stein, WFTV-TV Miami, Fla.
2007 Nashville News Channel 5
Charlotte Louise Berry Winters turned a high-school education into a valuable support role for the U.S. Navy during World War I. In doing so, she helped open doors for women to serve in the military for the next century.

A founding member of USS Jacob Jones Post 2 in Washington, D.C., Winters passed away March 27 at age 109. She was the last known Navy yeoman and female veteran of World War I. Her funeral in Frederick, Md., on March 30 was attended by family, friends, an honor guard, pallbearers and a firing party from the Navy Ceremonial Guard. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Mullen also attended the service.

"Every sailor in our Navy joins me today in mourning the passing of our shipmate, Charlotte Winters," Mullen said. "We offer her family and friends our deepest sympathies and most heartfelt condolences."

Born Nov. 10, 1897, Winters graduated from Washington Business High School in 1915 and enlisted in 1917 after Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels decided to permit women to serve in support roles. Women who enlisted were designated Yeoman (F) and were assigned mostly to secretarial and clerical positions, though some served as translators, draftsmen, fingerprint experts, ship camouflage designers and recruiting agents. They worked at the Navy Department and wherever else needed, freeing sailors for combat duty. More than 11,000 women enlisted during World War I.

Winters served in the Washington Navy Yard in Building 57, the current home of the Naval Historical Center. She was one of the last Yeoman (F)s to be discharged, in 1919, and was immediately hired by the Navy as a civilian to fill her active-duty job.

Charlotte Winters "was a trailblazer, one of a relatively small group of women to serve in our Navy during World War I," Mullen said. "She did so honorably and nobly, helping through that service to bring freedom to millions of people all across Europe and hope to thousands of young women all across America. She and her shipmates answered the call when the nation needed them most. They worked hard. They struggled. They persevered, and they set a shining example. And, as in Ms. Winter's case, some stayed on to prepare the Navy to fight and win yet another world war."

Winters was a founding member of the National Yeoman (F) veterans organization, and served as its eighth commander from 1940 to 1941. She joined what was then Betsy Ross Post 1 – comprised entirely of Yeoman (F)s – on July 23, 1919. In October 1919, The American Legion's National Executive Committee granted a new charter to Post 1, changing its name to the USS Jacob Jones Post 2. Winters was a member of The American Legion for 88 continuous years. In 1936, she was appointed chairman of the Sesquicentennial Anniversary of the Constitution celebration, coordinating the activities for every American Legion post that participated in the Washington event.

She married John F. Winters in 1947 and retired from her Navy civilian job in 1953. Her husband passed away in 1983, and Winters moved into an assisted-living facility in 1990. She remained active for many years.

"Theodore Roosevelt once observed that 'no nation has the root of greatness in it unless in time of need it can rise to the heroic mood,'” Mullen said. “Ms. Winters and every other American sailor of World War I, man or woman, certainly rose to the heroic mood. We salute her memory, and we thank her for inspiring us to do the same.”