NATIONAL CONVENTION

‘IT’S WHO WE ARE’

Michael Peterson DVD set to debut American Legion Legacy Scholarship fundraiser at national convention.

By Steve Brooks

When country music entertainer Michael Peterson and the American Legion partnered up earlier this year in a fund-raising effort for the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, Peterson’s initial vision was to produce a DVD that featured his vocal tribute to the world’s largest veterans organization, his new song, ‘It’s Who We Are’.

But in the six months since then, Peterson’s project has turned into something much bigger than a music video. ‘It’s Who We Are’ still contains a video of Peterson’s song, but the DVD – which will be available at the 91st National Convention in Reno – also includes enough special features to serve as a dynamic membership tool for any American Legion post. In addition, 50 percent of profits from DVD sales will go to the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, which provides college money to serve as a dynamic membership tool for any American Legion post.

In addition to the video that accompanies Peterson’s song – featuring patriotic images and Legionnaires in action over the years – the DVD also includes a special feature titled ‘What is The American Legion?’ It explains the four pillars of the American Legion and includes interviews with such spokespeople as actor and Legionnaire R. Lee Ermey and retired Gen. Richard Myers, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Viewers will also gain a better understanding of how The American Legion’s many programs benefit a broad range of Americans.

‘A number of people I interviewed said they hadn’t joined The American Legion until somebody asked them,’ Peterson said. ‘It’s as simple as just asking somebody. In this package we’ve put together, there’s actually a beautiful invitation: ‘Come join The American Legion’. I think there’s a lot of supporting visuals and stories to make it a compelling invitation.”

Another special feature explains The American Legion Legacy Scholarship and includes interviews with various celebrities and Legionnaires, along with another section that includes public service announcements about how to donate to the scholarship fund.

The DVD also contains information about how to join The American Legion and contact information for ordering ‘It’s Who We Are.’

National Commander Paul A. Morin has stressed the four pillars of The American Legion during his tenure. ‘It’s Who We Are’ touches on all four pillars and can serve as both a teaching and membership tool about and

See Peterson on Page 3

See Turncoat on Page 3
Since I took the oath as national commander of The American Legion, I've tried to emphasize at every stop I've made – and I've made hundreds, including visits to all 55 departments – that the way to make this organization thrive is by going “back to the basics.” That’s not a simple cliche. It’s what I believe. Sometimes we complicate things and get caught up in red tape and bureaucracy. Keeping things basic, we’re able to go back to perform the mission of The American Legion, laid out 88 years ago by our founders.

One of the ways I’ve tried to go back to the basics has been refocusing on the foundation of our organization. The American Legion was built upon four pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth. Much of what we do falls into one of these four categories. I’ve been witness to that during my travels as national commander.

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation. One of the things I’m most proud of this year is that Congress has reinstated the joint hearings of veterans service organizations in front of both the House and Senate Veterans Affairs committees. We’ve traditionally testified in front of a joint session of both committees in September, during which time we present our budget recommendations and legislative priorities for the year. In 2005, then-House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Steve Buyer, R-Ind., changed the date of our testimony and reduced our time in front of his committee. By shifting the hearing to February, his committee and the White House had very little time to review our recommendations.

This was unacceptable. Thanks mainly to grassroots lobbying, it’s no longer an issue. This September, the next national commander will testify before both committees at the same time. There, our message will be loud and clear: America’s veterans deserve the best possible health care, and that care should not be rationed for the sake of dollars.

National Security. While we continue to lobby Congress for better pay for our service members, that’s not the only part of national security. Local troop-support efforts all across the country this year have again been phenomenal. Post have sent thousands of packages to our deployed soldiers and sailors, Minnesota Legionnaires provided GPS units to National Guardsmen stationed in Iraq. Members of The American Legion Riders have attended funerals for our fallen service members. Whatever it takes, Legionnaires show our military men and women, and their families, that we support them as they sacrifice to preserve our way of life.

Operation Landstuhl, which has a goal of raising $50,000 by next month’s national convention in Reno to purchase comfort items for wounded U.S. service members at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, is a joint project between The American Legion, the Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion. You’ve always supported our causes in the past, and I have no doubt you’ll be behind this one, too.

Americanism. When the flag amendment was defeated last summer, some thought we’d abandon the cause. But Legionnaires are already back on the phones, calling their senators and representatives, urging them to renew the fight. An amendment has once again been introduced in the House. We’ve also been able to count on your support in reintroducing the Public Expression of Religion Act, PERA, in Congress. American values are under attack by the American Civil Liberties Union and others, and it’s our job as an organization to defend the Boy Scouts, the Pledge of Allegiance and hundreds of memorials across the nation besieged by the ACLU and others. We are, after all, “For God and Country.”

Children & Youth. During my stop at the Department of Wyoming in June, I came across a rather nontraditional way that the
**NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE**

**Running a district ... from Iraq**

Nebraska's District 7 commander hits 100-percent membership while deployed.

By Robert W. Spanogle

"My schedule is too busy to try to make membership calls this month." How many times have we heard that statement and fully understood that little things do come up in day-to-day life that get in the way of extra tasks we want to accomplish? It happens all the time.

But when one of life's "little things" -- namely a war-zone deployment -- happened to Nebraska Legionnaire Virgil Blum last summer, he didn't let it get in the way of his duties as the District 7 commander.

Halfway through his tenure in the district office -- Nebraska's district commanders serve two-year terms -- Blum got a startling piece of news. The 20-year Army reservist was mobilized to go to Iraq as a supply sergeant. His unit was recalled on May 19, 2006, and on July 7 he touched down in Iraq.

Blum briefly considered giving up his Legion position, but after talking with some fellow Legionnaires, he decided he could serve in Iraq and in The American Legion at the same time. Not only did he hold the position, he helped the district achieve its 100-percent membership target for the year.

Blum spent hours making phone calls and sending e-mails to Legionnaires in his district during his deployment, which ended last June. He also found time to send out a monthly newsletter to every post commander in his district.

"I talked to (immediate Past) Department Commander Jerry Landkamer and other good friends of mine when I found out I was going to be deployed," said Blum, a member of Post 265. "They all said, 'I'd talk to people who'd come back from Iraq, and I knew they had a phone center. I also knew I'd have e-mail. I figured I could run the district from there.'"

Blum also said he felt a sense of family obligation to fulfill his Legion responsibilities. "My father-in-law's father started Post 265," he said. "My father-in-law is a member of Post 265. "I told them, 'I think I can do this.' They said, 'I'd talk to people who'd come back from Iraq, and I knew they had a phone center. I also knew I'd have e-mail. I figured I could run the district from there.'"

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Assistant sergeant-at-arms recommendations sought

Department adjutants are reminded to submit their recommendations for national convention assistant sergeant-at-arms to National Headquarters Executive Director Daniel S. Wheeler.

Please include the complete mailing address of recommendations so a letter of appointment can be sent to each nominee.

**NATIONAL CONVENTION NOTES**

Legion Racing Rally set for Aug. 27

An American Legion Racing Rally is scheduled for Aug. 27 from 10 a.m. to noon at Reno/Tahoe International Airport (RTA) of the Reno-Sparks Convention Center. The meeting is open to all American Legion family members, but American Legion Racing points of contact are especially encouraged to attend.

Program plans will be presented and discussed during the rally.

**Scooters, wheelchairs available**

Motorized scooters and wheelchairs, along with non-motorized wheelchairs, will be available to rent during the National Convention from the following vendors:

- **AME Home Health Care**, (775) 329-5567
- **Accelence Home Medical Equipment**, (775) 787-8880
- **Lee's Respiratory Service** (Carson City), (775) 883-8600
- **Medtech Services**, (775) 826-2022
- **Reno Orthopedic Appliance**, (775) 322-9299

**Tours available in Reno**

Several tours of area attractions -- including a floating trip down Truckee River, horseback riding and a gondola trip over Lake Tahoe -- are scheduled during the 99th National Convention.

For tour descriptions and sign-up forms, go to www.legion.org. Click on "Programs" and "National Convention." Forms must be mailed or faxed by Aug. 6.

**Posts available to host events**

The following American Legion post has expressed an interest in hosting events during the National Convention:

**Darrell Dunkle American Legion Post 1**
877 Ralston St.
Reno, NV 89503
(775) 331-5359
d symbolize at sbcglobal.net
Contact: Larry Balsley

**Future convention sites, dates**

- **Phoenix** -- Aug. 22-28, 2008
- **Phoenix Convention and Visitors Bureau**
- **Louisville, Ky.** -- Aug. 21-27, 2009
- **Kentucky Convention and Visitors Bureau**
- **Milwaukee** -- Aug. 27-Sept. 2, 2010
- **Milwaukee Convention and Visitors Bureau**
- **Minneapolis** -- Aug. 26-Sept. 1, 2011
- **Minneapolis Convention and Visitors Bureau**

**Towar from Page 1**

Congress passed a 2007 war-spending bill in May that identified 18 benchmarks for security, economic and political reforms in Iraq. These benchmarks are to be measured in September when Gen. David Petraeus reports on progress.

"There is no more important issue right now than sustaining a strong national defense," Morin said. "Premature withdrawal and timelines severely jeopardize our national security. This is not a war without end. Our men and women can be victorious. And there is no greater way to honor our men and women in uniform than by providing them the personnel, time, patience and support of the American people as they complete this mission."
The drive is on for flag-amendment cosponsors

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Members of Congress listen to their constituents, and they listen in a variety of ways. It can be through personal phone calls, letters, faxes, e-mail, and by visits to their offices in Washington, D.C., or in their home states. In any case, it is important that they be approached through all possible means and shown why they should sponsor and support the flag amendment.

Visits to offices
It is unlikely that you will be able to talk face-to-face or even by phone with your elected representatives. They are extremely busy people and seldom have the luxury to spend a great deal of time on a single issue. The next best option is to visit with the administrative staff of your member of Congress in regard to evaluating constituent requests. The member’s legislative director makes recommendations concerning particular legislative issues and necessary actions. When visiting your elected representative, be mindful of his/her schedule and, above all, be prepared and plan your visit carefully. Make an appointment with the member’s appointment secretary/scheduler. Be on time, show patience and understanding if you have to wait, and be prepared to answer questions on why we need a constitutional amendment to return Congress the power to protect the flag. Writing a letter
If you write a letter to your senator or representative, you have chosen the most popular means of communication with a congressional office. Following are some helpful suggestions on what to include in the letter:

- Always be brief and to the point, briefly stating your purpose for writing in the opening paragraph of the letter.
- Encourage your senators and representatives to support and sponsor the flag amendment.
- Include the bill or resolution number in your letter.
- Always be courteous and address only one issue in your letter:

        ▪ E-mail or write your U.S. representative and ask him or her to cosponsor House Joint Resolution 12.
        ▪ Call local congressional offices and urge support. At the next vote on H.J. Res. 12.
        ▪ Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or call your local radio talk show and encourage the community to contact their congressional representatives to ask their support for the flag amendment.

All U.S. senators and representatives can be reached through the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121; the White House can be reached at (202) 456-1414. Local phone numbers for congressmen are in the blue pages of your phone book. Finally, you can e-mail any member of Congress from The American Legion’s Web site at www.legion.org by clicking on “Veterans Legislative Action Center.” In its long service as our nation’s banner during periods of peace, war and domestic turmoil, the flag has persevered as a symbol of justice and national resolve. To a large majority of Americans, it represents the hope, freedom and values we hold dear. It is unique among our traditional national emblems and deserves respect, care and protection. Each of these points are messages to be conveyed to Congress as the list of cosponsors grows.

H.J. RES. 12 CO-SPONSORS

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<th>State</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>Don Young (R)</td>
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<td>California</td>
<td>Edward Royce (R)</td>
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<td>Florida</td>
<td>F. Allen Boyd (D)</td>
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<td>Georgia</td>
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<td>Christopher Carney (D)</td>
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<td>Texas</td>
<td>Chet Edwards (D)</td>
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<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Thomas Davis III (R)</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
<td>Doc Hastings (R)</td>
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<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>Barbara Cubin (R)</td>
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Further information is available at www.cfa-inc.org.
WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

Getting involved in community emergency operations plans can boost membership, revitalize post.

By Erwin Gus Williams

Have you been looking for a way to revitalize your post, sign up new members, increase meeting attendance, get media attention, attract interesting speakers, energize young people and maybe even save lives - all with one new project?

If so, look for the latest guide coming out from National Headquarters: "Disaster Preparedness and Response for American Legion Posts." It provides advice and recommendations about getting involved in your community's emergency operations plan (EOP). In 2005, The American Legion signed a statement of affiliation with the Department of Homeland Security. Since then, Resolutions 97 and 98 – "The American Legion Role in Homeland Security" and "The Citizen Corps" - have directed Legionnaires to get involved in local disaster preparedness and response activities. After all, who better than military veterans know the value of survival skills and being prepared for anything?

The booklet, prepared by the Legion's National Security and Public Relations commissions, provides everything a post needs to get started.

"We're grateful to The American Legion family for its tireless service to our nation," said Michael Chertoff, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. "American's dedicated volunteers embody our nation's great spirit of service and bring our Citizen Corps program to life, helping communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from all types of hazards."

"Some of the terrorists who plotted to murder Americans at Fort Dix fit the definition of what many call 'undocumented workers.' They are illegal aliens, and that is the term I will continue to use," Morin said. "The American Legion is willing to work with our leaders in reforming immigration, but there can be no reform until our borders and ports are secure."
Motorcycle riders on bikes of all shapes, sizes and colors will roar across the Midwest, over the Great Plains, and through the Rockies and southwestern deserts en route to Reno, Nev., in August for the 89th American Legion National Convention. They will ride more than 2,000 miles to raise money for the college educations of children of U.S. servicemembers who have died in action since Sept. 11, 2001. American Legion National Commander Paul A. Morin will lead the second annual American Legion Legacy Run from National Headquarters in Indianapolis across the country to the convention city, with hopes of raising $250,000 or more for the American Legacy Scholarship Fund. Riders can join the run at any time along the route, or make the entire trip Aug. 19-24.

Legacy Run participants will depart American Legion Post 500 in Speedway, Ind., in the early morning hours Aug. 19. An American Legion Rider Rally is scheduled for Aug. 25 in Reno, and participants will join in The American Legion National Convention Parade on Aug. 26. Legionnaires unable to participate in The American Legion Legacy Run or attend the convention may support the American Legacy Scholarship Fund by sending tax-deductible contributions to: The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206. 

Aug. 23, 12:00 p.m. Evening event: Meal hosted by Post 7 and a special ceremony honoring Native American veterans. Location and times to be announced.

Aug. 24, 2:00 p.m. Afternoon event: National Commander Paul A. Morin will host a welcome lunch at the Elks Club upon the conclusion of the American Legacy Run. The Elks Club pool will be open to riders and their families. The Elks Club is on Virginia Street, directly across from the Reno-Sparks Convention Center.

Aug. 22, 4:30 p.m. Evening event: Cookout at Howard Johnson Hotel in courtyard area hosted by Evanston Post 41 and the American Legion Riders.

Aug. 21, 3:30 p.m. Evening event: Cheyenne Post 6, 2001 E. Lincolnway, will host a dinner and band. Shuttle service from the hotel may be available.

Aug. 20, 1:20 p.m. Evening events: Meal hosted by Post 7 and a special ceremony honoring Native American veterans. Location and times to be announced.

Starting Point: Portland, Ore.
Midday Stop: Winnemucca, Nev.
Overnight Stop: Reno, Nev.
Final Stop: Santa Fe, N.M.
Evening event: Coralville Post 721, 901 2nd St., will host a dinner. Shuttle service may be available from the hotel, while a visit to the local VA hospital is planned. Contact Coralville American Legion Riders President Tom Connelly for details at tgonn@hotmail.com.

Evening event: Police-escorted run to United Veterans Club and VA memorial dedication with the family of Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Hanson, who was killed while serving in Iraq. A meal will follow at the United Veterans Club, 1914 W. Capital Ave.

Aug. 19, 4:15 p.m.

"The American Legion Legacy Run Rally" Speedway Post 500, Georgetown Rd., will host a rally and evening meal for all visitors on Saturday, August 18, starting at noon. American Legion Legacy Run registration will be available all afternoon. Run departs at 08:00 a.m. on Sunday, August 19th. Contact American Legion Riders of Indiana Director Bob Schnell for details at rsales8@aol.com.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the American Legacy Scholarship Fund, contact Bob Caudell at (317) 630-1212 or by e-mail at rcaudell@ legion.org. Information may also be found on The American Legion Web site at www.legion.org. Click on the "Scholarships" link on the lower left corner of the home page.
American Legion representative eases transition for those recovering at Walter Reed.

U.S. Marine Corps combat veteran Jerry Johnson knows the stress of medical discharge, a military career cut short, and the bureaucratic gray areas one must traverse in the transition from DoD to VA, from soldier to veteran. The American Legion’s on-base service officer at Walter Reed Army Medical Center spent 13 years in uniform, including deployment in Operation Desert Storm before he “was med-boarded out after I had a lung collapse,” he says. “The doctors told me I had developed asthma. I fought to stay in.”

But he was out. The Columbus, Ind., native says he received little guidance during his transition out of the military. “I had a fellow staff sergeant tell me, ‘You’re broke and can’t be fixed, so the Corps doesn’t need you anymore.’ That left a bad taste in my mouth about the way service-members are sometimes treated when they get discharged under these conditions. I decided then and there that I wanted to work with veterans to ensure they get their proper benefits.”

Johnson used the GI Bill to attend Indiana University and graduated in 2003 with a sociology degree. He soon worked for The American Legion Department of Indiana, where he trained under John Hickey, one of the nation’s most highly regarded veterans service officers.

“I had to go back to school for more classes on legal research and writing, medical terminology, anatomy and physiology. And I continued to study. ‘John also tested me w.r.t. about what I learned. I can say it was 18 months of learning and training, but John expects his people to know their stuff.”

Johnson worked four years for the Department of Indiana before moving to Washington last spring to assume a newly created position to ease the often-difficult adjustments faced by military personnel receiving treatment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The position came in response to deplorable conditions that were exposed in one of the Walter Reed outpatient facilities. Following widespread national media exposure of the problem, The American Legion signed a memorandum of understanding with the DoD to provide Walter Reed with a paid service officer who could help ease the transition for wounded soldiers and to provide unprecedented veteran service organization participation on the base.

Johnson recently spoke with The American Legion Magazine.

Q: What drew you to the Walter Reed assignment?
A: I had heard that service members are going through a lot of the same things I did. Don’t get me wrong. They have a great support system here, but a lot of them are being under-rated in terms of their benefits. I give them representation and assist them to get the proper rating they deserve. I also help them file initial claims with VA. A lot of these young men and women don’t realize what all they are eligible for.

Q: What kinds of conditions are you seeing among them?
A: The majority of the injuries here deal with amputations, mainly because of the use of improvised explosive devices in Iraq. The second most common injury has to be the TBIs – traumatic brain injury. I can say this about the medical military service: It has improved the chances of surviving. The quality of life afterwards is a major concern. The next most common disorder has to be post-traumatic stress disorder.

Q: Your position was created after deplorable conditions were revealed at one of Walter Reed’s off-base outpatient facilities. How is your job connected to that exposure?
A: I think the media exposure shone the light on different areas that needed to be addressed. It was like the situation at Building 18 hit the news, and then people started finding more problems with the entire system. It was like, “What else is wrong that can be repaired?” There are still going to be problems, but the command here is dedicated to fixing them and giving the soldiers a better quality of life.

Q: Was the Building 18 problem an isolated incident?
A: Building 18 was closed down before I started here. A lot of people don’t realize that the building actually is not on the base itself. It’s off post and across the street. I have talked with some soldiers who stayed there, and they all agree that the conditions there were terrible. Rats, roaches, mold, water leaks, plumbing problems were common. Many of them don’t blame the Army, or the command. They seem to feel the fault lies with the civilian contractors. A work order would be put in, and it would take several days before anyone would respond to it. When I got here, it took a month to get telephone and computer service for my office. I think the Army should hold these people more accountable.

As a whole, Walter Reed is one of the finest military medical facilities you will ever see. I don’t know why it’s on the BRAC list. There is a definite need for it, and I predict there will be a need for it for several years to come. When you visit the actual hospital, the Maloney House, Fisher House or Abram’s Hall – where the soldiers and their families stay – you see how nice the facilities are. They are modern, well-designed and well-equipped. You always see cleaning crews working or repairing things as they need done. They should take the older buildings off the base and refurbish them. They wouldn’t have to worry about shutting the base down and dividing the assets between Bethesda and Fort Belvoir.

Q: How does your position dovetail with the Heroes to Hometowns program?
A: Most of these men and women are going to need a leg up when they get home. When you leave the military – where everything has been done to help you – and go home, it can be a traumatic experience. They go from having all of the support in the world at their fingertips to being dropped off and at the mercy of VA and other bureaucracies. You know what that system is like. It’s back-logged beyond belief. Veterans shouldn’t have to wait. They need real answers, real help now. If the posts and communities join together to support these people, it would be fantastic.

Q: How do you make your presence known to the soldiers as their hometowns and states to say they can help. It actually here to hire people, not just take resumes or show up. We need companies and individuals from the soldiers’ hometowns and states to say they can help. It may be something as simple as building a wheelchair ramp or finding a babysitter.

When these people leave the service, they are going to be faced with everyday problems most of us don’t think about. They’re going to be busy rebuilding their lives.

Q: What is the biggest challenge for you right now?
A: To get these soldiers to transition to civilian life is to prepare them for what they’re going to face once they leave the service. Transition-assistance programs and all of that is great, but it’s not going to pay the bills and put food on the table. It would be great if each one of them would be able to leave the military and step right into a job, or have the resources to get by until they can find work and get their new lives on track.

Q: Do you feel a sense of personal obligation to the people you serve?
A: I feel for every one of these young men and women when they leave here. I don’t want to sound like a pessimist, but some of these people will face a lifetime of problems ahead. I think we need to be ready as individuals, posts, districts, departments, an organization and a nation to help them where and when they need help – to prepare them for what’s out there, and guide them to the right sources, roll our sleeves up and lend a hand when needed.

Interview: Jeff Steffer
To donate to the American Legion Auxiliary, P.O. Box 6141, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

To donate to the Creative Arts Festival: American Legion Auxiliary, 773 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.
O n June 15, the full House of Representatives passed H.R. 2642, a bill to fund military construction projects and the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal 2008. The measure cleared the House by a 409-2 vote. One day earlier, the Senate Appropriations Committee had approved its own version of the spending bill, S. 1645. The Senate bill’s totals are nearly identical to those in H.R. 2642. The Senate committee voted 28-1 to advance the measure to the full Senate. The near unanimity of support by the House and Senate panels reflects the bipartisan nature of congressional support for U.S. veterans. As reported last month, the House Appropriations Committee approved H.R. 2642 by a unanimous 56-0 recorded vote on June 6. Both of these bills are in response to the bipartisan message to the White House, which had threatened to veto the bill if it exceeded the president’s initial budget request.

The bill would increase VA’s budget to a total of $87.7 billion, $9.9 billion above the fiscal 2007 level - the largest single increase in VA’s history - and $3.8 billion above the president’s request for the coming fiscal year. It also increases funding to VA’s for fiscal 2008, amounts approved by the full House for fiscal 2008, and the totals approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee. Other spending in the measure includes $21.4 billion for military construction, family housing, and the Base Realignment and Closure process. This is an increase of $207 million from the president’s request for fiscal 2008 and $5.1 billion more than the current fiscal year.

It is hoped that the Senate can complete action on the military construction/VA funding bill before the August recess, with final enactment before Sept. 30, the beginning of the new fiscal year.

Immigration debate
During May and June, one of the most unusual debates in recent history took place in the Senate. Its final hours on June 28 are a classic case for grass-roots lobbying at its finest. In the opening months of the 109th Congress, there was speculation that legislation would be re-introduced that would address the strained U.S. immigration system. Congress attempted to address this problem during the 109th Congress, but no final resolution was achieved. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., introduced legislation, S. 1348, to overhaul this country’s immigration policies. They had worked on this legislation with the help of other senators, as well as the support of President Bush.

An estimated 12 million to 20 million illegal aliens are currently living in this country. Most of the provisions of S. 1348 would have done nothing to apprehend them, or even encourage them to return to their country of origin. The bill also did nothing to address the single biggest draw for illegal aliens into this country: the prospect of jobs at which these aliens would be working outside the Social Security system and for low wages, robbing the U.S. Treasury of billions of dollars of tax revenue. In fact, S. 1348 would have done everything possible to allow these illegal aliens to remain in this country and to acquire legal status, and eventually U.S. citizenship. For example, one provision sought to address illegal-alien gang members. In order for an alien gang member to remain in this country, all he had to do was sign a document stating that he would never again be involved in gang activity.

Another provision prohibited the prosecution of any illegal alien who used fraudulently driver’s licenses or Social Security cards to obtain jobs. Early versions of S. 1348 included $5,000 fine for illegal aliens as one component of their legalization process; unfortunately, the fine was removed from later versions.

This legislation was never examined in committee hearings, nor did the original bill even have a final printed version in order that all senators could even see the contents of its contents before debate began in early May. Opponents of the measure sought to introduce amendments to add enforcement provisions, but they were defeated again and again.

Then, on June 7, the Senate held a cloture vote. This procedural vote is used to determine if debate on a bill will end — followed by a vote for passage — or whether further debate will occur.

Sixty votes are needed for cloture, but the final tally for cloture was only 50-45. At that point, Reid withdrew the bill from the floor, vowing to bring it back.

Nearly three weeks later — on June 26, during the last week before the Fourth of July recess — Reid and Kennedy reintroduced immigration legislation as S. 1639. The only major change to the bill was a proposed $4.4 billion authorization for border-enforcement provisions, funding promised by the White House to sweeten the deal for obstinate senators. The ploy, however, did not convince many senators.

Over the next three days, constituents delayed their senators’ offices with letters, phone calls, faxes, and e-mails, urging rejection of S. 1639 — especially if it did not include any sort of enforcement or border-security provisions. On June 28, the Senate held another cloture vote, which fell short with a final tally of 53-46.

Many members of The American Legion family opposed their right as U.S. citizens by contacting their senators and expressing their opinions on this legislation.

The American Legion will continue to monitor Congress should the immigration issue be raised again.

Senate VA panel approves veterans bills
On June 27, the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee approved several bills — all by voice votes — that would provide various veterans benefits:

- S. 423 — This measure contains the annual cost-of-living adjustment for the rates of compensation for service-connected disabled veterans and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans. The percentage increase would be the same as the one for Social Security benefits, which will be calculated later this year.

- S. 479 — Titled the Joshua Omvig Veteran Suicide Prevention Act, this bill would require VA to undertake an outreach effort aimed at Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families, and to conduct a campaign to discuss veterans’ mental-health concerns. Further, it would require VA to make mental-health care available on a 24-hour basis. This measure is similar to H.R. 327, which passed the House on March 22.

- S. 1163 — This bill, the Blinded Veterans Paired Organ Act of 2007, would offer additional benefits to veterans who have only partial sight in one eye. Under current law, disability compensation is provided to veterans who are blind in one eye, and increases if their visual acuity is 2/200 or less in the other eye. However, no extra compensation is offered if they have more serious impairment in their other eye. S. 1163 would ease the requirement to receive benefits for a visual impairment in a second eye to 20/200 or less. S. 1233 also requires VA to develop individualized plans for the rehabilitation and reintegration of veterans with TBI, and to provide each plan for the individual before discharge from inpatient care. It further directs VA to enter into agreements with non-VA facilities to provide veterans TBI services when VA is unable to provide such services or if veterans reside at a long distance from a VA facility.

- S. 1233 — The Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Rehabilitation Act of 2007 would address the growing problem of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans with traumatic brain injuries (TBI). The bill would require VA to develop individualized plans for the rehabilitation and reintegration of veterans with TBI, and to provide each plan for the individual before discharge from inpatient care. It further directs VA to enter into agreements with non-VA facilities to provide veterans TBI services when VA is unable to provide such services or if veterans reside at a long distance from a VA facility.

The chart below outlines VA’s final appropriations for fiscal 2008, the president’s budget request for fiscal 2008, amounts approved by the full House for fiscal 2008, and the totals approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

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See Deadline on Page 11
Veterans Update: News from and about the Department of Veterans Affairs

Homeless programs get financial boost

Homeless veterans in 37 states will get more assistance through a VA program that will provide funding for transitional housing for 92 community organizations.

VA has identified nonprofit groups eligible to receive payments for housing and supportive services to homeless veterans through three VA programs:

- Fifty-three organizations will receive $30 million to provide about 1,000 transitional housing beds under VA's per-diem program.
- Thirty-six groups will get $12 million for programs for veterans who are seriously mentally ill, along with women (including women with children), frail elderly or terminally ill.
- Three organizations will receive about $2 million for homeless outreach programs.

More information about VA's homeless programs can be found online at www.va.gov/va homeless. The list of all 92 grant recipients is available at www.va.gov/vaopa/vadocs/homeless-grants.asp.

VA sets up national suicide hotline

A 24-hour VA national suicide prevention hotline is scheduled to launch by Aug. 31, and will be based at the Canandaigua VA Medical Center in New York. Staffed by qualified mental-health professionals, the hotline will operate seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

In addition to staffing the hotline, suicide-prevention coordinators will take part in training clinicians and non-clinicians on warning signs for suicide.

Guide veterans into care, and work within facilities to identify veterans at risk for suicide.

VA's Canandaigua facility is a VA "center of excellence" focused on suicide prevention and mental-health education and research.

LA veterans home breaks ground

Ground has broken for a new California state veterans home on the campus of VA's Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System in West Los Angeles. VA's recent $113.5 million grant to construct the facility is the largest federal grant ever for expanding veterans homes, enabling California veterans to have comfortable housing in a caring community.

VA transferred ownership of more than 13 acres on its West Los Angeles campus to the state to build the home. The Greater Los Angeles Ventura County Veterans Home, as it will be known, will have 396 beds providing multiple levels of care for aged and disabled veterans.

The home is scheduled to be completed by early 2010. To be eligible for admission, veterans must be California residents, honorably discharged from the U.S. military, and disabled or at least 62 years of age.

VA and California recently broke ground on two other new state veterans home satellite sites in Lancaster and Ventura counties.

Wisconsin, Maryland cemeteries to expand

VA has announced the award of a $6.2 million grant to Wisconsin to expand the Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Spooner. The grant will pay for the construction of 460 full-casket burial sites, 444 in-ground cremation sites, 1,056 columbarium niches, a memorial walkway, a storage building, utilities, landscaping and irrigation.

The Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery, which began interments in 2000, was developed through VA's State Cemetery Grants Program. VA funded two other state veterans cemeteries in Wisconsin: the Central Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in King, and the Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Union Grove.

VA also announced a $1.9 million grant to expand the Crownsville Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Maryland. The grant will pay for construction of 2,434 full-casket burial sites, 1,087 in-ground cremation burial sites, 1,056 columbarium niches, utilities, landscaping and irrigation.

Maryland has four other VA-funded state cemeteries: the Chehalem Veterans Cemetery, the Eastern Shore Veterans Cemetery in Hurlock, the Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery in Owings Mills and the Rocky Gap Veterans Cemetery in Falmouth.

VA's State Cemetery Grants Program complements VA's 125 national cemeteries across the country. The program helps states establish, expand or improve state veterans cemeteries.

To date, the VA state cemetery program has helped establish 66 veterans cemeteries in 35 states, Saipan and Guam, and provided more than 22,000 burials in 2006. Since the cemetery program began in 1980, VA has awarded 154 grants totaling more than $276 million.

Learn more about VA's burial assistance programs from national cemetery offices, online at www.cem.va.gov or by calling VA regional offices at (800) 827-1000. For more information about Wisconsin's veterans cemeteries, contact the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs at dva.wisconsin.gov/cemeteries.asp or by calling (608) 261-0179.

More information about Maryland's veterans cemeteries is available at www.mdva.state.md.us or by calling the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs at (410) 923-6981.

Cemetery to be added in Iowa

VA has announced a $7.6 million grant to establish a new state veterans cemetery in Van Meter, Iowa. The Iowa Veterans Cemetery, the first state veterans cemetery in Iowa, will be located in Dallas County near Des Moines. Nearby 70,000 veterans and their families live within its service area.

The grant will pay 100 percent of allowable costs for the cemetery's construction, which is scheduled to begin this fall. It also covers construction of nearly 10,000 full-casket gravestones, 750 in-ground cremation sites, 768 columbarium niches, a memorial walkway, a storage building, utilities, landscaping and irrigation.

Interments are expected to begin in fall 2008.

Kensuk National Cemetery, operated by VA in the southeastern part of the state, has space available to accommodate both casketed and cremated remains.

For more information about Iowa's state veterans cemetery, contact the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs online at www.iowa.gov/veteraninfo or by calling (515) 242-3331.

Joseph A. Stacy
Chicago
Joseph A. Stacy of Post 1101 (Department of Illinois) passed away June 10 at age 75. He was a Korean War and Vietnam War Air Force veteran.

Mr. Stacy served in several department positions and also served as National Legislative Council from 1983 to 1989, the National Veterans Preference Committee from 1973 to 1977 and the National Veterans Support Committee from 1973 to 1977.

Mr. Stacy is survived by his wife, Erline, and three daughters.

Stephen F. Steele
Northfield, Minn.
Stephen F. Steele of Post 43 (Department of Minnesota) passed away June 17 at age 86. He was a World War II Army Air Force veteran.

He was a member of The American Legion Magazine Committee from 1969 to 1999.

TAPS

Dewey R. Brown
Independence, Mo.
Dewey R. Brown of Post 21 (Department of Missouri) passed away June 10 at age 75. He was a Korean War and Vietnam War Air Force veteran.

Mr. Brown served in several department positions and also served as National Airmen's Association Board of the Kansas City Air Force from 1988 to 1999. He was a member of the National Resolutions Assignment Committee from 1990 to 1990.

Mr. Brown is survived by his wife, Betty, and two daughters and one son. Memorial contributions can be made to the Fisher House Foundation, 1401 Rockville Pike, Suite 600, Rockville, MD 20852.

Edward L. Dudley
Salem, N.H.
Edward L. Dudley of Post 99 (Department of Missouri) passed away Jan. 31 at age 74. He was a Korean War Army veteran.

Mr. Dudley served as National Americanism Commission chairman from 1993 to 1994. He also served as a member of the National Legislative Council from 1993 to 1993, and the National Veterans Preference Committee from 1987 to 1987.

Mr. Dudley is survived by his wife, Erline, and three daughters.

Philip J. Mayeaux
Jefferson, La.
Philip J. Mayeaux of Post 267 (Department of Louisiana) passed away June 22 at age 83. He was a World War II Army veteran.


He also was a member of the National Americanism Commission from 1988 to 2007, the National Legislative Council from 1988 to 1989, the National Membership & Activities Committee from 1967 to 1977, and the National Veterans Preference Committee from 1973 to 1977.

Mr. Mayeaux is survived by his wife, Erline, and three daughters.

Joseph A. Stacy
Chicago
Joseph A. Stacy of Post 1101 (Department of Illinois) passed away June 10 at age 75. He was a World War II Navy veteran.

Mr. Stacy served in several department positions in the Departments of Italy and Minn., including Department of Adjutant in 1989 and from 1991 to 1993, and Department of Italy commander from 1993 to 1994. He also was a member of the National Legislative & Order Committee from 1965 to 1964 and the National Membership & Post Activities Committee from 1965 to 1964.

He is survived by three daughters.
American Legion signs are easy to acquire, and they raise awareness in your community.

Drive into any community across the country and you’re typically greeted by a sign reading something like, “Welcome to Greenfield, Pop. 14,345.” Below the welcome sign, or perhaps mounted nearby, are the emblems of Kiwanis, the Rotary and the Lions Club — all well-respected organizations that have been doing good in their communities for nearly a century. Since 1919, The American Legion has been doing similar good. But how often do you see the organization’s emblem on a town’s or city’s welcome sign? It may not seem like much, but a simple American Legion emblem on a sign leading into your community can increase membership, create awareness about the services and programs of the Legion, and drive traffic to post-home facilities. The signs are affordable and available from Emblem Sales.

One such sign is displayed heading into Indianapolis, home to numerous posts and The American Legion National Headquarters. “The American Legion sign is very visible,” says Melissa Mann of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce. “It definitely lets people know The American Legion is in town.” Stand-alone signs available through Emblem Sales simply feature The American Legion emblem. Other signs are designed to be attached to larger welcome signs that offer space for a post’s personalized message with either non-reflective or reflective lettering. The message can include information such as the post address, phone number, or date and time of monthly meetings.

The signs are available at www.emblem.legion.org or by calling (888) 453-4466. They range from $49.95 to $209.

The cost of displaying a sign varies from community to community, often paid as a one-time fee; call your city clerk’s office or municipal government center to get prices. You also can contact the owners of marquee signs also displayed in your community — many of which are owned by other nonprofit community service organizations — and negotiate a price. Some are free, and some charge one-time fees.

Among the findings of a recent study by The American Legion National Headquarters is that presence on a community welcome sign builds local awareness of an organization and its programs. Posts that display signs also report that veterans passing through their towns feel a sense of connection and often stop at the post home.

In Americus, Ga., American Legion Post 1 felt its informational sign was helpful in directing people to the post in the aftermath of a tornado that swept through the city. Post members turned their facility into a distribution center for badly needed supplies, medicine, water, food and clothing.

“I’m sure glad we got the signs up,” said Post 1 Legionnaire Brenda Johnson. “They came in handy when the tornado struck town... People knew how to find us.” It’s a simple, affordable gesture for any post. To learn more about how to make the best use of welcome-sign space in your community, visit www.legion.org on the Web.

Signs may be ordered from the Emblem Sales catalog or by visiting www.emblem.legion.org on the Web and typing “sign” under “Search.”

Legion post donates $2 million to help build Los Angeles Fisher House

Blessed with members who early on knew the value of investing in real estate, American Legion Post 283 in Pacific Palisades, Calif., currently owns buildings that house a CVS pharmacy and the U.S. Post Office in its community. Thanks to rent collected from those properties and the generosity of its own members, Post 283 has become the single-largest contributor to the Los Angeles Fisher House project.

Post 283 — former President Ronald Reagan’s home post — has donated more than $2 million to the project, which will put a Fisher House on the grounds of VA’s West Los Angeles Healthcare Center. Fisher Houses are located on the grounds of major military and VA medical centers and enable family members to be close to wounded U.S. servicemembers during hospitalization.

The average charge to stay in a Fisher House is less than $10 per family per day, and many locations offer rooms at no cost. No similar housing options are currently available at the West Los Angeles Health Center.

“We give out a lot of money in scholarships each year, and we gave the YMCA $45,000 for one of their projects,” immediate Past Post 283 Commander Louis Corolino said. “When I became commander, I told our executive board the thing I wanted to do was help veterans. I volunteer a lot at the West L.A. Center, and we didn’t have a Fisher House there.

“We’ve got kids coming back who’ve been wounded or are now amputees. Their family wants to be there with them, but some of those families are having to sleep in their cars. The hospital tries to find them hotel rooms, but it’s very crowded in this area. There weren’t a lot of options. It’s really heartbreaking.”

Construction is expected to be completed inside of a year. The cost is $5 million, and Post 283 expects to contribute about half.

“This donation comes at such a critical time in the nation’s quest to provide the best possible care for our veterans and their families,” said Charles Dorman, director of VA Greater Los Angeles. “This big-hearted, caring and generous group of people has helped lead the effort to bring this resource to the veterans of Los Angeles.”

“In this line of work, actions speak louder than words, and this group has quietly proven to be a true leader in caring for our veterans.”

The entire post supports the donation, Corolino said. “After our executive board approved it, everyone at the meeting got up and started clapping. We have people who already volunteer at the hospital. This is somewhere else they’re going to volunteer. It’s for a great cause. We have to do something for the people coming back from the war.”