PROCEEDINGS

of the

99th Annual National Convention

of

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Reno-Sparks Convention Center
Reno, Nevada
August 22, 23, 24, 2017
DISTRIBUTION
1 ea. To: N.E.C.
   Past National Commanders
   National Officers
   Commission Chairmen
   Departments
PROCEEDINGS

of the

99th Annual National Convention

of

THE AMERICAN LEGION

Reno-Sparks Convention Center
Reno, Nevada
August 22, 23, 24, 2017
Table of Contents

Tuesday, August 22, 2017

Call to Order: National Commander Schmidt ................................................................. 1
Invocation .......................................................................................................................... 1
Pledge of Allegiance ...................................................................................................... 2
POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony ................................................................................. 2
Preamble to The American Legion Constitution ......................................................... 2
Law Enforcement and Tolerance ................................................................................ 2
Opening Ceremony, Neal McCoy, Master of Ceremonies ............................................ 3
The American Legion Youth Champions .................................................................... 5
  2016 American Legion Baseball All-Academic Team Captain ............................... 6
  2017 Boys Nation President ...................................................................................... 6
  2017 Eagle Scout of the Year .................................................................................... 7
  2017 Junior Shooting Sports Precision Champion .................................................. 7
  2017 Junior Shooting Sports Sporter Champion ....................................................... 8
  2017 National Oratorical Contest First Place Winner ............................................... 8
Presentation: Spirit of Service Awards ......................................................................... 8
Address: Brigadier General Kevin Vereen, Deputy Commanding General, Operations . 13
Address: Donald E. Ballard, Medal of Honor Recipient .............................................. 16
Presentation: The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal, Dr. Apostolos P.
  Georgopoulos, Director, Brain Sciences Center .................................................... 19
Greetings:
  Mary E. Davis, National President, American Legion Auxiliary ............................. 20
  Jeff C. Frain, Arizona, National Commander, Sons of The American Legion .......... 20
Presentations:
  Department Membership Awards ........................................................................... 21
  National Recruiter of the Year ................................................................................ 24
  Consolidated Post Reporting 2016-2017 ................................................................. 24
  National Emergency Fund Awards ...................................................................... 25
Donations to the National Emergency Fund .............................................................. 26
Welcome:
  Hon. Catherine Cortez Masto, United States Senate .............................................. 28
  Hon. Brian Sandoval, Governor, State of Nevada .................................................. 28
  Robert J. Terhune, 2016-17 Past Commander, Department of Nevada ................ 29
  John Warden, National Convention Corporation of Nevada .............................. 29
  Hon. Hillary Schieve, Mayor of Reno ................................................................. 30
  Hon. Mark Amodei, United States House of Representatives ........................... 30
Presentation: The American Legion Riders ................................................................. 31
Greetings:
  David Flannigan, Dominion President, The Royal Canadian Legion .................... 36
  Ronald G. Smith, Acting Dominion President, ANAVETS ................................. 37
  Chia-Kai Lu, Vice Minister, Veterans Affairs Council, Republic of China ......... 38
  Larry T. Guzy, President General, National Society of the Sons of the American
    Revolution ............................................................................................................. 39
Donations to National Commander's Charity Fund .................................................... 40
Call for Convention ..................................................................................................... 41
Reports:
  Convention Committee on Credentials & Rules .................................................. 43
  Convention Committee on Finance ...................................................................... 44
Wednesday, August 23, 2017

Call to Order.................................................................................................................... 55
Invocation........................................................................................................................ 55
Pledge of Allegiance........................................................................................................ 55
Presentations: ................................................................................................................... 56
Certificate of Appreciation ...................................................................................... 56
The American Legion Patriot Award........................................................................ 57
National Commander’s Media & Communications Award..................................... 58
Plaque to the City of Cincinnati............................................................................... 60
2017 National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year .............................................. 61
2017 National Firefighter of the Year....................................................................... 62
Address: Hon. David J. Shulkin, Secretary, U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs.......... 63
Presentations: Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion……… 68
Addresses: ....................................................................................................................... 70
Address: Greg Pratt, United States Navy (Ret.)......................................................... 70
John D. Monahan, Commissioner, WWI, Centennial Commission......................... 72
Hon. Donald J. Trump, U.S. President.................................................................. 75
Dr. Poonam Alaigh, Acting Under Secretary for Health, Department of Veterans
Affairs............................................................................................................................ 79
Presentation: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. Religious Liberty Award ................................ 84
Address: Hon. Ted Cruz, United States Senate ........................................................... 85
Welcome: Hon. Dean Heller, United States Senate .................................................. 87
Address: Colonel Tom Moe, USAF (Ret.)................................................................. 89
Presentation: Daniel J. O’Connor Americanism Trophy ............................................ 91
Report: Convention Committee on Americanism...................................................... 92
Presentations: ................................................................................................................... 93
Frank N. Belgrano, Jr., Trophy .................................................................................. 93
Ralph T. O’Neil Education Trophy .......................................................................... 93
Garland Murphy, Jr. Award...................................................................................... 93
U. S. Grant Legacy Award.................................................................................... 94
Donations to The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation ......................... 95
Address: Charles Dahlquist, National Commissioner, Boy Scouts of America.... 96
Reports: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs................................................. 99
Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education.......................... 103
Presentations: ................................................................................................................. 111
Employer of the Year Award for Hiring Veterans................................................... 111
Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year Award .................... 113
Addresses: MG Garrett Harencak, USAF Recruiting Service................................. 113
Judith C. Young, Chairman, Gold Star Mothers .................................................... 118
Presentation: Mark Ochenbein, Soldier’s Wish....................................................... 120
Report: Convention Committee on Legislation ....................................................... 121
Thursday, August 24, 2017

Call to Order .................................................................................................................. 123
Invocation...................................................................................................................... 123
Pledge of Allegiance...................................................................................................... 123
Presentations:
   The American Legion Fourth Estate Awards.......................................................... 123
Report: National Security Committee ....................................................................... 126
Donations to Operation Comfort Warriors ................................................................. 135
Report: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation ..................... 137
Presentation: William F. Lenker National Service Trophy ............................................ 147
Presentation: Plaque and Colors to Outgoing National Commander .......................... 152
Special Order of Business: Election of National Officers ......................................... 154
Administering the Oath of Office to the National Commander ................................. 162
Acceptance Speech: Newly Elected National Commander ....................................... 163
Election of National Vice Commanders ....................................................................... 166
Presentations:
   Colors to Incoming National Commander ............................................................. 171
   National President, American Legion Auxiliary .................................................... 172
   National Commander, Sons of The American Legion ............................................ 172
Benediction .................................................................................................................... 174

Announcement of Annual Recipients ......................................................................... 175
Report of Independent Auditors .............................................................................. 183
Abbreviations ............................................................................................................... 199
Index ............................................................................................................................. 203
This booklet has been prepared for the information of members of The American Legion. It has come to be known as the Summary of Proceedings of the National Convention for the current year. It is a comprehensive résumé of what took place at the Ninety-Ninth Annual National Convention in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017.

The final report of the national organization for the period ending December 31, 2016, and balance sheet as of December 31, 2016, and surplus analysis, January 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016, are included in the Summary.

To make a quick distribution, speed has been necessary. Every precaution has been taken to avoid errors, but some may have occurred in the rush of Convention events and the haste of editing and printing.

Permission is hereby given to quote from this Summary without further consent. However, because of the nature of our resolution process, I urge that the full text of any resolve clause(s) be used when a quotation from a resolution is required for publication.

Daniel S. Wheeler
National Adjutant

Note: At various times, the national vice commanders, as follows, presided over the Convention sessions, when called upon by the presiding officer, in accordance with the Uniform Code of Procedure as shown in the verbatim proceedings: Paul Martel, Florida; Fae Casper, Georgia; Douglas L. Boldt, Nebraska; Paul L. Espinoza, New Mexico; Vincent James Troiola, New York.
... At 8:30 a.m., the delegates assembled for the 99th Annual National Convention, and the following proceedings were had.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Ladies and gentlemen, as we begin our program, please join me in a round of applause for Rick Pedro on the keyboard. (Applause)

Call to Order
Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon, National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The 99th National Convention of The American Legion will come to order.

Ladies and gentlemen, please rise as the National Champion Color Guard from Newport Harbor Post 291, Newport Beach, California, presents the Colors. Remain standing while rendering a hand salute for the singing of the National Anthem by Neal McCoy. Advance the colors.

... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors, followed by which the National Anthem was performed by Neal McCoy. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Color Guard, you may retire. Thank you!

For the invocation, I call on National Chaplain Harvey H. Klee of Texas. Ladies and gentlemen, please uncover.

Invocation
Harvey H. Klee, Texas, National Chaplain

Dearly beloved, merciful and loving God, Your prophet Joshua instructed us to be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged, for the Lord, your God, will be with you wherever you go.

And by Your grace The American Legion has taken that message to heart in service to veterans and their families everywhere, and has grown to be the largest veterans organization in the world. And so we begin this gathering in conjunction with the 99th National Convention in humble gratitude for Your divine benevolence, never forgetting the source of our past and future success lie in You.

May "For God and Country" not be just a motto but a way of life, a way of life dedicated to veterans and their rehabilitation, national security, Americanism and children and youth. Heavenly Father, we are a simple people who insist at times on making life more complicated than it need be. So help us out here, Lord. Grant through your loving kindness our National Convention will be a resounding success.

May all go well without major hiccups, with problems easily fixed and issues resolved in good spirit and friendly humor. Let good health and circumstance prevail for all attending this convention with bodies well fed and well rested. Help us to be patient with
one another and turn our differences into strength, not weakness. May kindness predominate in our relationships with one another.

As to our scheduled events, may all arrive on time, leave on time, and have a good time; and may the presentations be meaningful and enlightening and, when appropriate, entertaining; and when all is said and done, may we leave this convention better for having attended. This we pray in Your most precious and holy name, Amen.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Chaplain Klee.

Pledge of Allegiance
Kevin J. Owens, Oregon, National Sergeant-at-Arms

Please remain uncovered as National Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin J. Owens of Oregon leads us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

... At this time, the delegation recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony
G. Michael Schlee, Maryland, Chairman, National Security Commission
E. C. Toppin, North Carolina, Vice Chairman, National Security Commission

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: At this time, we pause to remember those who are listed as prisoners of war or missing in action from wars in which we have been engaged. We in The American Legion will never forget them. We will not ease the pressure on our government to do the right thing and continue to work for an accounting of all those missing. I now call on the chairman of the National Security Council, G. Michael Schlee, of Maryland and Vice Chairman E.C. Toppin of North Carolina to place the POW /MIA flag on the empty chair.

Preamble to The American Legion Constitution
Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon, National Commander

Cover. Let us reaffirm our commitment to the principles and ideals of our American Legion that was founded upon by reciting the preamble to the constitution.

... At this time, the delegation recited the preamble to The American Legion Constitution.

Law Enforcement and Tolerance
Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon, National Commander

You may be seated. Before we begin our opening, I would like to point to yet another reason why I am so proud to be a Legionnaire. It involves the vision of our founders. In 1923, The American Legion passed a national resolution at our convention in San Francisco that is as relevant today as it was 94 years ago. It resonates so well that I would like to read it over now. Resolution No. 407, titled Law Enforcement and Tolerance, and I quote:

"WHEREAS, The fundamental law of our country guarantees to all people equal rights and opportunities and the right to worship their God as they see fit; and

WHEREAS, It is provided that our laws shall be made and enforced by representatives of our people, chosen under the law to do so; and

WHEREAS, Membership of The American Legion is made up of those who served our country in time of great national stress, without distinction as to race, color, creed or class; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion is pledged to the orderly enforcement of our laws through our lawful agencies; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in San Francisco, California, October 15-19, 1923, That we consider individuals, groups of individuals or organizations which creates or fosters racial, religious or class strife among our people, or which takes into their own hands the enforcement of law, determination of guilt or infliction of punishment to be un-American, a menace to our liberties and destructive to our fundamental right; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That we consider such action by any individual, groups or organizations to be inconsistent with the ideals and purposes of The American Legion."

Ladies and gentlemen, once again The American Legion was on the right side of history, and we still are today. The American Legion National Executive Committee, just reaffirmed Resolution 407 without changing a single word. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Our master of ceremonies for this morning is a true country music star. He has released fifteen studio albums on various labels and has released 34 singles to country radio. In 1993 he broke through with the back-to-back number one singles "No Doubt About It" and "Wink" from his platinum-certified album No Doubt About It. His success continued with a string of hits, including "Billy's Got His Beer Goggles On." Although he has won numerous awards, he is most proud of participating in 15 USO tours. His patriotism was on full display when in 2016 he recited the Pledge of Allegiance live on his Facebook page every morning. Before calling him up here, let's watch a brief video. ... At this time, the delegation viewed a video.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome a proud American, Neal McCoy! (Applause)

Opening Ceremony
Neal McCoy

Thank you. Oh, please sit down. Thank you very much. Thank you, y'all. I'm the one that should stand for you guys, and I do quite often. Thanks for having us here. I'm going to sing something right quick. If you will, like I sing the National Anthem, I'm going to sing "God Bless America." And I'd be honored if you'd sing it with me. And I often joke, when I sing the National Anthem, I get a lot of young people that come up and say, you know, "What's the best way to sing that?" I say, "Here's the way you sing it: Get up and sing it the way God wrote it." In case somebody else wants to sing along with you, don't throw all those twists and curves in there. It's not worth it. You're screwing everybody up. (Applause)

One of my pet peeves. So I'm going to sing one this morning, and I appreciate it if you sing it with me. I'll start it right here.

... At this time, Neal McCoy performed "God Bless America." Nice job. (Applause)

Good morning. Good morning. Good morning, young people. Nice to see young people. There's an old song that says youth is wasted on the young. I never understood that when I was young. I thought it was the stupidest lyrics I ever heard. Now that as you get older I understand it. I've got a two-year-old and six-year-old, both grandsons, and it's entirely wasted on those two. (Laughter)

First of all, I'm glad to be here. I'm honored to be here. Kind of freaked out a little bit when they handed me this piece of paper that has me listed as master of ceremonies, because I really don't know that I am. But I'm sure honored to be here. It's awfully kind of Commander Schmidt and all these folks to invite me here, and I had a pretty good speech of what I was going to say in my mind, tell you a little bit about my family, but it was all in that video that we just watched. So thank you very much. Have a good day. (Laughter)
I had not seen that. They did a very good job of editing it, because it is exactly what I would say and probably what I was going to say here. I'll give you a little bit about my history. I was born and raised in Jacksonville, Texas. Where are my Texas people? They're supposed to clap anytime you say "Texas." *(Applause)*

You know the old saying: You can tell a Texan; you just can't tell them much. *(Laughter)*

I was born and raised there in Jacksonville, which is in northeast Texas, what they call the Pine Curtain. And I still live in Longview, Texas, which is about an hour north of Jacksonville. Never moved too far off. I've been around the world many times, and every state, province, a lot of different countries, there's no place like coming home. That's where I was born and raised. My father graduated from Texas A&M in 1952. *(Cheers)*

Whoop! And thought that he was fixing to ship off to Korea just like most of his friends did. Instead, I think because of his engineering degree, they sent him to the Philippines. They started surveying, started to survey the jungles, get everything a little closer so they could figure out where everything was.

Anyway, he met my mother in the Philippines. My mother is from Manila. She is the second oldest of 18 children. Yeah, right. Oh, my gosh, where was reality TV when she was growing up? *(Laughter)*

But her mother died young, and Mom was 13 when the Japanese occupied Manila. I know I'm preaching to the proverbial choir in this room, but they hit Manila about the same time they hit Pearl Harbor. So Mom was very tough. Raised us kids to be tough. Not always fighting or anything, but to be tough minded, tough spirited. I'll give you just a quick example of how tough she was. Because she was raising all these brothers and sisters in some tough times, martial law, a lot of things going on in the Philippines.

When she had my older brother, born in Manila, they moved back, and they had my sister and me around the Jacksonville, Texas, area, they thought it was very important for us to mind our Ps and Qs. That's when Mom, coming from the Philippines and not having all the freedoms that all of us wonderful folks have had here in the United States of America, she started teaching us at a young age: You ought to be grateful and respectful and understand what is giving you guys the right to do what you do and have the right to say what you want to say when you want to say it.

Some of them, there's a lot of people saying them at the wrong times, if you ask me, but they got the right to do that. So she started instilling in us as children how fortunate we were to be in this country. So as I got older, it takes some of us a little longer to kind of figure out life in general, figure out God in general, figure out what's going on. And sometimes it takes us a little longer. Took me a little longer.

My older brother and older sister, who graduated from Texas A&M, they learned a little sooner because they were a little smarter than me and they went to the right school. I, in turn, started singing. But as you get older and you start to have children and then us having grandchildren, what Mom was trying to teach us was right from wrong.

When I had the opportunity to take my first USO tour, Wayne Newton called me about 18 years ago. And he knew of me as an entertainer. Didn't know that much about me. We took our first USO tour over to Bosnia and Italy and Hungary. And since then I've been on 15 USO tours, most of them with Wayne. We've been to Afghanistan seven different times, Iraq a few different times, Pakistan, Bosnia, Italy, and Hungary. A lot of places some of you folks have been, Germany, Belgium.

So it just instills in me, when I have an opportunity to be around what you folks do on your daily lives in trying to let folks know about the constitution of some of these young people up here, and they're grasping it pretty young, and I appreciate that, I probably didn't. So it's nice to see young people that get it early. Some of you probably would admittedly say: Yeah, I didn't get it either. Took a while to soak in on me. And it's okay. As long as it
soaks in, it don't matter when it soaks in. As long as you get it in there. But these kids are all about it. I understand they're going to receive some pretty prestigious awards here in a little bit. I'm honored to be up here and be a part of that.

But I just want to tell you that it's an honor for me to be in the room and invite you tonight to our show. We have a concert tonight that we think you'll enjoy if you give us an opportunity to entertain you. That's kind of what we do.

But he mentioned that I say the Pledge of Allegiance every day, and this morning I said it outside of my bus for the 593rd day in a row. (Applause)

So if you're about that, if you're about our country and love what the Pledge stands for and that flag and what that flag honors, I invite you to come over to Neal McCoy's fan page every morning and say it with me. It's a big deal. In the 593 days, we've had probably over 80 million views. And a lot of people have gotten on board, and now they say it every morning with me. As a matter of fact, I haven't missed it in 593 days, but I've been tardy or late because we're on the bus and sometimes cell service isn't that great. The second you're not there at a time, they're writing you and emailing you and texting you, saying, "What's the matter? Have you had a wreck? Is everything okay?" "Yeah, just in a bad cell. Hang on, I'm getting there."

But it's become a part of my life. And I'm honored that it has. Because my grandfather, serving in the World War, and then my father serving, and they've given us, my family and I, I've got a wife of almost 37 years. Our 37-year anniversary is coming up in October. We have two wonderful children. A 31-year-old daughter, who has given us two grandchildren, and a 23-year-old son. Because of them stepping up and understanding what it's going to take to protect the freedoms of this country and them serving our country, I'm fortunate enough to be here with a lot of other patriots in this room.

Commander Schmidt told me when I was up here visiting with him before this whole thing became real, he said, "So your grandfather was in the service and your father was in the service; so that says that you can be a Sons of The American Legion." And I said, "I'll take it. (Applause)

So I don't know where the paperwork is or what I've got to do, but I am honored and flattered to be associated with you guys and girls. Other than that, I don't have much to say. They told me don't talk too much but don't talk too little. So I really don't know where I am in that, where it falls in.

But thank you for emceeing and master of ceremonies, when they tell you you're going to emcee, I've emceed a lot of things, and that's pretty easy. But what it means when they write it out, "Master of Ceremonies," like, I don't do that. (Laughter)

But I'm glad to be here. Thank you for singing with me today. Music is just a great way to let your heart really sing. So I appreciate you singing with me today. If you get bored tonight and not doing nothing, come sing with us again, and we'll do something that you'll find in our show somewhere you'll like. We sing country music, but we do a little bit of everything. So, we invite you out tonight. And thank you for letting me be your master of ceremonies today. I'm honored to be here. (Applause)

The American Legion Youth Champions

ANNOUNCER: The 2016 American Legion Baseball All-Academic Team Captain hails from Chester, Virginia. He currently attends Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia. Upon graduation, he will be commissioned in the United States Army. Sponsored by Colonial Heights Post 284 in Colonial Heights, Virginia, please welcome your 2016 All-Academic Team Captain, Adam Conway. (Applause)
Proceedings of Tuesday, August 22, 2017

2016 American Legion Baseball All-Academic Team Captain
Adam Conway, Chester, Virginia

Good morning. I'm so excited to be in a room with people who love America as much as I do. Commander Schmidt, Commander Frain, President Davis, ladies and gentlemen and distinguished guests, I'm privileged to stand before you today. There are many people that are responsible for me being with you today. First and foremost, I would like to thank my Lord and savior Jesus Christ for living in the greatest nation on the planet. (Applause)

And also for the ability to play the greatest game in the world, baseball. (Applause)

Secondly, I'd like to thank my parents, Michael and Gail Conway; my sister, MaKayla; and my grandma, Carol King. Thank you, Memaw. (Applause)

A very special thank you goes out to my local American Legion post, Post 284 of Colonial Heights, Virginia, especially Barb and Bill Gilmore for their countless hours and undying love of American Legion Baseball for over 20 years. (Applause)

Also, a special shout-out needs to go to Colonial Heights Post 284 Pirates coach and team mom, Gilbert and Amy Baber, because without them I would not be here standing before you today. A special thank you goes to Mr. Abrahams who has taken us around and treated us like rock stars this entire week, and it's been incredible. Last but not least, a very special thank you goes out to the National Scholarship Selection Committee, for this scholarship has helped to ease the financial burden of attending my first year at the Virginia Military Institute. (Applause)

My experience with American Legion Baseball has been nothing shy of extraordinary. And on behalf of over 66,000 American Legion Baseball players this year, we thank you. May God bless The American Legion, and may God bless the United States of America. Thank you all. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our next Youth Champion was elected President of Boys Nation by his peers. He hails from Phenix City, Alabama, and was elected Governor of Alabama's Boys State and Alabama state president of a student-led organization. He plans to attend the University of Alabama to pursue a degree in political science. Sponsored by Post 135 in Phenix City, Alabama, please welcome your 2017 Boys Nation President, Darius Thomas. (Applause)

2017 Boys Nation President
Darius Thomas, Phenix City, Alabama

Hello, good morning. Thank you. Thank you. I would like to start by first and foremost thanking my mother for her strong support of me throughout my entire life. Thank you, Mom. (Applause)

I would like to thank Mr. Davis and my American Legion post, Post 135 of the great state of Alabama, for everything they've done for me. (Applause)

Lastly, I would like to thank you, The American Legion Family. Thank you for funding the scholarships that will lead to my education. Thank you for shaping my future. You know, I'm a young man with a single mother and a brother in prison until the year 2030, and success from that kind of background really isn't the status quo. However, I'll never let the status quo define me. (Applause)

My faith in God and my love of country is too deep, too strong for me to waste my life. Being on this stage is a testament to the fact that the American dream is still alive. Being on this stage is a testament that for with God nothing shall be impossible. (Applause)

With my mother's love and God's guidance, there is nothing that I cannot achieve. So, lastly, I'd like to say myself, Emily, Adam, and Andrew, we are living proof that America's
future is bright. Thank you, American Legion, for the hope, thank you for the love, thank you for the honor. May God bless The American Legion and may God bless these United States of America. Thank you. (Applause)

2017 Eagle Scout of the Year
Scott Moore, Jr., Clarksville, Tennessee

ANNOUNCER: The 2017 Eagle Scout of the Year is from Clarksville, Tennessee. He was awarded this honor for his tireless work at The Well, a homeless shelter and food ministry in downtown Clarksville, raising more than $1,400 and asking for toiletry donations from hotels in the area. He credits his active involvement with Boy Scouts and JROTC and his participation in Boys State for his acceptance into the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. Due to his training obligations, Scott is unable to attend today. Please give a round of applause for the 2017 Eagle Scout of the Year, Scott Moore, Jr. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: In competition at Colorado Springs a few weeks ago, two Youth Champions took top prize at the 2017 Junior Air Rifle Championships. Emily Stith of Colorado Springs, Colorado, claimed the precision championship title with an overall score of 2,477 out of a possible 2509, finishing with a precision final score of 104.7. In just a few weeks she plans to join the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit in Fort Benning, Georgia. Please welcome your 2017 Precision Champion, Emily Stith. (Applause)

2017 Junior Shooting Sports Precision Champion
Emily Stith, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Hi everyone. I'd like to start off by thanking the inspirational man that ran the national competition that I competed in and all of the rounds leading up to it, Shayne Abrahams, National Commander Charles Schmidt, National Auxiliary President Mary Davis, my wonderful parents, and Colorado Department Commander Terry Clinton, and also everybody here that has a helping hand in The American Legion.

To everyone here in this room, thank you for being here. Without all of you my fellow champions and I wouldn't be here. Whether or not you're in the Auxiliary, the Sons of The American Legion, or any of the amazing programs that are run by The American Legion, you all help the youth and shape us. And we all can't say thank you enough.

When I was told that I would not win a national competition, I made sure to prove them wrong. When I was told that I would not go overseas and go to any national or any international world cups or world championships, I made sure to win silver in Czech Republic and Innsbruck, Austria, and made it to World Cups in Bangkok, Thailand, and Munich, Germany. I did so by representing this beautiful country and upholding my thanks in Christ and the sportsmanship that I was taught so well by everybody here. With that I have my eyes set on 2020, the Olympics. (Applause)

Thank you. I will always hold all of the lessons that I've learned in The American Legion when I go overseas to do that. This opportunity to speak in front of all of you guys has been absolutely unbelievable. I can't say thank you enough. May God bless the amazing American Legion and this beautiful country. Thank you. (Applause)
2017 Junior Shooting Sports Sporter Champion
Hailey Smith, Zion, Illinois

ANNOUNCER: In the Sporter category, the championship was captured by a young shooter representing Zion Benton NJROTC in Zion, Illinois. She won the title by firing a score of 2,330 out of a possible 2,400. This fall she is attending Marquette University in Milwaukee on a Navy ROTC full-ride scholarship. Although school commitments prevent her from being with us today, please acknowledge your 2017 Sporter Shooting Champion, Hailey Smith. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our last Youth Champion hails from Newton, Massachusetts. He displayed his passion for encouraging youth to educate themselves on the U.S. Constitution with his prepared oration entitled "The Constitution: A Lasting Legacy." He's not only been recognized at several debate and public speaking tournaments, but he is also an accomplished wrestler. He is a senior in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, and plans a future in international relations and public policy. Sponsored by Post 440, please welcome your 2017 National Oratorical Contest winner, Andrew Steinberg. (Applause)

2017 National Oratorical Contest First Place Winner
Andrew Steinberg, Newton, Massachusetts

Ladies and gentlemen, Commander Schmidt, distinguished delegates, I would like to thank you for the profound honor of participating at the National Oratorical Contest and welcoming me to The American Legion Family. (Applause)

My exposure to The American Legion came through the Oratorical Contest. For others, programs like Boys Nation, Baseball, Shooting and so many others promote a culture of service, citizenship and commitment to bettering our communities and country. From my earliest interactions with Post 440 in my hometown of Newton, Massachusetts, to the national stage in Indianapolis, I have met the most incredible people. But I would especially like to thank Mr. Shayne Abrahams, who ran the entire national competition and has given all of us at the youth delegation the experience of a lifetime. (Applause)

And all of you for giving us the opportunity of a lifetime. We learn from your examples of leadership and service. Your message to us is clear: That studying the constitution matters. Investing in our generation matters. In a time where viewpoints concerning our nation can be polarizing, I returned from Indianapolis optimistic about our country's future. Optimistic not because my peers agreed on every issue, but because of what we shared: love of country, respect for our brave men and women in uniform, and the commitment to becoming the next guardians of American democracy. (Applause)

This fall I'll be a high school senior. I'm interested in pursuing public service, but I don't know exactly where my future will take me. But I promise you this: I will always work to protect the rights and liberties that you have fought to defend, and I will always strive to make sure The American Legion is proud of its investment in me for the years to come. Thank you and God bless. (Applause)

Presentation of the Spirit of Service Awards
Brigadier General Kevin Vereen, Deputy Commanding General, Operations
United States Army Recruiting Command
Donald E. Ballard, Medal of Honor Recipient

ANNOUNCER: The Spirit of Service Awards were first established by The American Legion in 2000 at our National Convention in Milwaukee. Each of the military branches
Selects an outstanding junior enlisted member to receive this distinguished award based on off-duty volunteerism. Assisting National Commander Schmidt in presenting the awards is Brigadier General Kevin Vereen of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command and Medal of Honor recipient Donald E. Ballard. Please rise as the commander leads us in rendering appropriate honors to Mr. Ballard.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Present arms! Order arms!

ANNOUNCER: Our first Spirit of Service Award recipient demonstrates a spirit of charity through her selfless dedication and voluntary commitments. As a volunteer instructor for the Health Professions Scholarship Program in Fort Knox, she contributed to educating future Army leaders, exhibiting exceptional volunteer service, and enhancing the U.S. Army Medical Department and the local community. In 2016, she served as a member of the "Funeral Honors Mission" and rendered final honors to 25 veterans, achieving the highest grade of excellence from all 25 families and funeral directors. Representing the United States Army, please welcome Spirit of Service Award recipient, Specialist Virginia A. Constable. (Applause)

SPECIALIST VIRGINIA A. CONSTABLE: Good morning, Legionnaires, brothers and sisters in arms, distinguished guests, and family and friends. Thank you for being here today in support of the incredible people and programs that are represented. It is impossible to put into words how honored I am to be here today receiving this award, but I'll do my best.

First off, I have to thank Sergeant Terpaso for introducing me to this program that I work with and that I fell in love with. Sergeant Prescott put together a program where medics could go to universities and teach the students basic medical school. These students were incredible. They're pre-med students who knew all the book knowledge but didn't have any hands-on experience. And the medics had all this hands-on experience down to muscle memory. But in order to teach, they had to break it down to the very basics and had this unique opportunity to learn to teach. It is truly an incredible learning opportunity for both sides, and also it is an opportunity to introduce these students to a friendly face to the uniform and the opportunities that the military has to offer.

I wish I could thank each individual person who helped me on the way to this incredible accomplishment and who has helped me in the progression of my career. But if I did that, we'd be here all day. I know y'all don't want to listen to me talk that long. But I will simply thank The American Legion for this incredible opportunity to come out here and all the experiences I've had and the honor of being here.

I also have to thank Sergeant Verales, Sergeant Wright and my command team at the USN MEDEVAC at Fort Knox for thinking of me when the opportunity for this award arose. I'd also like to thank my friends and family for supporting me along the way and continuing to support me in all of my endeavors. Thank you and God bless. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our next 2017 Spirit of Service Award recipient displayed outstanding leadership and a devotion to aid others. In 2016, she provided 624 hours as a volunteer EMT for Virginia Beach Medical Services. As a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Victim Advocate, she volunteers to aid and support victims of sexual assault in the Hampton Roads area. Her selfless dedication has earned her two Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals as well as the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal. Please welcome United States Navy Petty Officer Second Class Robin Stephens. (Applause)

PETTY OFFICER SECOND CLASS ROBIN STEPHENS: Good morning. I want to start off by thanking everyone that thanked me for my service on the way here. That was
incredible. So many people that stopped me, and that was just amazing. So thank you to all of those that stopped me. Thank you for your service as well because it's extremely important to be here today. There's so many people that I have met that are just incredible, and I've heard so many amazing stories. And for that I'll always be grateful. Also just the few that recognized that I was in my white uniform today. So thank you for recognizing that it's very easy to stain this up, you just breathe the wrong way and something jumps on you. So thank you for recognizing that.

First and foremost, I want to thank The American Legion for such an unforgettable opportunity and the privilege to represent the Navy in accepting the Spirit of Service Award. To every single member of this organization, thank you for allowing me to become a part of this family. I'm so excited to share the same passion, to strive towards a better tomorrow for past, present and future military servicemembers.

I want to thank my command. In no way would this have been possible without their unconditional support. More specifically, my CO, XO, CMC, Warrant Officer Haner, Mr. Sloan. Thank you for always having my back and unknowingly showing me the qualities it requires to be not just a good leader but a great one.

I would also like to thank my family. They are the ones who truly deserve this award. Their spirit of service has yet to falter even though challenged by time and distance. Y'all are my heroes, and I love y'all very much. To my wonderful, handsome husband, who is down in the front, thank you from the bottom of my heart for willingly going down this amazing, crazy, difficult path with me. I love you so much and thank you for being here today. (Applause)

Thank you again for allowing me to become a fellow Legionnaire. It means so much more now that I've gotten to meet many of you and see for myself what The American Legion is truly about. Thank you again for everything you do for us. We are forever grateful. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our next Spirit of Service Award is given to a Marine for his outstanding volunteer service and unselfish devotion to local community activities. He provided over 430 hours of community service to a multitude of meaningful organizations while also receiving the Presidential Volunteer Service Award with Silver Distinction. His outstanding willingness to serve has made him an exemplary role model to other Marines across the Corps. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Corporal Justin Ahasteen, United States Marine Corps. (Applause)

CORPORAL JUSTIN AHASTEEN: Good morning. Ladies, gentlemen, fellow servicemembers, veterans, distinguished guests and retirees, it is with great honor to receive this award as a representative of the United States Marine Corps. As servicemembers, we have a duty and commitment not only to the best interests of our national security, but to the people of the United States.

Hunger, poverty and inequality have plagued our nation, but organizations such as The American Legion, Red Cross, Salvation Army and the willpower of others are able to impact the lives of many and make a difference one action at a time.

I thank The American Legion, my fellow servicemembers and the grace of God for setting the example and to provide aid to those who are unable to provide for themselves. Semper fidelis, and thank you for having me. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our Coast Guard Spirit of Service Award recipient is a servicewoman with a contagious desire for volunteerism. Serving as the Base Elizabeth City's Volunteer Captain, she has planned, organized, and served as the Coast Guard leader in many community service events. Recently, she was awarded the Coast Guard Military
Outstanding Volunteer Service medal for her 355 hours of community service. She was also nominated for the Greater Elizabeth City Area Chamber of Commerce "Women of Excellence" Program. Due to her military duties, U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer Second Class Jordan Suchon is unable to attend. Please give her a warm round of applause. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our next recipient, in addition to serving her country, works as a school nurse in the historic Northeast Kansas City Public School District. While there, she has coordinated with the Kansas City Health Department to help more than 100 students meet compliance standards. She has worked with several organizations to provide free hygiene products and dental care to students. She has also taken up the volunteer task as coach of three sports, providing structure and a safe environment. Representing the Air National Guard, Senior Airman Allanesha Smith. (Applause)

SENIOR AIRMAN ALLANESHA SMITH: Well, good morning. I don't think I've been this nervous since the first day of basic training. (Laughter)

I would first like to thank The American Legion and all you distinguished guests for being here. I'd like to thank the Legion for rewarding me and recognizing my service to my community. I'd like to thank my leadership, Colonel Fries, Medical Group Commander 131st Bomb Wing, Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri. I'd like to thank my parents for their unwavering support and their awful "Chair Force" jokes, as they are two retired Army. Growing up an Army brat from a family of a nursing corps officer mom, combat engineer dad and IT specialist brother, it's hard to get out of those "Chair Force" jokes. I'd also like to thank my better half and soon-to-be husband, Michael. Thank you for being here. Down there, I see you. (Applause)

I love you very much and I'd like to thank you for supporting my service.

The last thing I'd like to leave you with today is a special shout-out to Post 331 outside of Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where I grew up. That post offers a specific scholarship to nursing students. I wouldn't be the nurse that I am without that post. You see, 14 years ago, a Legionnaire named Richard gave my mom a scholarship to become a nurse. She went from green to gold in the Army. She received the 40&8 Scholarship. Fourteen years later I would follow in her footsteps, go to the same nursing school and receive the same scholarship from an American Legion Legionnaire named Richard. (Applause)

So, you see, the story is about impact. If 14 years ago my mother hadn't received that scholarship, she wouldn't be the director of the Hamlet VA serving thousands of veterans after she retired from the Army. (Applause)

She wouldn't be the nurse she is today serving in prisons inside the great state of North Carolina, and I wouldn't be the nurse that I am serving in the great state of Missouri, with thousands of children, helping many homeless people and lots of their families in my community. So I'd like to thank the Legion because you don't realize that one impact can change someone's entire life. I challenge you all to continue to do that each and every day. Thank you. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Our final Spirit of Service award goes to a member of the U.S. Air Force who has dedicated her time and efforts to many charitable organizations within the Tucson community. Ever the humanitarian, she dedicated 144 hours comforting and engaging seniors without family at a local hospice center. She's assisted with numerous food drives for the Tucson homeless while also participating as a storyteller in the children's ward intensive care unit. Please welcome U.S. Air Force Spirit of Service recipient, Senior Airman Kalynn Mitchell. (Applause)
SENIOR AIRMAN KALYNN L. MITCHELL: Good morning, everyone. I would first like to start out and say how gracious and humbled I am to be here. It's been a wonderful and amazing opportunity.

I've suffered with depression for many years, been diagnosed for about three and a half. Now, on the worst days, where falling asleep and staying asleep was hard but actually waking up and going through the day was the hardest, I looked to volunteering. Volunteering actually gave me a purpose. It made me see that one person can mean so much. No matter how hopeless or awful or out of luck I felt, volunteering was always there to remind me that no matter who you are, no matter what gender, what race, sexuality, you did matter and you can make a difference. Thank you. (Applause)

NEAL MCCOY: Where's the person playing that organ at? I love that. Thank you. Nice job! All right. Great job! (Applause)

Well, as your master of ceremonies, at least for this early portion of the presentation, I thank you for having me here. What an honor to be up here with all these folks who received these awards, the young folks, our military folks. It's a big deal, again, for me to be here and finding out from the general that I'm eligible to be a Son of The American Legion. I'm going to start the paperwork on that, and I look forward to being with you guys and girls maybe somewhere else down the road. Thank you for having me. Enjoy the rest of your show. Please come to our show tonight, if you get a chance. Thank you for letting me be your master of ceremonies. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Ladies and gentlemen, please show your appreciation once again for Neal McCoy. (Applause)

Congratulations once again to our American Legion Youth Champions and to our Spirit of Award recipients. Don't those men and women in uniform make you proud? And don't our Youth Champions make you proud? (Cheers and applause)

Those Youth Champions are the fruits of your labor, out in your posts, units or squadrons, of giving youth an opportunity in The American Legion programs. Thank you all. By the way, all of our Spirit of Service recipients are now members of The American Legion. (Applause)

I also have a feeling that some of our Youth Champions will someday be Legionnaires. (Applause)

I would like to make some important announcements, if you would please note. Those individuals receiving membership awards should start making their way to the area behind the stage now in order to form up for the presentations at 10:50 a.m.

Secondly, the president of the United States will speak at our national convention tomorrow, Wednesday, at approximately 11:00 a.m. Regardless of your political views, we always treat our guests with the utmost courtesy. That means no booing, no chanting, no demonstrations. Polite applause when appropriate.

On Wednesday, shuttles start at 6:00 a.m. All pickup and drop-off for shuttles, on Wednesday only, will be at the north entrance of the convention center. If you are not on the shuttle by 9:30 a.m., you probably will not make it into the hall or even into the vicinity. Reno Police Department will have all streets closed around the convention center by 9:30 a.m. If you have been driving to the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, we recommend arriving at the parking lot off Coliseum Way, back of the Atlantis, no later than 9:30 a.m. If not, you will not get into the parking area. The convention center's only entrance will be the north entrance at the Atlantis Skywalk. If you go to any other door, it will be locked. Doors will be for exiting only. If you leave the center for any reason through those doors, you will have to walk all the way around to the north entrance. In order to enter the convention center, you will need to have your name badge and/or distinguished guest badge. Entrance is via the Atlantis Skywalk and the north entrance near the bottom of the
escalators. The convention center will open at 6:00 a.m. Hall 4, where you now are, will open at 7:00 a.m. Magnetometers will be in place outside Hall 4. Once you go through the mags, if you leave, you must reenter through the mags again. Most likely the Secret Service will restrict movement around 10:30. If you have not passed through the mags by 10:30, it is highly probable that you will not be granted access to Hall 4. Don't bring backpacks or large purses because it slows down entry through the mags. Also, knives, weapons, guns are not allowed. You bring them, you won't receive them back, ever. You may bring in water bottles, soda, etcetera. Also, there's no department media seating this year due to the seats being preempted by media for the president's visit. This will be a historic event because the president will be signing the Claims Modernization Act on our convention stage, a first. And you don't want to miss it. (Applause)

If any organization understands the importance of a strong corps of volunteers, it's The American Legion. Our next speaker is the Deputy Commanding General of Operations for the U.S. Army Recruiting Command. It has a vitally important mission of finding the best men and women to defend our America. He deployed with the 42nd Military Police Brigade under Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2008 to 2009. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Airborne and Air Assault schools. He has earned master's degrees at the U.S. Army War College and Troy State University. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Brigadier General Kevin Vereen. (Applause)

Address: Brigadier General Kevin Vereen
Deputy Commanding General, Operations, U.S. Army Recruiting Command

Okay. Good morning, American Legion! And I'll end it with "hoohah" for all you Army. I just want to clarify the last name is Vereen. I'm from the great state of North Carolina, born at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. And that's what I call home. So for you North Carolina folks, I am just proud and honored to be able to represent the state of North Carolina. Hooah!

So I'm going to talk real quick. I'm not going to be here long. I will tell you, it is an honor for me to stand before you and speak to some great Americans who I have had the honor and privilege of knowing pretty much all of my life. Having being raised as a kid in a military family, both of my siblings have served in the military and have since retired, so we are truly a military family. And so I'm just honored to be able to speak to you just real briefly about what it means for our Army and for our military as we go into the next couple of decades and the future of service.

So I will just tell you that The American Legion has been just a proud organization who has done great work since 1919, and I am just honored for what you do for our retirees, for our current servicemembers serving on active duty, and our youth. I will tell you that, speaking on behalf of the Army, and I can almost say for all the other services, our military is built on people. As we continue to do those things that our nation has required us to do at home and abroad, it's all about our future generation of servicemembers.

We've got a tremendous military that's been active, pretty active, over the last 16, 17 years. You all know it. You see it on the news. There's no surprise. We have been in continuous conflict since 9/11. And it's not going down. It is not diminishing. As our Army and as our military continue to serve our nation and to protect and defend those who enjoy the liberties and the freedoms that we all enjoy in this great nation, we will need a future generation that can step up and serve their country.

So for the Army, I will tell you, we're going to need your help. I don't care if you're a retired Army veteran, a retired Marine, Coast Guard, Navy, doesn't matter. We need your help because our military is going to be called to continue to do what it's designed to do, it's on the backs of our future generation. I know you're going to ask probably: Well, how
can I help? Well, I will tell you that I want you to be an ambassador for our military. I want you to be an ambassador for our Army. The best way you can do that is really tell your story, tell your story of your service to your nation, so that our young generation will want to be a part of something bigger than themselves, and that's the U.S. military.

I will also tell you that I will grant you access to our recruiters all across the world. We have over 9,000 Army recruiters alone over the United States and some overseas. Wherever there is a school, a high school, there's a recruiter close to that location. I just want to tell you, you have an open invitation to be a recruiter for us, to talk to our recruiters and ask them how can you help. But I will tell you, it starts with telling your story. We want you to tell your story. You have access in some cases where we don't have access. You have friends who may not even know what the military's all about, and they may have grandkids and kids who want to be a part of something bigger than themselves, and that's the U.S. military.

I would ask that you visit our recruiting centers. They're all over the world. They're all over the United States. They are in storefronts. They are in office buildings. Find one in your local area. I would ask that you go and talk to our recruiters and ask them how you can help. We need your help. I'll also tell you that our Army and our military is built on professionals. We are a professional institution. We have served on the backs of you all. I will tell you, there is no greater service than service to your nation wearing the uniform. I'm proud to be able to do that. (Applause)

I will hope that in your contact and your interaction with our servicemembers wearing the uniform that they're professionals and that they treat you with dignity and respect, the respect that you deserve as former servicemembers wearing the uniforms defending our country. I would hope that that's the case. I will also hope that they're doing the right thing, in your presence and out of your presence, because we expect them to do the right thing all the time. In the absence of supervision, in the absence of leadership, they are the ambassadors of our country, and we expect them to act accordingly and to represent our nation and our military in a positive light.

So what does the Army have to offer? And I'll speak just real quickly about the Army. There's over 150 career fields that we have now in the Army. I will tell you, there is about any job occupation that any young 17 to 24 year-old would want to do. But they may not know what's available to them. There's also credentialing programs and certifications where they can be certified in a certain field. Then when they decide to hang up their uniform, they have a certification or a credential that they can take back in the community and they can work in the civilian sector and service the civilian sector using those skills they learned in our military. But they will not know it unless we tell them. So I ask that you know about our Army, know about our military so that you can be advocates for our profession, a true profession of arms.

We also have tuition assistance. I know most of you know what that is. The Army GI Bill, all those great educational benefits that our Army and our military offer to servicemembers, we offer that to those who entered the service, regardless of how long they served, if they served honorably. That will allow them, of course, to fund a college education that they may not be able to afford otherwise.

I will just tell you that those are a few things we offer, it's not only the Army, but it's the military, it's all services, for our young generation so they can be equipped with the skills and the knowledge, the education, so they can be viable and vital members of our society. So let me just tell you, it's no surprise, it may be a surprise to you, but most of our youth are disconnected to the military. About 50 percent of our youth have no clue what the service is all about. They can't tell you the difference between the Army, the Navy. They may. They see ships, and they understand that's probably the Navy. The Marine
Corps, probably the uniforms. I know the Army takes heat about not being as well dressed as the Marine Corps. So thank you, Marines. We appreciate it. *(Laughter)*

But they don't know about the military. In substance, true substance. Most of them, if you don't know, really don't even meet the qualifications to serve in the military. 71 percent of our youth, 17 to 24, don't even meet the qualifications to serve in the military. Why is that? I will tell you the number one thing is obesity. So we've got to work with our youth and we've got to tell them that we want them to be fit to fight. We want them to be ready to win. The only way that they can win is they've got to be ready to don the uniform and do things that they may have never dreamed that they could do. We talk about the triad, and that's sleep, diet, and exercise. So that's what we want our young generation to understand and to acquire and pick up those good habits, because it will pay dividends in the long run. They don't understand that you can't serve in the military if you're overweight. They don't understand that you've got to get six to eight hours of sleep at night. The Army only gets six. All the other services, I think you get eight. *(Laughter)*

They don't understand that. We've got to teach them that. They don't understand that growing up on hamburgers and hot dogs and everything else without balanced exercise is not good for you. We've got to educate them on that. I will also tell you that only 1 percent of Americans are currently serving in the military, and only 7 percent of the U.S. population has ever served in the military. I'll tell you, we've got our work cut out because we've got to knock down doors to make sure folks understand that our military can't survive unless it's got people.

I'm asking that you do your job, I will do mine, to make sure that we are ambassadors for our military. Because we want to make sure that at some point in time, as I'm going to transition and sit in those same seats that you're sitting in, don the same uniforms that you're donning today, that I want to have comfort in knowing that our Army and our military is in good hands. So we all have a role to play.

So I want to thank you for your service. I want to thank you for all that you have done for this great nation that we serve and this great nation that we live in. I will tell you from all of our senior leadership, all of our soldiers, our servicemembers across the globe, we don't take freedom for granted because we have to ensure freedom.

Thank you for your service, and thank you for being a part of this great military. May God bless you. May God bless you, bless The American Legion. May God bless the United States of America. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The newest member of The American Legion! *(Applause)* Somebody knows how to recruit.

... *At this time, the delegation viewed a video.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: A member of American Legion Post 626 in Missouri, our next speaker was awarded the Medal of Honor for the amazing bravery and valor of his actions during an attack at a helicopter pad in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam. A Navy Corpsman attached to Company M, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, our guest was treating two Marines suffering from heat exhaustion when they came under attack on May 16, 1968. Under fire, he continued to direct aid to other Marines and then smothered an enemy grenade with his body to protect the wounded. The grenade failed to explode, and he threw it away, where it detonated harmlessly. He continued to treat the wounded and received the nation's highest award for his actions by President Nixon and General Westmoreland. He transferred to the U.S. Army and retired as a colonel in the Kansas National Guard. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome a true American hero, Donald E. Ballard. *(Applause)_UI
Address: Donald E. Ballard  
Medal of Honor Recipient

I am standing up. (Laughter) Please sit down. I treat life with humor because I suffer from post-traumatic stress and I avoid post-traumatic stress disorder by understanding what all that entails and how to avoid it. I'm thinking that I've successfully blended back into our population and successfully lived my life to honor the guys that I served with. I wear this Medal of Honor for all the guys that's ever served. I wear it especially for the guys on the hill with me that died that day. I wear it for all the corpsmen out there. Without the corpsmen, the Marines wouldn't even be able to put a flag on top of the hill. (Applause)

The Marines are always looking for a few good men. They found them: Hospital corpsmen. (Laughter)

Actually, I'm honored to be here today to speak to such a group of Americans. As a matter of fact, I talk about you wherever I go because I do believe in what the general said and all our honorees have done for this great country. But we are kind of missing the boat, as I said, is that we need to reach the common people. Now, these people excelled. They were champions. They were selected because their skill sets were such that they were superior to their peers. But I want to reach the little guys, because, first, I believe the military is a family-owned business. Think about that. We've all handed it from generation to generation. Hardly ever do we get other people that want to join because they have, as the general said, have no clue as to the benefits of joining or the responsibility to this great country. It's up to us to lead the way, to teach these kids and expose these kids to a different core value. Let me ask you this: If we don't do it, who in the hell is going to do it? You know? Take that home with you.

I've only got two like points I want to make. There will be a test afterwards, so pay attention. I'm the treasurer of the Medal of Honor Society. We have spent millions of dollars designing a character development program. They modeled it after me because I'm a character. (Laughter)

I would like and challenge each of you to go to the website, Medal of Honor Society, and look at the education opportunities and help us get that into the schools in your local towns. It's free. It started out as a course curriculum, and we teach anything and everything about core values and situational awareness. We found that didn't work because schoolteachers are already inundated with all their requirements. So we came back to the drawing board and we broke it up into little vignettes to where they can pick and choose what subject matter they want to talk from and use our vignettes as a training tool or adjunct to their objectives.

So my first request for you is when you go home, look at the Medal of Honor Society educational program. Get involved. There's no money involved on your part or the schools' part. We just want to get the word out because not all of us are champions and we do need to reach the less fortunate, the less skilled, and they become an opportunity for them then to become great Americans, just as we've all done. That's my first request for you.

My second is I took off the colonel hat and I put back on my doc hat because I'm sitting out here thinking there's a lot of good speakers here and they all talk about patriotism, Americanism, everything else, which we need to continually hear and we need to spread that word to the youth. I'm going to mention one thing that I want to take home with you, especially the women. Pay attention. How many of you in this room think that the government is going to take care of you when you die? They don't care about us when we're alive. They care even less when we are dead. At the age of 60, I went back to school to become a licensed funeral director. I shook a lot of hands in here checking for pulses. Some of you I have a question about. (Laughter)
But I retired three different times and went back to college to get that license because I found a void. Every veteran I've ever talked to, with the exception of very few, believe that the government somehow is going to pay for their funerals. That is a misstatement. They will not pay one penny for my funeral even though I have the Medal. They'll not pay one penny for your funeral. They will not pay a penny for the returning Afghan that died in combat. Not one penny. That's why you got SGLI insurance.

So if you think for one second that the government is going to be there for you, you're wrong. I'm giving you some advice that I've learned. I got my corpsman hat on again. The thing to do is to go home, think about it, and learn all you can about the process, because an educated consumer will benefit your family after you're dead or if your wife would die. I couldn't see if you raised your hands, anyway, but the attitude is most of you don't know about funerals. The government will give you everything once you step into that cemetery. But how do you get from the deathbed to the cemetery? You have to go through a licensed funeral practitioner. Okay. That's why I went back to school, because in our post, in our town, Kansas City, we had no assets to help the indigent.

I do over a hundred funerals free. I take no salary now, and my wife takes no salary, because we care and that's our passion, is to take care of the veterans that don't qualify for benefits. And, by the way, that's you. (Applause)

I'm going to try to get ads in your magazine with a website that will allow you to go to my website that says "Things you should know about funerals." I know this is not a subject that anybody wants to talk about, but that's what corpsmen do. We look at things differently than most of you. You know, you might see somebody get shot, but it's the corpsmen that has to go over there and stick his hand in his chest and try to control the hemorrhage and treat for shock. The rest of you are too busy doing whatever you're doing. You know, when I was in the Marine Corps, I was wounded eight times. Thank you very much, Marines. (Laughter)

But there is no greater love than the corpsmen and the Marines. Hooyah. The Army says "hoorah." The Marines says "Hoorah." I don't know what the Navy says. I was only in there a short time. In the Air Force, what do they say? "Nice putt." (Laughter)

Okay. I have your attention now. It is a great country because we made it a great country. Come on. Take credit. Take credit. (Applause)

We took an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. We elect those domestic bastards every year. (Laughter)

Now, there's some good politicians. You can tell, they die early. You can always tell when they are lying: Their lips are moving. There may be some politicians in here, if you want to raise your hand. I wouldn't blame you not to. Nobody does. (Laughter)

But we do need to represent our country in a different manner. We represented it at the time of need. We were there when our country was challenged. We were there when we were called to duty. I'm calling you to duty now to educate the youth. As the general said, less than 1 percent of our population has ever served in the military. Less than 1 percent. How pathetic. As I said in my video, I was raised under a different attitude; that I was required to serve in the military, required to serve the country somehow. There's plenty of jobs out there that does provide service to our country that doesn't require you to be in the uniform.

Take that message home. Go to the Medal of Honor Society website and encourage your schools to adopt that program. Take it. It's free. And also follow up with that because the kids today are thirsty and hungry for your attention. They're thirsty to know about what the veterans are all about. Who teaches them? Nobody. It has to be you. You have to teach the youth our core values of what the military stands for. It's up to you. Please help me spread the core values so our grandkids can live the life that we lived and we can take care of the country in a way that's respectful and we can all hold our heads up and be proud.
I will put out a website to anybody that has any information. I'm in Kansas City. So don't think that you're going to drive to Kansas City after you're dead to be buried. That ain't going to happen. I want to give you free information that you will be armed and you will have the knowledge then to go to your local funeral parlor or funeral home or funeral director and do it with honor, dignity and respect and knowledge that you don't have to spend the money that you normally would if you didn't have the education.

Just know your rights, know your benefits. That's all I'm asking. It's up to you. Just as I told the Marines, Change your socks. If they don't, it's up to you, you know? It's all about your decisions. Life's about choices, and it's better to be knowledgeable about what answers you can select, or you'll just fall to the fate of whatever else somebody else is going to tell you. There's a whole list of things that you do not understand, you do not know about next of kin. Everything about this was a learning curve for me. I had no knowledge. Most of my Marines said I was such a bad corpsman that I had to become a funeral director. (Laughter)

It's okay. I'm still giving. I take no salary. I'm here to help you. If all the things that you take out of this convention, do something for yourself. Look at what I've told you. The test will come when our country is older: Did we really educate our youth? Did we really make a difference? The second test is when we die, is our family taken care of? Do we get the honor and respects? I do, like I said, over a hundred a year that get no flag, they get no attention, they get no final respect. I'm there to give them their final salute and thank them for their service.

You can set up a program just like that in your hometown to take care of the people that you do not even know it's happening in your communities. I don't expect you to know that. I just expect you to be a little bit more aware of how to take care of your own family. And maybe, if you'll start some initiatives in your own community, you can take care of the veterans that's under the bridge or fall in the way of hard times.

So I'm going to close my comments. We all love America, we all respect the good Lord, we all want to be here and thank The American Legion for all they're doing. But the issues are simple. The test is coming. Will you be prepared? Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Colonel Ballard, for those words. I would like to give you the national commander coin and a diamond-studded Legion pin and also The American Legion medallion. Thank you so much.

I just told Colonel Ballard not all of us Air Force guys are golfers. I'd like to share with you an announcement before I introduce the next guest. My fellow veterans, if you would today take ten minutes of your time to help your fellow veterans by contributing to the VA's MVP, that's the Million Veteran Program. The MVP is a VA initiative to improve and modernize health care through genetics and health research. With over 595,000 veterans already enrolled, MVP is the largest initiative in promoting precision medicine. Stop by the MVP booth located in the exhibit hall. Just look for the balloons and the friendly faces to welcome you on board to the MVP family. Keep in mind that the exhibit hall today will close at 2:00 p.m. That's 1400 hours. So you don't want to miss this opportunity, so you need to act real soon.

The American Legion is proud to bestow its highest honor on our next guest. The Distinguished Service Medal recognizes outstanding service to the nation and programs of The American Legion. This year's recipient studied medicine and physiology at the University of Athens in Greece. He was trained in neurophysiology at Johns Hopkins, and in 1991 accepted The American Legion Brain Sciences Chair at the University of Minnesota. This chair was created by the Minnesota American Legion Family, which raised over $1 million to endow this position to promote research, teaching and training to promote brain diseases and disorders. Our honored guest has also served as director of the Brain Science Center at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center and is responsible for research
involving post-traumatic stress disorder, Gulf War illnesses, Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, alcohol abuse, and other areas. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal to Dr. Apostolos P. Georgopoulos. Please welcome him. (Applause)

**Presentation: The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal**

**Dr. Apostolos P. Georgopoulos**

**Director, Brain Sciences Center, Minnesota VA Health Care System**

I'm tremendously honored to receive this award for many reasons. The main one is that, after all, I hold The American Legion Family Brain Sciences chair. So it's only natural, I think, to receive the award. I want to recognize past commander of the great state of Minnesota and Past National Commander Dan Ludwig, who is here and who actually spearheaded the raising of the funds in the mid '80s to create this endowed chair.

So 26 years later I moved to Minnesota, 1991, from Johns Hopkins Medical School. I am here to really raise a hope for successfully if not treating entirely but stopping in its tracks the Gulf War illness, a very complex and debilitating disease that affected one-third of the veterans that served in the Persian Gulf war of 1990-1991.

I could not have done that without you. We have studied along those lines hundreds of veterans in Minnesota and actually Wisconsin, Dakotas, Nebraska, the network, VISN 23 network. And without them, we could not have had any insight into the brain disorders, the brain mechanisms that are changing in post-traumatic stress disorder and especially more lately the Gulf War illness.

Number two, I could not have done any of that and I could not have been here without my collaborators and colleagues at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center, more specifically Dr. Brian Engdahl and Lisa James, who are really spearheading the research on Gulf War illness, as a closely knit team. Nevertheless, with all of this, nothing could have been achieved without the unfailing support from the leadership of the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. I'm very grateful for that, 26 years of unfailing support. Well, my trick is I don't ask for anything, but I'm given without asking. I think we deliver what we're supposed to do and help the veterans' cause.

Last but not least, I want to thank my family. My wife, Lily, who is a physician. I'm a doctor, but I never practiced medicine. She was an endocrinologist at the VA Medical Center for 26 years and director of the Women's Comprehensive Medical Health Center. Is now retired, but served the veterans with pride and good cause, and very successfully. Without her and our two daughters really standing next to me in the long hours that I was absent and all the ups and downs of personal life, as you can imagine, again, this award belongs to all of them, not just to me. Most of it belongs to you, because without you, it would not have been a success. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The woman elected to lead The American Legion Auxiliary has worked many years for veterans and their families and has held numerous offices at every level of her organization. An accredited VA service officer and a member of Pat Tillman Memorial Unit 53 in Dupont, Washington, she has spent more than four decades working for veterans and their families. Eligible for Auxiliary membership through her two World War II veteran parents, father R. Garnett Boots and mother Helen Babb Boots; her husband, Dale; her son, Robert. She has served The American Legion Auxiliary at every level. She is currently a strategy captain on the Centennial Strategic Plan and is a designated director of the ALA Foundation board of directors. Please welcome the leader of the nation's largest patriotic women's organization, The American Legion Auxiliary National President Mary E. Davis. (Applause)
Greetings: Mary E. Davis  
National President, American Legion Auxiliary

Thank you all. National Commander Charlie, officers, past national commanders, distinguished guests and Legionnaires, this year has been awesome. I had the opportunity to travel to the Far East and Europe with your commander. We found we had similar experiences with American Legion posts when we arrived in Europe.

So, in tandem, we were able to approach the deficiencies that we found. I talked with unit members, requesting they make greater effort to recruit military spouses. We interfaced with the USO at several installations, discovering missed opportunities to spread the word about what Legion Family stands for and how important it is for our troops to join. In the future, I know Auxiliary magazines will be placed in USO offices and in the USO at the major airport hub for transport of military and their families throughout Europe.

Another large gap I found was that the national president's scholarships, which usually are sent through department headquarters, had no place to be processed for overseas DoDDS students. Now those applications will be sent to the state which is declared the home of record. Finally the voices of overseas military kids will join with those living in CONUS.

Membership has been on the minds of all leaders in the Legion Family this year. The ALA didn't meet its goal, but our secondary goal was to slow the bleed of lost members, those that did not renew. And we have done that. It saddens me to see how many lost members we have and yet know that there are members among your ranks with women eligible but have not yet joined The American Legion Auxiliary.

You would have been proud to see your national commander interact with World War II veterans in Hawaii or Normandy. You would have been proud if you had seen your national commander shake the hands and share a story or two with those who were in the Landstuhl hospital or those who came to town hall meetings.

Yes, Legionnaires, we made a difference. We had a great year, and you had a great dedicated commander in Charles Schmidt. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: President Mary, we did have a great year. I thank the Department of Washington and also The American Legion Auxiliary to give me an opportunity to not only serve but travel with you, serving veterans, serving their families, and also representing our great organization, our American Legion Family and also representing America. On behalf of our Convention, let me give you the medallion.

The man who led the Sons of The American Legion through another successful year is a member of Squadron 27 in Apache Junction, Arizona. He is eligible through the service of his Korean War veteran father and Vietnam War veteran stepfather. He has travelled to Pearl Harbor for the 75th anniversary observances of the attack and to the Department of France, where we paid respect for those who landed at Normandy on June 6. At this time, please welcome the national commander of the Sons of The American Legion, Jeff Frain. (Applause)

Greetings: Jeff C. Frain, Arizona  
National Commander, Sons of The American Legion

Good morning. Greeting, Legionnaires, and salutations from 366,000 Sons of The American Legion. On behalf of the Sons, I thank you for your continued service to our
country, your commitment to our communities, and your dedication to The American Legion Family.

I wish to thank each and every one of you for the opportunity we have as Sons of The American Legion to serve and support our veterans and our family. It's been a very busy year, yet productive, as the national commander of the largest program, your program, Sons of The American Legion. This June I had the privilege to go on the trip to Normandy, honoring the indebtedness we have to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice, to guarantee the everyday freedoms we sometimes take for granted.

My aide, Chuck Treat, and I, with corporate support, created a distinguished book, the Book of Knowledge, which will continue to be a useful tool for the squadrons for years to come. This book, along with the successful "Knowledge is Power Tour," created greater understanding of The American Legion programs, on how to best support our veterans.

This year we soared in the sky with our theme, "Be a superhero, sign up three American heroes today," which will recruit three new Legionnaires and help our American Legion Family grow. In Cincinnati, I asked the Sons of The American Legion to raise money for your program, the Child Welfare Foundation, and they responded: $594,000 by the Sons of The American Legion. (Applause)

In one year. This accomplishment demonstrates the Sons of The American Legion's commitment to support the veterans and their families. Commander Schmidt, will you please approach the podium. Commander, since the Sons of the American Legion have overwhelmingly reached their goals for the Child Welfare Foundation, we feel it is time to help support your program, the Temporary Financial Assistance program. So with this check I'd like to present to you for $300,000 to help you with your program. (Applause)

Together, as Charlie's theme is, we will carry the legacy forward. Thank you, God bless, and thank you for allowing me to be your Sons of The American Legion national commander. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Aren't those Sons of The American Legion awesome? (Applause)

You know, that Temporary Financial Assistance program is a program that helps children of veterans. In 2016, The American Legion Family disbursed over $830,000 to more than 600 veteran families to ensure that 1,400 children will have the necessities of life: food, shelter, clothing, and in some cases emergency medical care. That's what we do. We serve veterans, and we serve families. I'm sure every penny of that will be well spent. Thank you, Sons of The American Legion. (Applause)

Presentation: Department Membership Awards

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: It is now time for the membership awards. The departments and individuals who will be joining me onstage are being recognized today for their membership efforts in 2017.

We are now beginning the fifth year of executing The American Legion's Strategic Plan for Sustained Membership Growth. It is imperative for us to continue working and building on the five priorities within the plan to reverse our current membership trend of declining membership, to build our legacy, so as we grow our new members will not only continue the Legion's legacy to our next generation of veterans, but promote and encourage a culture of growth throughout The American Legion. Keep in mind those priorities are: First, create brand awareness; secondly, communications; third, increase training, education and leadership development; fourth, post creation, development and revitalization; and, most importantly, number five, membership recruiting and retention. The fifth priority in the strategic plan focuses on
recruiting and retention. Long-term growth comes with signing up new members and retaining the members we have. If we stick with the basics and implement the strategic plan at every level, we can grow the organization. We need every member to embrace and foster a culture of growth if we want to consistently increase membership within our organization.

We realize the Legion's legacy is their own and something they will be remembered for by generations to come. A legacy that will continue to flourish with every new member that joins The American Legion. We want The American Legion not only to remain a household name, but be something that is recognized for the good work and dedication to our veterans and their families. We can accomplish this with the resources that The American Legion provides. With the policy authorized three years ago by the secretary of defense allowing The American Legion greater access to military installations, it has allowed us to offer support service and expand our outreach with the active-duty military, reserves, and the National Guard.

We need to build relationships at all levels, but specifically at the local level. American Legion posts are community-based organizations, just like the Guard and reserve components. Posts must reach out to those local Guard and reserve components through their Family Readiness Groups and other organizations that help support our servicemembers while they are deployed or in reserve status.

Through our Reconnect visits and programs such as Access Granted, Operation Comfort Warriors, the Family Support Network, Soldier's Wish, Temporary Financial Assistance, the American Legion Riders and our benefit town halls, we have expanded the opportunity for The American Legion to fulfill the promise of our Four Pillars.

Priority four places an emphasis on building new posts and revitalizing existing posts. Over 2,500 posts received support through revitalizations for the 2016-17 membership year. This has enabled thousands of veterans to receive access to veterans service officers provided by The American Legion and provided to local posts in their communities. We also need to plan on starting new posts anywhere a considerable amount of veterans live, work or go to school. From your local hometown to the big city, The American Legion should have a presence in as many communities as possible.

Through our posts' hard work, we have continued our commitment of service to veterans, their families and our communities. You can clearly see why The American Legion's growth potential is unlimited. Today we want to recognize a few departments and individuals for their efforts in membership, but before we do, I call upon Membership & Post Activities Committee Chairman Randy Goodman, for remarks. (Applause)

Remarks: Randy Goodman
Chairman, Membership & Post Activities Committee

Good morning, Team American Legion! Thank you, commander. The recipients of today's awards are proof that when we commit ourselves to the five priorities within the strategic plan, it works. As leaders of this great organization, it is important that we continue to get buy-in from each Legionnaire so we continue the legacy.

We have seven departments this year whose legacy has improved and are ahead of last year's membership totals traditionally. I would like for you, each of you, each of those departments to stand when your department is called and make some noise! The Department of France; The Department of Hawaii; Department of Idaho; Department of Mexico; Department of Montana; The Department of the Philippines; and the Department of South Carolina. (Cheers and applause) My home state. With that, Mr. Commander, I yield my time.
NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I now ask National Vice Commander Doug Boldt of Nebraska assume duties at the podium and that the national vice commander assigned to each department join the chairman and I as we congratulate departments from their areas.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Boldt assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER BOLDT: We had one department commander who exceeded his target membership goal this year by May. This year's recipient is Ronald Gregory Abbe, Department of Mexico. Congratulations, commander, on a job well done! (Applause)

This next award is earned by the departments meeting every target date this year. Commander Ronald Abbe, Department of Mexico, please accept the All Target Dates Award Plaque. Thank you for a job well done! (Applause)

Our next presentation will be to our 100 percent targets. Three departments have exceeded their 2016-2017 membership goal utilizing traditional methods. This is a testament to the motivation of their members and their ability to implement their strategic plan. A shadowbox is being presented to the following departments: Robert L. Skinner, Department Commander of Idaho; Ronald G. Abbe, Department of Mexico; Lawrence Wade, NECman from the Department of the Philippines. (Applause)

It should be noted that Mexico exceeded this goal four years in a row and the Philippines has met this goal two years in a row as well. Congratulations, gentlemen, for your hard work. (Applause)

This next series of awards are being presented to each of the seven departments previously recognized by the membership chairman for their hard work and dedication to establishing a culture of growth in their departments. The first three departments went above their goal by obtaining over 100 percent. By implementing and working the five priorities within the strategic plan, the Department of Idaho, Department of Mexico, and the Department of the Philippines have built a foundation in which their membership saw growth. Three shadowboxes are being awarded to: Commander Robert L. Skinner, Department of Idaho; Commander Ronald G. Abbe, Department of Mexico; and NECman Lawrence E. Wade, Department of the Philippines. Thank you, gentlemen, on a job well done. (Applause)

The following departments also saw growth this year and are being awarded a plaque for their performances: John Shanahan, Department of France; Michael Soucie, Department of Hawaii; Peter "Hal" Rice, Department of Montana; and Robert Scherer, Department of South Carolina. (Applause)

This year we are presenting a special award to two individuals who have propelled leadership within their departments all while still recruiting new members into The American Legion. These two NECmen have consistently met the challenge of recruiting eligible veterans: Francis J. MacDonald, Jr., NECman from the Department of Massachusetts and William R. Roy, NECman from New Hampshire. (Applause)

Our next award is the most prestigious award a district commander can earn. The American Legion Race to the Top award is given to the district commanders who attained at least 100 percent of the district's assigned membership objective by March 31. These three district commanders' leadership helped their districts exceed their membership goal this year. These district commanders are receiving a new cap, polo shirt and a shadowbox plaque for their efforts. The winners are: Roger L. Archibald, Department of Utah - Category 1, District 4; John W. Griffin, Georgia - Category 2, District 6; and Edwin B. Long, Jr., from the Department of Ohio - Category 5, District 10. (Applause)

Gentlemen, thank you for your leadership and dedication in motivating your districts to achieve this goal.
PROCEEDINGS OF TUESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2017

Presentation: National Recruiter of the Year

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER BOLDT: Finally, ladies and gentlemen, we are going to present the National Recruiter of the Year. This award is given to the individual certified with the highest number of new members recruited from among all of the departments. For a second year in a row this individual is being honored for her outstanding commitment to The American Legion and specifically her dedication to membership. In 2016 she amazed us with 818 new members. This year she went above and beyond and brought 841 new members into The American Legion Family. Please join me in recognizing the 2017 Recruiter of the Year. From Post 333, Department of Georgia, Patricia Liddell. (Applause)

PATRICIA E. LIDDELL: Good morning. First of all, I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Protocol already being established, to National Commander Charles Schmidt; to National Auxiliary President Mary Davis; and all the distinguished guests; to my brothers and sisters in The American Legion and the rest of my family members in the Auxiliary, the Sons, and the Riders; to my department, my Department of Georgia; and to my post, American Legion Post 333, triple threat, the fastest growing post in the nation: I want to thank my mentors; my commander, Vickie Dikes; my senior vice commander, Edgar Johnson, who is not here; my adjutant, Hazel Taylor; my department junior vice commander, Mark Shreve; my traveling buddies, Louise Grinich and Sara Anderson. They've all been very supportive. The first year I know everybody was probably saying, "She was just lucky." But I want to tell you, the second year I worked my behind off. I went from a size 14 to a 10. (Laughter)

And what I also want to tell you, if you all let me, I'm going to be a three-peat, still serving veterans, our nation's heroes. Excellence is contagious. Accept nothing less. Failure is not an option. For God and country. May God bless The American Legion, and may God bless the United States of America. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER BOLDT: Congratulations, Patricia, on a job well done.

...National Commander Schmidt resumed the Chair.

Presentation: Consolidated Post Reporting 2016-2017

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Consolidated Post Report is a summary of what American Legion posts have accomplished in their communities. It's an opportunity to tell the story of your post on an easy-to-fill-out form either on hard copy or online. When I testified before Congress last fall, I used the data from this annual report as part of my testimony. For the 2016-2017 reporting year, August 1 through July 31, 8,880 posts reported out of 12,982. This is a response rate of 68 percent. In July I had Internal Affairs send out a letter to all Legion leadership to continue to send their Consolidated Post Reports. With that extra month of reporting, we received an additional 364 Consolidated Post Reports. I want to thank you.

By your efforts Congress now knows what 9,244 posts are doing in our communities, and that is important when it comes to influencing Congress to support us in our work for our veterans and communities. Moreover, this is information that is important to pass on to our statehouses at home. How are we going to tell our legislators about the important role The American Legion plays at home if we don't and if they don't know?

But there is so much more we can be doing to get our posts to report. We have almost 30 percent of our posts, 3,739 posts, that aren't reporting what they are doing. I want to call upon all of your department commanders, department adjutants, district and county commanders and adjutants to do all they can next reporting year to get these posts to report.
their activities, because all posts are doing something, at least one thing, in their communities.

This report needs to be engrained with our leadership from national to our posts. During leadership visits to posts, the questions must be: "How are you doing in filling out your Consolidated Post Report? Do you need any help? Are you filling it out on mylegion.org? If not, why not?"

Imagine the impact and influence on Congress if we had 100 percent reporting of all posts. As it stands now, this annual report is not truly showing Congress what we are doing in our communities. It isn't showing our statehouses what we are doing at home. We are proud of what our posts are doing, and our posts are so critical. We need for them to report what they are doing each and every day in communities across this great country. I implore you to do all you can next year to increase our posts reporting.

At this time, I wish to recognize those departments who worked on submitting these reports. A certificate was mailed to the departments who met the challenge of a 95 percent response rate this year. Those departments are Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, West Virginia and Wyoming. They deserve a round of applause. (Applause)

Now, I have asked the departments that exceeded the challenge and had the response rate of 95 percent or higher to join me onstage today for special recognition. At this time, we will present their plaques to the department commander. Will National Vice Commander Paul Martel of Florida assume the duties at the podium for the reading of the winners? ... At this time, National Vice Commander Martel assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER PAUL MARTEL: Thank you, sir. Jeffrey K. Crouser, Department of Delaware; Joseph R. Magee, Department of Florida; Carmen M. Streit-Smith, Department of Georgia; Robert L. Skinner, Department of Idaho; Elizabeth A. Gonzales, Department of Missouri; Peter "Hal" Rice, Department of Montana; Beth L. Linn, Department of Nebraska; Thomas E. Wiley, Department of New Hampshire; Ronald L. Chapman, Department of Ohio; Donald Kuntze, Department of Oklahoma; Nancy B. Harper, Department of Tennessee; David M. Stein, Department of Virginia; and Reverend Daniel J. Seehafer, Department of Wisconsin. (Applause)

... National Commander Schmidt resumed the Chair.

Presentation: National Emergency Fund Awards

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I want to thank each and every post that submitted a report. Every report is important but we still have a way to go before we can correctly represent before Congress all the good work that all of our posts are doing in our communities. Before we announce our National Emergency Fund award winners, I ask that those who plan to present NEF donations, please gather in the backstage area.

Our National Emergency Fund is one of the most visible ways we demonstrate our "devotion to mutual helpfulness." But I can't tell you how many times I have heard longtime Legionnaires mention that they had just now heard of the National Emergency Fund. We need to have disaster assistance teams in our departments that will respond after the crisis hits and search out our Legion Family members who have been displaced from their homes and assist them in getting back on their feet. I want to encourage departments to assign or, better yet, seek volunteers to be department NEF coordinators who will travel and assist fellow Legion members in the processing and submission of National Emergency Fund applications. In this way, we can help ensure that our Legion Family members are assisted during a most troubling and challenging time.

Since the Fund's establishment in 1989, we have given out over $9 million to our family members. Individuals can receive up to $3,000 and posts can receive up to $10,000. When a disaster strikes, Legion posts and members are usually well placed and able to
assist, as we have done in the past, our members in need. I am now thankful to know that, when there is a need, legionnaires don't hesitate to respond. When a disaster strikes we open our hearts and pockets to embrace our members and communities with the care and assistance they need to get back on their feet. We are a big family, and a family helps each other when the need is there. Remember that each and every dollar donated to the National Emergency Fund is used for this purpose. We take care of our own when they need help. I think we will all deserve a round of applause. (Applause)

We have six departments being recognized today, one for each of the Big Twelve categories. At this time, we will present their plaques. Will National Vice Commander Vince Troiola of New York assume the duties at the podium for the reading of the winners. ... At this time, National Vice Commander Troiola assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER TROIOLA: At this time, we will present the plaques to the department commander. The departments that have donated the highest dollar amount to the National Emergency Fund in their respective categories are: Category I - Ronald L. Chapman, the Department of Ohio. Category II - James B. May, the Department of Indiana. Category III - Patricia A. McCoy, the Department of Maryland. Category IV - David S. Shore, the Department of North Carolina. Category V - Rudolph A. Bourg, Sr., the Department of Louisiana. And Category VI - Robert J. Terhune, the Department of Nevada.

Congratulations. Thank you for your hard work in ensuring Legion Family members in local communities know where to turn during a natural disaster. So please continue your fundraising efforts because we never know when and where the next natural disaster will strike and interrupt someone's daily life. At this time, I would like to ask those departments that would like to present checks for the National Emergency Fund to come forward and make your presentations now.

Donations to the National Emergency Fund

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER HOLMES (SD): From the Department of South Dakota, I'm Hugh Holmes, department commander. With me is Past Commander Charemon Dunham. We are the home of American Legion Baseball. We are donating $825 today.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NM): Commander, during Vice Commander Paul Espinoza's homecoming at Post 13, Albuquerque, New Mexico, we raised $1,276 for the NEF fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ND): North Dakota is the home of the Peace Gardens, and we were happy to have the commander come visit us there. We gave a check to NEF fund of $593.50.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PA): From the great state of Pennsylvania, home of Past National Commanders Dominic DiFrancesco and Ron Conley, along with what we have already donated, we would like to donate $6,605.25. Along with me is my adjutant, Kit Watson, and my two NECmen, Dennis Haas and Edward Stefacio.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN WILLIS (OR): I'm Jim Willis, delegation chair and past commander of the Department of Oregon. We bring to our commander $1,260 for the NEF fund. And I'm joined this morning by our department commander, Gene Hellickson.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): The Department of Arizona has $4,500 for the NEF fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OH): The proud Department of Ohio and The American Legion Family of the great Buckeye State would like to donate $20,465 to the NEF fund.
DELEGATE ROCHHOLZ (IA): Ken Rochholz, Department of Iowa, $1,000, Hawkeye State.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MI): From the Department of Michigan, we'd like to donate $2,000 to the NEF.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): Commander, the Department of New Jersey is proud to donate to the fund $1,500. Joined here today by our NEC, Chuck Robbins, and our department adjutant, John Baker.


DELEGATE STEIN (VA): Dave Stein, immediate past commander, Department of Virginia, $1,050 to the NEF.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN MILTON (MN): Hi, delegate chair Denise Milton from the great state of Minnesota, home of Past National Commander Ludwig, donates $1,000 to national commander's project NEF.

DELEGATE FARRELL (TN): Bobby Farrell, Department of Tennessee, $450 donation to the NEF with me is Past Commander Nancy Harper.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FL): Florida, the Sunshine State, $1,600.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): China Post 1, which is under the Department of France, is thrilled to give $500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: Check for $250 from the Department of France, and a second check for $250 from the Paris Post No. 1, Paris, France.

DELEGATE STEPHENSON (UT): Chuck Stephenson, Department of Utah, we are very proud to present a check for $750 for the National Emergency Fund.

DELEGATE MEANEY (NH): Dave Meaney, commander of the Department of New Hampshire, the Granite State, is proud to contribute $1000 to the NEF.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SAMPSON (NY): Mr. Commander, John Sampson, chairman of the delegation of the great Department of New York, along with our newly elected department commander, Rena Nessler, and Department Adjutant James Casey, in addition to previous funds donated to the NEF, I present you with a check for $59,630.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (WI): Commander, my friend, the Department of Wisconsin donates $757.15 to the NEF.

DELEGATE ROBINSON (CT): Louie Robinson, outgoing commander, Department of Connecticut, home of the Huskies, donates $605 to the NEF.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MT): The Department of Montana, $400.27 to the NEF.

... At this time, National Commander Schmidt resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you all for your donations to a great program of The American Legion. Again, veterans serving veterans. (Applause)

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I now present to you a Legionnaire who has dedicated his life to the Legion and our nation's young people. You saw in the video where the Boys Nation says: We love you, Bob. Well, Past National Commander Bob Turner, we all love you, too. Please welcome Past National Commander Bob Turner. (Applause)

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER TURNER: Mr. Commander, and delegates to this convention, to say that I'm shocked is a minor word to say. I had no earthly idea this was going to happen.

I've spent 35 years on the staff of Boys Nation. I thank my department for allowing me to be away so much to do this. I certainly thank the members of the Boys Nation staff for their support, for their love and their concern. But, more importantly, I thank God above for His giving me the time and the ability to do this job. I only wish that she could have
been with me this morning to share in this excitement. But I know she's looking down and she approves of what I'm doing. Thank you all so very much. Thirty-five years is a long time. But I'm leaving Boys Nation as a staffer, but I'm not leaving The American Legion. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Our next speaker is unable to be with us but would like to address us by video. She served two terms as Nevada's attorney general before being elected to the United States Senate. She was also an assistant county manager for Clark County and served as a federal criminal prosecutor for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Washington, D.C. Please turn your attention to the video monitors for a message from Senator Catherine Cortez Masto.

**Welcome: Honorable Catherine Cortez Masto**

United States Senate

Hello, Legionnaires. I'm so sorry that I can't be there with you today, but I want to extend my deepest thanks and gratitude for your service to our country. Your service and sacrifices have kept our nation safe. As the granddaughter and daughter of veterans, I understand the toll these sacrifices take on servicemembers and their families.

One of my top priorities as United States Senator is to ensure that veterans receive the support they need to recover from their injuries, visible and invisible, and thrive in civilian life. Since I was sworn in, I have been outspoken in calling on the Trump administration to uphold its responsibilities to veterans. I've taken steps to prevent veterans from being exploited by for-profit colleges and have called on my colleagues in the Senate to appropriate funding for state veterans homes.

Most recently, in July, I partnered with the University of Nevada in Las Vegas to host my first semi-annual career fair and workshop geared towards veterans and their families. I know that there is no better ally in our efforts to support veterans than The American Legion. Your work helps veterans engage with their communities and achieve their educational goals. And through the Girls State and Boys State programs, you help our kids learn the problem solving skills they need to become the next generation of leaders.

I look forward to partnering with you to tackle the challenges that remain as we work to resolve the staffing shortages in the VA, improve accountability, end veteran homelessness, and empower veterans to succeed in their careers. Thank you, again, for everything you've done for our country. I hope you enjoy the rest of your time in Reno, and have a wonderful time at this year's convention.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Our next speaker was elected as the 30th governor of Nevada in 2010 and was reelected in 2014. He was previously a U.S. district judge and Nevada attorney general. Please turn your attention to the video monitors for a message from Nevada's governor, Brian Sandoval.

**Welcome: Honorable Brian Sandoval**

Governor of the State of Nevada

Hello. I'm Brian Sandoval, governor of the great state of Nevada. It is an honor to welcome you to the 99th National Convention of The American Legion. Thank you for joining in the celebration and for selflessly serving those who have served our country. With a commitment to mentoring youth, advocating for our servicemembers and veterans, and promoting patriotism, honor, and national security, this organization has improved the lives of millions of Americans.
For nearly 100 years, you have worked on behalf of communities, and I'm proud to express my sincere gratitude for your dedication to our nation's heroes and our future leaders. This gathering is an opportunity to come together as a national organization, and I hope you enjoy this time of camaraderie. I'm honored to thank you for your service to our country, and please enjoy your time in Northern Nevada.

Thank you for choosing the Silver State for your convention, God bless The American Legion, and God bless the United States of America, the greatest nation on earth.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Our donations thus far for the National Emergency Fund are $107,727.17. Thank you all! (Applause)

Our next speaker is a retired correctional officer at Ely State Prison and a past commander of White Pine American Legion Post 3 and District 5. He has been in The American Legion for more than 30 years. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the 2016-17 past department commander of Nevada, Bob Terhune. (Applause)

Welcome: Robert J. Terhune
Past Department Commander, Department of Nevada

After that, I kind of feel like I'm in a lineup up here with all these lights. From the Legionnaires of the Battle Born State to those that have borne the battle, I offer a heartfelt welcome to the Biggest Little City in Nevada, Reno.

It's been ten years since our last convention here in the state of Nevada. Since the Nevada Legionnaires have had the privilege to host an American Legion convention, and we're glad you're back. Our goal is that this will be an enjoyable and most memorable convention for all of you. Some of it, I'm sure, probably already has with the slot machines.

The American Legion National Convention Corporation of Nevada and Nevada's Legionnaires have worked hard planning and preparing for the 99th American Legion National Convention and are here to assist you. So don't hesitate to ask any of us for assistance. Enjoy your stay here.

Again, welcome to Reno and to Nevada, and God bless America. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: A past department commander of Nevada, our next guest is a Marine veteran of the Vietnam War and the current alternate National Executive Committee member for his department. He has held many positions at every level in The American Legion. He belongs to American Legion Capitol Post 4 in Carson City, Nevada. Please welcome the president of The American Legion National Convention Corporation of Nevada, John F. Warden. (Applause)

Welcome: John Warden
President, National Convention Corporation of Nevada

Good morning! Commander, on behalf of the Department of Nevada and the City of Reno, the biggest city in the world, I would like to welcome all our Legionnaires and guests to Nevada. I see most of you have survived the parade, and hopefully you had a great time. As you can see, Nevada is one of the most veteran-friendly states in the union. Besides enjoying the sights, sounds, lights, glitter, and the wonderful restaurants of this great city, I hope you have had time to go back to the Silver State's mining days and visit Virginia City, a National Historic District, and our state capital of Carson City with its Railroad and State Museums.

The State Museum holds relics of the USS Nevada, the battleship that got underway during the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. And, yes, the portrait of Abraham Lincoln that
hanging in the Assembly chambers does have three bullet holes in it. Yes, this is the wild, wild west. Besides our battle-born history, Nevada's Great Basin has 314 named mountain ranges and some of the most awe-inspiring national scenery that you'll ever see in our snow-capped mountains, known as the Sierra Nevada. And, of course, Lake Tahoe, one of the largest alpine lakes in the world. A ride on the gondola at Heavenly will give you an inspiring view of the lake.

Have a wonderful 99th Annual Convention. Come again, come often, and thank you for coming. Semper fi for God, country, and The American Legion. Thank you.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, John. It's great to be back in Nevada after a ten-year absence for our National Convention. For our next presentation, I draw your attention to the video monitors.

Welcome: Honorable Hillary Schieve
Mayor of Reno

Hi, I'm Mayor Hillary Schieve, and welcome to Reno, Nevada, the Biggest Little City in the World. I'm so excited that you're here with us, and I'm excited to be hosting you and your 10,000 American Legion members and their spouses.

I know you're going to love our city. And I'm so proud of our city. I can't wait for you to get to experience and enjoy all the things that we have to offer. You will get to see incredible landscapes, certainly if you visit Lake Tahoe and you just look around you, the beautiful mountains, all the way to our fine dining.

We have so much for you to do. Just take a walk along our riverwalk and see how beautiful the river is that runs right through our city. We have incredible shopping. Certainly there are a lot of historical places to visit. But when it comes to shopping, we have some of the best antique malls that you could ask for. We hope that you'll enjoy midtown and downtown, because really they are unique places. We have a vibrant 24-hour nightlife, and you can game all night long and find great food, great entertainment. And there's so much to do. So we're very excited for you to experience what the Biggest Little City has to offer.

I would like to thank you so much for your service. I have great respect for our veterans. And so I want you to know that thank you so much for all that you have done for our country. And, truly, I have a heart of gratitude. So, again, we're so excited to have you here and so thankful for all your service.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Our next speaker has represented Nevada's Second Congressional District since 2011. A graduate of the University of Nevada, he received a law degree from the University of the Pacific's McGeorge Law School. He served with an artillery unit in the U.S. Army until joining the Army JAG Corps. In Congress he is a member of the Army Caucus, the USO Caucus, and the Veterans Jobs Caucus. He is also a member of American Legion Post 4 in Carson City, Nevada. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to United States Representative Mark Amodei. (Applause)

Welcome: Honorable Mark Amodei
United States House of Representatives

Thank you, Legionnaires. You know, I would like to, first of all, thank you specifically for coming back to Reno. Now, as a person who represents a district in Nevada, and many people say, well, you're from Las Vegas, I say, well, you know, actually, if you are looking
for high altitude in Nevada, you really ought to come north a little bit up by Lake Tahoe and those sorts of things. So I want to start out by saying American Legion Convention for 2017, welcome to Nevada's original congressional district. (Applause)

We know in this area that you folks with this organization and with your membership can go anywhere you want. The fact that you have multiple times chosen Western Nevada and the Truckee Meadows is something that I want you to know doesn't go unnoticed and is not taken for granted.

So as you sit there and get ready to go through, and it's quite a crossroads time here in Western Nevada in terms of you're going to have the president come in tomorrow, sign some legislation specific to veterans' issues and claims, other things like that, you've got the secretary of labor here, you've got the Veterans Affairs secretary, vice president is in town at the end of the week, it's kind of a palmy time for the federal government and veterans in Western Nevada, and we owe that to you.

So as you sit here at high altitude, and I know that some of you, many of you did not have the privilege of serving in the Army, as I did. I know that some of you that served in the Navy, as my daughter did, think that your football team is doing pretty good these days. What was it one of you said to me? Well, you guys can win one game every decade and a half or something like that. Thank you for that.

Anyhow, we couldn't be happier you are here. I couldn't be prouder to be a small part of your program. For a guy who grew up in Carson City, Nevada, ended up serving during the Reagan administration, which now seems like a long time ago, as we go into this section of our history now in a very dangerous world, and now as many of you sitting out there have served in the Middle East to complement your brothers and sisters in Vietnam, Korea, World War II and other conflicts over the course of our time, I couldn't be prouder to call you folks special people.

Thank you for the leadership roles that you've played in your units. Thank you for the leadership roles that you continue to play in your communities, your states, your regions, and your organizations. We're a stronger place and a better nation because of organizations like this and you people that are the members. Enjoy northern Nevada, and have a great day. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Next I would like to call the chairman of the American Legion Riders Advisory Committee, Bob Sussan, to the podium so he can help lead the presentation of Legacy Scholarship Fund donations. Those presenting checks, will you please proceed to the microphone, announce the amount and donor, and go to the front on the floor for a photograph. While the photographs are being taken, I will ask National Vice Commander Paul Espinoza of New Mexico to assume the duties at the lectern.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Espinoza assumed the Chair and the delegation viewed a video.

Presentation: The American Legion Riders
Bob Sussan, Chairman, American Legion Riders Advisory Committee

National Commander Schmidt, national vice commanders, national officers, my fellow Legionnaires and guests, my name is Bob Sussan, and I have the distinct honor and privilege of being the chairman of the American Legion Riders Advisory Committee and the chief road captain and planner for the Legacy Run.

This year was bittersweet in that one week before our departure on August 12th, my best friend and co-planner, Verlin Abbott, was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident in Indianapolis while on a funeral escort.
With over 2,000 chapters and membership in the six figures, the American Legion Riders is the only program comprised of the whole American Legion Family. A far-flung motto used by the Riders is "Legion First." A few years ago we consciously attempted to make the Legacy Runs very veteran centric.

We focused on this Legacy Run six days, 1,400 miles. A first for our Legacy Run, we dedicated a town's veterans memorial in Green River, Utah, six wreath laying's and three Operation Comfort Warriors grants, touching lives in the communities through which we traveled. We traveled from the Soldiers' Home in Fort Dodge, Kansas, home to 106 veterans, almost exclusively on Route 50, America's loneliest highway. Here are some memorable encounters I would like to share with you:

The Border Inn, named as such as it's on the border of Utah and Nevada. Locally owned Mom & Pop restaurant. They needed to hire extra help to prepare our 400 boxed lunches. Once the temporary staff learned who we were and what we were doing, they donated their paychecks to the Legacy Scholarship Fund, and so did the owner of the restaurant. (Applause)

Eureka, Nevada. In Eureka, Nevada, a small town, population of 660, we needed to gas up. Unfortunately there were only two very small gas stations. The problem with small gas stations is also small toilet facilities. We contacted the Superintendent of Schools who contacted the high school, and they opened their school for cooling off and use of the facilities. That's the Riders parked next to the school. It gets better. While at the school, the teachers and administrators mingled with the Riders. They wanted to know what we were doing and why we did it. After we left, the principal prepared a letter and sent it to us. I'm going to read it to you. I'm putting it up on the screen; you probably can't read it.

"Legacy Riders, first off, thank you for riding for a great cause. What you are doing for the kids is memorable, honorable.

"Second, thank you for your service to our great country. For those of you who have served overseas in combat, I have no words other than my gratitude. The sacrifices you and your families have made are great and are greatly respected by me and my family.

"I spoke with a number of you and told you I feel as if you are riding for me. I was one of those kids that you serve. My dad was in KIA in Vietnam, November 24, 1970. I was 2-1/2 years old. My uncle, dad's brother, was KIA in Vietnam October of 1968. My brother served two tours in Iraq and died after being injured on his second tour.

"So thank you for riding for me and for all the children who will never know what it's like to grow up without a parent. It was an honor to have you at our school today. God bless you all." (Applause)

As we pulled into Ely, Nevada, that was one of our wreath laying's next to the courthouse. One of the advanced team members, a woman placed a rose on his motorcycle with that note. I'm going to read you the note.

"Hello. My name is Raelynn, and today would have been my Dave and my 18th wedding anniversary. We used to ride a yellow Gold Wing like yours. When I saw it, I had an idea. I was hoping you would take this rose along with you on your journey for me as a way of wishing for one last ride with my late husband. I would appreciate it very much."

In the video, one of the riders from Indiana, I don't know if she's still here, Legionnaire Debbie Bickel, an assistant road captain, said in the video you were just shown that we ride for a cause. Many departments have in-state Legacy rides to raise funds for the scholarship. Several years ago the American Legion Riders in the Department of Florida while on their in-state Legacy Run noticed a sign on a wall while pulling into a parking lot of the Cherry Lake post. This is the expression that was on their wall. Author is unknown, and many Riders chapters have adopted this saying: "For the cause, not the applause."

This was Verlin's ride. This photo was taken a few years ago on our Legacy Run at the Missouri Veterans Home. Verlin was unassuming, compassionate, and truly interested...
in interacting with the residents at that time. He was my best friend, my right hand, and I feel as though I have lost a part of me. He is gone, but never forgotten. He will always ride with us. Thank you for your attention. We will now accept donations. (Applause)

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IL): From Galva, Illinois we present this check to you for the Legacy Foundation from a Gold Star father in New York.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NY): Gold Star dad from Commack, Long Island, $1,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IL): On behalf of our Naperville Post 43, Department of Illinois, I'm honored to present two checks: one from our post for $400 and the second one is from our Legion Riders for $4,000. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IL): Louisville Post 914 in Illinois, $500; detachment of Illinois, $2,062; Canton Post 16, $700. Illinois Legion Family, $25,897, with a grand total of over $35,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): From the great state of Arizona, we've got a check for $3,000. From Fountain Hills Post 58 we have another $500, and our Riders.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): The Riders from Arizona brought $14,593.19 today. They sent me another check for $700. And $1,500 donated by ALR to the commander during the Legacy Run for a total from Arizona of $16,793.19.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ID): On behalf of the Legion Riders from Post 26 and 101, from Mountain Home in the great state of Idaho, we have a check for $2,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): On behalf of the Department of New Jersey, we'd like to present a $1,000 check. Presenting this with me today is our department ANEC, Berley Hanna, and Department Adjutant John Baker.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: New Jersey. Hudson County Committee, $500; Bayonne Post 19, $500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PA): The great state of Pennsylvania, along with our previous donations, donate $1,102.44.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NY): From the great Department of New York, in addition to previous funds donated to the Legacy Fund, Mr. Commander, please accept these two checks totaling $10,610.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NY): From the American Legion Riders from the great state of New York, we donate $16,111.93.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OK): The Department of Oklahoma American Legion Riders, Post 1340, we donate $500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MA): From the Department of Massachusetts, home state of Past National Commanders Paul Morin, Jake Comer and the current 2017 National Oratorical champion, Andrew Steinberg, present a check for $8,300 to the Legacy Fund.

DELEGATE STARKS (MA): Past Department Commander Ken Starks, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Oxford Post No. 58, $1,100.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MA): From Chapter 224 in Easthampton, Massachusetts, a check for $2,500, giving our total, $11,900 from the Department of Massachusetts.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MO): On behalf of the Show-Me State, birthplace of Harry S. Truman and our national commander, Charles Schmidt, we are giving $78,241.13.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (SC): South Carolina, on behalf of its 392 American Legion Riders, will have our ranking ALR member present a check.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (SC): On behalf of the American Legion Riders of South Carolina, we present $67,056.78. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): I have a check for $250 from the Department of France and another check for $250 from Paris Post 1, Paris, France. Total of $500.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): From the China Post 1, the only post operating in exile, we give to The American Legion $1,630. Thank you.

DELEGATE PARISAN (DE): Hello, everybody. I'm with the Department of Delaware. My name is Charles Parisan. I'm the Kent County commander and also the Department of Delaware Riders director. I have with me here the Department of Delaware commander, MaryAnna Moderhak. We are here to turn in checks totaling $17,006.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MI): Department of Michigan, the proud home of the Legacy Ride founding chapter, Garden City, is proud to donate $20,555.77.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TN): Department of Tennessee, we added to our previous donation $1,187.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (KS): From the Department of Kansas. And we're proud to have sponsored and been the starting point of this year's Legacy Run in Fort Dodge, Kansas, and we look forward to seeing you in Salina, Kansas, next year. From the Department of Kansas, $24,111.55.

DELEGATE TONEY (MS): From the Legion Riders, Commander Murray Toney and what's known as the land between Alabama and Louisiana by the weather folks, state of Mississippi, $6,700.

DELEGATE HEREDIA (MD): I'm David Heredia from the Department of Maryland. On behalf of the department and our Legion Family, I'd like to present our final four checks totaling $1,000, bringing our grand total for the Department of Maryland of over $35,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NV): On behalf of Las Vegas Paradise Post 149 family, Sons of The Legion, ladies Auxiliary and the Riders program, we would like to donate a check for $10,000 to the Legacy Scholarship Fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (HI): On behalf of the Legion Riders Chapter 17, Department of Hawaii, I'd like to present two checks totaling $2,300.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NM): On behalf of the enchanted Department of New Mexico, I'm proud to provide donations from Chapters 19, 18, 4, 26, and Post 69 totaling $4,450.

DELEGATE BERENOTTO (AL): My name is Tony Berenotto. I'm the second division commander and the state adjutant for the Riders. On behalf of the Department of Alabama, I present a check from Post 107, Leeds, Alabama, of $1,823; for our winning the Royal Legion Riders Vest Auction this year, an additional $1,000; Post 133, Millbrook, Alabama, $15,133; and our first organized in-state Legacy Run, an additional $4,381.62, to bring Department of Alabama's contribution this year to $31,405.62.

DELEGATE JAMES: Tony James. For people eating with their covers on, I have $16 for fines, and thank you for letting me ride with the American Legion Riders.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ND): On behalf of Commander Christensen, Bergman-Evenson Post 215 in Rutland, North Dakota, population 163, the Pride of the Prairie, home of the world's largest hamburger, we are proud to present $200.

DELEGATE BREW (ND): Department of North Dakota, Matthew Brew, Chapter 3, Dickinson, North Dakota, $1,300.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PA): On behalf of World War I Post 109 in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, I have a donation of $2,500. In addition to that, I have a $100 check from my wife and I for memory of Verlin Abbott. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ME): Department Commander for Maine. The Maine Legion Riders continue to make noise, and it is a privilege to represent them for a $3,600 check.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER SHUGA (FL): From the Department of Florida and the Florida ALR, Department Commander, Florida, Steve Shuga. I just got a check thrown at me in the back by American Legion Post 110, Port Charlotte, Florida, for $2,180. This increases our number to $44,836.85.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NE): Again this year it's an honor to represent the great state of Nebraska. Along with me is Past State Commander Beth Linn, and we have money totaling $13,843.30. Of that, the ALR post of Central Plains donated $1,200; Columbus, $1,500; Hartman, $300; and Geneva, $520. Go Big Red!

DELEGATE PISA (AK): From the Land of the Midnight Sun, the Alaska Legion Riders proudly donate $14,629.25.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: On behalf of the American Legion Riders from Stevens-Christian Memorial Post 557, I'm really proud to present a check for $13,500 for the Legacy Fund.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER PIZZO (GA): John Pizzo, commander, Department of Georgia, we proudly donate $10,150.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (CO): From the great Rocky Mountain state of Colorado, the home of founder of the Legacy Run and Past National Commander Tom Bock, we would like to donate $9,100 to the Legacy Scholarship Fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (KY): On behalf of Post 113, Elizabethtown, Kentucky, Chapter 113, $500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IA): On behalf of Chapter 29 from Washington, Iowa, the Tall Corn State, a check for $500. And for the ride, there were people that wore their hat and ate or their phone went off, an additional $45.

DELEGATE HAGGAN (FR): FODPAL, which stands for Foreign and Outlying Departments and Posts of The American Legion, proudly donates $500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PR): Department of Puerto Rico, on behalf of Post 82 Legion Riders, a check for $120.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (WY): From the great state of Wyoming, Post 13, Powder River, we would like to donate $2,000. And my fellow partners are with me, and we rode all the way from Wyoming.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AR): On behalf of Riders Unit 64, Department of Arkansas, $150.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OH): On behalf of the great state of Ohio, we make a donation of $5,000 to the Legacy Scholarship Fund.

DELEGATE RALSTON (CA): AC Ralston, Post 82, San Mateo, California, we donate $1,500. And our Riders Chapter 82, $1,340.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (CA): Also from the state of California, on behalf of Chapter 509, $200.

DELEGATE SEEHAFER (WI): Commander, on behalf of the great Department of Wisconsin family, we held a 900-mile state run called the Rev's Run, which we open wide our hearts to present you this day with $67,627.67.

DELEGATE MOORE (FR): I'm Ron Moore from the Department of France. 2007 was my run here, and I'm still running. Unfortunately I lost my delegation. They've already passed on money, so I'm just bringing in a couple of checks: $510 from The American Legion Family at Rhein Main Post 5, and another $100. That's only $610, but we're still going. God bless you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NC): From the great state of North Carolina, adding to the previously already sent, $2,994.27.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MN): The great Department of Minnesota American Legion Family donates $200,000 to the Legacy Scholarship Fund. (Cheers and applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER ESPINOZA: Before our next segment, I ask donors who have collected for the national commander's TFA charity fund and service officers to please gather behind the curtain to my right and line up for check presentations.
The Royal Canadian Legion is committed to securing adequate pensions and benefits for veterans and their families by dealing directly with the federal government. Our next guest hails from Labrador City, Canada, and was awarded the Legion Meritorious Service Medal, the Queens Golden Jubilee and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the Royal Canadian Legion Dominion President, Dave Flannigan. (Applause)

Greetings: David Flannigan
Dominion President, The Royal Canadian Legion

Good afternoon. To steal the words of our honored recipient of the medal, I am standing up. Yes, I am. Comrade Schmidt, special guests, friends, on behalf of the Royal Canadian Legion, I'm honored and privileged to have been invited to this terrific conference today. It is a great privilege for me as president of the Royal Canadian Legion to speak at this session.

Our two organizations have much in common. Like you, we have a strong sense of obligation to our communities and to our nations. Like you, we focus on advocating for our veterans, especially in our main goal: To ensure that our veterans receive the life-long support they have earned and deserve. We do, of course, have differences, and one is in size. While you are 2 million strong; our membership is a mere 275,000. Then again, we are a much smaller country, less than 37 million; and yours, 326 million. We are a little younger than you as well. We were formed by the special act of Congress at Parliament in 1926, seven years after you came into being.

Despite our differences, though, we share a mission to serve and support our veterans and to contribute to all our communities. We both have jobs to do, big jobs, and to do them right, we need to hold steady on our numbers so we have the members and volunteers needed to carry out our mission. Over the past few decades, it's been a bit of a struggle for us as we continue to lose our largest cohort, veterans of the First and Second World War and the Korean Conflict. Although our brave veterans continue to serve their countries with equal valor and distinction, there simply aren't enough of them to keep our numbers strong. This has led us to take a different approach to Legion membership. While you are a veterans-only organization, we have extended our membership to serving and retired RCMP personnel and veterans' family members. In fact, all who support our aims and objects are welcome to join the Royal Canadian Legion.

And we've stepped up our efforts to reach out to all of them. We are relying more and more on public relations' initiatives, targeted marketing, and cutting-edge social media strategies such as Facebook. We've streamlined our website and have added a member portal to help our branches process membership and renewals online.

We are partnering in the upcoming Invictus Games in Toronto this September as a way to help dispel the stigma sometimes associated with veterans with physical and mental injuries. These games are a great way to showcase role models of the ill and injured veterans. As the Canadian Man in Motion, Rick Hansen, once said: If you believe in a dream and have the courage to try, anything is possible.

That certainly is true for our wounded servicemen and women. Like The American Legion, we contribute to our communities, to seniors, youth groups, and help health institutions. For example, we just gave $1 million to the Royal Ottawa for a brain imaging machine dedicated exclusively to mental health research. This will help with the diagnosis and development of new treatment options for PTSD and other medical issues that challenge our veterans.

At the end of the day, however, we are especially proud of our role as our nation's guardian to remembrance. Each year we distribute tens of thousands of iconic poppies that
symbolize our gratitude and respect for our veterans. We organize Canada's November 11th Remembrance Day ceremonies on our National War Memorial in Ottawa. Over 1,400 branches hold local services and wreath-laying ceremonies across the country. Last year we distributed over 21 million poppies across Canada and disbursed over $18 million back to our veterans.

That ties between our two legions are strong, from cross-border commemorations between branches and posts to a shared culture created by those who came before us. Like your founders, they passed on to us their convictions that nothing is more noble or fulfilling than serving and supporting our veterans and our communities. I hope that goodwill and friendship forged here in this great city of Reno today and this week stimulates many more conversations going forward. I look forward to continuing cooperation between the two legions, the Royal Canadian Legion and The American Legion, for many years to come. As always, in comradeship, thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER ESPINOZA: It's our honor to award you with The American Legion National Commander's Medallion. Now I call on Past National Commander Jake Comer for a presentation.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER COMER: Thank you, commander. Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry that I was late when they were making the presentation of checks to the Legacy Fund, but I had a few fires to put out in another room. So you'll understand. With me today is Department Commander Mike Davis, and we would like to make a presentation, to add to all those received, from the Cecil W. Fogg-Thomas J. Roberts Post. My post in Hyde Park, Massachusetts, over ten years has donated over $100,000. We have The Legion and the Auxiliary, but it's primarily the Sons of The American Legion that did the work on this. This was a one-day barbecue at our post, and I'd like to turn over a check to the tune of $9,000. (Applause)

I have another wonderful responsibility to present to you, and as the president of ANAVICUS, which so many of you belong and enjoy, as we did, the breakfast on Sunday, and was privileged to listen to this gentleman, but I am honored, as the president of ANAVICUS, to present to you, Ronald G. Smith, the acting Dominion president, the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada. (Applause)

... At this time, National Commander Schmidt resumed the Chair.

Greetings: Ronald G. Smith
Acting Dominion President, Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada

Good afternoon. Commander Schmidt, National Adjutant Wheeler, special guests, comrades, all. It gives me great pleasure to join you at this time, your 99th Annual Convention, and bring warm greetings on behalf of the executives and members of the Army, Navy, Air Force Veterans in Canada.

We have, as close allies and neighbors, fought shoulder to shoulder many times together in operations around the globe. Our sailors, soldiers and air crew have shared operations, experiences and hardships. Our mutual concern for our troops, our veterans and their families continue to join us together. Therefore, we are pleased to see Canada's Minister of Veterans Affairs and your secretary of Veterans Affairs come together in late June to discuss partnerships in how the two nations can work together to better serve our veterans and their families. Sharing information and best practices on health care, research, benefits, support programs will allow both countries who struggle with similar challenges to learn from one another and to better serve those who protect us.

The Canadian Institute of Military and Veterans Health Research continues to grow, now bringing together researchers from 42 Canadian universities and collaborating on new
and innovative projects to better protect and serve military communities during and after their service. Couple that with the research being done in America, both with your mental illness research, education and clinical centers and centers of excellence in mental health across the great country. We can hopefully make strides in suicide prevention, reducing veterans homelessness and mental health treatments.

By sharing our data, promising treatments and successful programs, we can hopefully improve the lives of our veterans and their families on both sides of our border. Programs like your cutting-edge Million Veterans Project that is down in Hall 2 is building the largest genomics database in the world specifically around veterans. It will assist future research to help veteran populations in many areas of health. If you have not yet gone to see what this program is about and its potential uses, I encourage you to do so.

I would also like to congratulate National Commander Schmidt and all the Legionnaires that worked on having the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 passed by your Congress and signed into law less than one week ago. Canada has itself just announced an education benefit based on your GI Bill, and you can be assured that, along with my comrades from the Royal Canadian Legion, we will be bringing your improvements to our government even before our program is set to roll out.

Thank you for having me here with you this week and for all the wonderful hospitality. God bless. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Taiwan is a nation that is always vigilant. Because of its close proximity to communist China, the Taiwanese military is prepared for an attack that could come at any time. The Taiwanese people also know that taking care of veterans is an important priority when fielding a strong defense. We are fortunate to have with us the vice minister of the Veterans Affairs Council of the Republic of China. Please welcome Vice Minister Chia-Kai Lu to our stage. (Applause)

Greetings: Chia-Kai Lu
Vice Minister, Veterans Affairs Council, Republic of China

National Commander Schmidt, distinguished guests and, most of all, the extraordinary veterans and your families, good afternoon. It is such a great honor of mine to be here, especially to address the veterans who have selflessly served the country. On behalf of the Veterans Affairs Council of the Republic of China, I hereby extend our sincerest respect and regards to all the American patriots and heroes.

The Veterans Affairs Council and The American Legion have bonded in close friendship for decades. The reason that we have established the long-lasting friendship is because we share the same values and beliefs in freedom, democracy, human rights and global justice and peace. Also, we are both committed to striving for the dignity and welfare for those who have served and sacrificed for the country, at home and abroad. They deserve this glory. That's the reason why we are here to support, honor and appreciate those veterans, servicemembers and their families by providing substantial benefits for them.

Taiwan and the U.S. have maintained relevant relations no matter in political, economic and security. In other words, Taiwan's development is closely tied to U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, assisting Taiwan to continuously undergo military transformation to gain adequate capability of national defense and to join economic and trade pacts as well as other international organizations, it's crucial for our mutual interests.

Taiwan is situated in the center of the first island chain in the Western Pacific defense line. Our strategic value is important and irreplaceable to the U.S. Hence, as a partner of the U.S., Taiwan will continue to promote the regional peace and security as well as
economic development in the Pacific Rim. Meanwhile, Taiwan will also continue the humanitarian aid and the disaster relief service to carry out our responsibility as part of the global village.

Dear fellows, we truly appreciate your continued support in the defense of the rights of Taiwanese people. In particular, submitting the resolution to Congress each year. By supporting Taiwan regarding national defense, arms procurement, political and economic issues and so on, such an act means a lot for us. Your valuable friendship will always be kept in our minds and will be treasured for good. Thank you so much, and I wish you a successful convention as well as wish you good health and happiness. (Applause)

Finally, I would like to present National Commander Schmidt, with a Medal of Honor with Cravat of Veterans Affairs Council, first-class, in recognition of his dedication to promoting the partnership between our two countries. Ms. Wong, please recite citation.

MS. WONG: Certificate of award to accompany the presentation of the Medal of Honor of the Veterans Affairs Council: To Mr. Charles E. Schmidt, National Commander, The American Legion, in recognition of his dedication in upholding international justice, in-safeguarding international status of the Republic of China and in improving the welfare of the veterans: A Medal of Honor of Veterans Affairs Council first-class, is hereby awarded on the date of the 22nd day of August in the year of 2017. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: A paid-up-for-life Legionnaire from Post 140 in Georgia, this Navy veteran served three years on the aircraft carrier USS Independence. He was self-employed in the insurance claims handling business for 40 years and now leads an organization that is composed entirely of the descendants of patriots who served in the American Revolution. Please welcome the president general of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, Larry T. Guzy. (Applause)

Greetings: Larry T. Guzy
President General, National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution

Patriotism, the love and loyal support of one's own country: That describes you, our veterans and members of The American Legion. This is a small token, but it bears repeating often. Thank you for your service and sacrifices.

The Sons of the American Revolution are dedicated to promoting patriotism, as you are. Our focus on this country's founding is honoring our first patriots: Veterans of the American Revolution. Their rallying cry for the first taste of national unity was the Declaration of Independence, which will celebrate its 250th anniversary in just nine short years. They would be proud to know that our country can still rely on men and women like you who stand and are counted when the need arises.

We are all descendants of the ideals that the heroes of the American Revolution established through their eight years of war. These veterans, men, women, children, black, white, immigrants of many nationalities and citizens, rose to the occasion as you did. They did so because they believed in a cause larger than themselves.

Although we often recall the commanders of the Army, Navy and Marines, sorry, there was no Air Force yet, it was the common people who sacrificed, fought against enormous odds, and eventually won to secure our freedom. Ben Franklin remarked, after the Constitutional Convention, "We have a republic if you can keep it."

We descendants of these heroes are honored to be in your presence, our contemporary patriots and heroes, because we see our country is safe in your hands who keep our country protected.

Thank you again for your service and have a great convention. Thank you. (Applause)

... At this time, National Vice Commander Casper assumed the Chair.
NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER CASPER: At this time, I would like to ask those departments that would like to present checks for the National Commander's Charity Fund to come forward and make your presentations.

DELEGATE STEPHENSON (UT): Past Department Commander Chuck Stephenson and Past Department Commander Randy Edwards and donation chairman from the Department of Utah, home of the 50-year National Executive Committee Bill Kristofferson, is proud to present a check to the National Commander's Charity for $1,077.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (WY): From The Equality State, the Department of Wyoming, on behalf of Don Stough Post 33, presents $200 to Temporary Financial Assistance and $200 to the Service Officer Training Fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TX): American Legion Travis Post 76, Austin, Texas, is proud to contribute $5,000 to the National Commander's Charity and Temporary Financial Assistance.

DELEGATE HELLICKSON (OR): Commander Gene Hellickson, Department of Oregon, donation of $932 for the Commander's Charity Fund.

DELEGATE GOTH (MO): I'm Kenny Goth, NEC from the great state of Missouri and proud home of Past National Commander Joe Frank. On behalf of the Past Post Commander's Club, we'd like to donate $2,719.

DELEGATE GONZALES (MO): I'm Betty Gonzales, immediate past department commander, and on behalf of the Department of Missouri, I have $2,635.85 for TFA and $568.85 for the VSO. It's a total of $3,204.70. (Applause)

DELEGATE TERHUNE (NV): On behalf of the Department of Nevada, junior Past Commander Bob Terhune and Commander Yvette Weigold, we are donating $10,000 to the National Commander's charities. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MA): On behalf of the Department of Massachusetts and Department Commander Mike Davis, home of Past National Commanders Jake Comer and Paul Morin, I would like to present a check from Milwauk, the western part of the state of Massachusetts, for $2,000. Also we'd like to present a check for $2,500 to the TFA Fund, along with $2,500 to the service officer training to go along with that, with a grand total of $7,000. (Applause)

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ID): Great state of Idaho, home of past national commander, the Honorable Al Lance, I'd like to contribute to the Commander's TFA Fund $1,124.85.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): On behalf of the Department of New Jersey, I'd like to present a check for $1,500. With me here today is Department Commander Darryl Reid, Department Vice Commander Larry Bishop, and Department Adjutant John Baker.

DELEGATE CHAN (OR): I'm William Chan from the great state of Oregon, and I'm the president of the National American Legion College Alumni Association. We have a check for $500 from our general fund; and additionally we had funds raised Saturday night at our banquet: $1,101 was raised by the classes of 2014 and 2016, and 2015 raised a total of $1,678, for a total of $3,279. (Applause)

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: Department of Oregon has an additional $6,600 for the commander's charity.

DELEGATE JACKSON (CT): Joe Jackson, NEC, Department of Connecticut, got a couple checks here for the national commander's project. Maybe he'll take flying lessons. $200.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OK): From the Department of Oklahoma, pleased to present a donation of $500 to the National Commander's Charity Fund.

... At this time, National Commander Schmidt resumed the Chair.
NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you for those donations to the commander's charity, Temporary Financial Assistance, and also for service officer training. Earlier we had the Legacy Fund Scholarship donations. This morning, on this stage, $667,800 was collected this morning. Thus far, this year, to The American Legion Legacy Fund, $1,224,653.55! (Applause)

At this time, National Vice Commander Troiola assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER TROIOLA: I now call on National Adjutant Daniel S. Wheeler of the Department of Virginia to issue the Call for Convention.

Call for Convention
Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia, National Adjutant

By the authority of the National Executive Committee, the 99th Annual National Convention of The American Legion is hereby called to meet in Reno, Nevada, August 18-24, 2017. The convention business sessions will be held in the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, Hall 4, August 22-24.

Purpose

The Annual National Convention is the legislative body of The American Legion. The convention is called for the purpose of setting the programs of The American Legion for the ensuing year, amending the National Constitution and Bylaws, and transacting such other business as may be brought before it.

On Thursday, August 24, 2017, at twelve o'clock (noon) of the final session, or at the conclusion of all other business of the National Convention, whichever first occurs, officers for the ensuing year will be elected, these being the National Commander and five National Vice Commanders, in that sequence.

Representation

Representation in the convention shall be by department, and in accordance with the provisions of the National Constitution (sec. 3, art. V):

"... each department shall be entitled to five delegates and one additional delegate for each one thousand members, or major fraction thereof, whose current dues have been received by the national treasurer 30 days prior to the meeting of said convention (July 24, 2017) and whose registration fees, as fixed by the National Executive Committee, for its total authorized delegate strength, have been paid; and to one alternate for each delegate."

In addition to the above, the members of the National Executive Committee are delegates to the National Convention with vote, which shall be exercised with their respective departments except that the vote of the National Commander shall be exercised only in his capacity as Chairman of the National Convention. (sec. 3, art. VII)

"Each duly registered delegate shall be entitled to one vote." (Sec. 4, art. V)

Delegates to the National Convention shall be accredited in writing to the National Adjutant in the number and manner prescribed by article V, VI and VII, of the National Constitution.

The rights of departments to make and accredit substitutes for absentee delegates or alternate delegates shall be recognized by the National Adjutant, provided that such substitution shall be officially certified by the Department Commander and Department Adjutant at the time of the certification required by the National Constitution or at any time prior to adjournment of the first session of the National Convention.

Alternate Delegates

Alternates shall have the power to vote only in the absence of the regular delegates.
The selection of alternates to represent absent delegates is a matter for decision within the respective delegations.

The vote of any registered delegates absent and not represented by an alternate shall be cast by the majority of the registered delegates present from his/her department.

**National Executive Committee**

A meeting of the new National Executive Committee will be held at the call of the National Commander within 24 hours after the adjournment of the National Convention, as provided by the national bylaws.

**Department Officials**

Department officials, unless elected as delegates or alternates to the National Convention, have no privileges in the convention except as the guests of their respective delegations.

**Convention Committees**

Americanism Convention Committee
- Americanism Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- Children & Youth Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate

Constitutional Amendments Convention Committee - One Delegate

Credentials & Rules Convention Committee - One Delegate

Finance Convention Committee - One Delegate

Internal Affairs Convention Committee
- Membership Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- Other Internal Matters Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate

Legislation Convention Committee - One Delegate

National Security Convention Committee
- Aerospace Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- Conventional Armed Forces Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- Foreign Relations Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- Law and Order & Homeland Security Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- Military Benefits & Quality of Life Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- National Guard & Reserve Forces Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- Unconventional Forces & Intelligence Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Convention Committee
- Health Administration Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- National Cemetery Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- Veterans Benefits Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate

Veterans Employment & Education Convention Committee
- Employment & Veterans Preference Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate
- Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness Convention Subcommittee - One Delegate

Signed by Charles E. Schmidt, National Commander; attested by Daniel S. Wheeler, National Adjutant

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, that completes the Call for Convention.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you very much, Mr. Adjutant. I now declare the 99th Annual National Convention of The American Legion to be regularly convened. The Chair recognizes George West, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Credentials and Rules, for the purpose of making a report.

Thirty nine delegates to the Committee on Credentials and Rules met at 8:30 a.m., August 20, 2017, in the Atlantis Resort, Grand Ballroom, Sections 1 & 2.

George West (NH) was elected Chairman, and Timothy Collmer (NY) was elected Secretary.

The Committee proceeded to the business agenda by considering the Rules of the Convention. A motion was unanimously approved by the Committee to adopt the Standing Rules of the Convention as they appear in the revised Uniform Code of Procedures for Organizing National Conventions of The American Legion as approved by the National Executive Committee in May 10-11, 2017. Each Department Delegation Secretary was provided a copy of the Uniform Code at this Convention.

It was regularly moved, seconded and carried to accept the Delegate Strength Report as reported by the National Adjutant certifying membership 30 days prior to National Convention. It was regularly moved, seconded and carried that the report be based upon the provisions of Section 3, Article V, of the National Constitution: Five delegates for each Department, plus one additional delegate for each 1,000 members or major fraction thereof, whose current dues have been received by the National Treasurer thirty (30) days prior to the opening of the Convention (July 24, 2017); and one alternate for each delegate. In addition, in accordance with Section 3, Article VII, members of the National Executive Committee, which committee includes the National Commander, who exercises his vote only in his capacity as Chairman of the National Convention, and five (5) National Vice Commanders are delegates to the National Convention. For a total of 2,316 delegates to the National Convention.

All living past National Commanders are members of the National Executive Committee without vote and life delegates to the National Convention with vote, which is exercised in their respective Departments.

In accordance with the membership report certified to the Convention Committee on Credentials and Rules by the National Adjutant on July 24, 2017, and in accordance with Article V of the National Constitution, the voting strength of the 55 Departments is 2,315 plus the National Commander allocated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Delegates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dist. of Col.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentuck</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Credentials and Rules Committee did not receive any resolutions for consideration or action.

It was also regularly moved, seconded and carried that the Committee Chairman and Secretary be authorized to sign the report on behalf of the Committee.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN WEST: Mr. Commander, as a duly elected and registered delegate from the Department of New Hampshire, I move that the report of the Convention Committee on Credential and Rules, to include the aforementioned Delegate Strength Report, and the adoption of the Standing Rules of the Convention as they appear in the Uniform Code of Procedures for Organizing National Conventions of The American Legion be approved.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER TROIOLA: Do I hear a second? ...Second. Is there any discussion? All in favor say aye. All opposed say nay. The report of Credentials and Rules is adopted. I'll now entertain a motion to adopt the Rules of Convention.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: So moved.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER TROIOLA: Do I hear a second? ...Second. Is there any discussion? All those in favor signify by saying aye. Opposed? The Rules of Convention are adopted. The Chair recognizes Gaither Keener of North Carolina, chairman of the national Convention Committee on Finance, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Finance
Gaither M. Kenner, Jr., North Carolina, Chairman

Forty six members met at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center in the meeting room D1 at 9 a.m. on Sunday, August 20, 2017, in Reno, Nevada. Shawn Long, CPA (Indiana), National Finance Director, opened the meeting as staff liaison and informed the committee that nominations were in order for Chairman and Secretary. Gaither M. Keener, Jr. (North Carolina) was elected chairman, and Carl E. Levi (Tennessee) was elected secretary, by unanimous vote.

Preston Herald III (District of Columbia) made a motion to empower the secretary to deliver the report if the chairman was unable. The motion was seconded by David Warnken (Kansas) and passed by unanimous vote.

Reports were received from Kenneth Danilson (Iowa) Chairman of the Marketing Commission and Walter Ivie (Texas) Chairman of the Media and Communications Commission.

Chairman Keener reported that the 2016 consolidated financial statements were audited by Crowe Horwath, LLP who issued an unqualified opinion.
The Chairman then introduced the National Treasurer, George A. Buskirk, Jr. (Indiana), who updated the committee on the economy. Treasurer Buskirk completed his report with a recommendation for national per capita to remain $18.50. John D. Monahan (Connecticut) made a motion to keep dues at $18.50. The motion was seconded by Paul Morin (Massachusetts) and adopted by unanimous vote. Chairman Keener finally introduced Shawn Long, CPA (Indiana) to report on the financial position and activities of the National organization.

Alan Lennox (California) moved to empower the Chairman and Secretary to write and/or amend the report on behalf of the Convention Committee on Finance. Paul Morin (Massachusetts) seconded the motion, which was adopted by unanimous vote.

As being no further business, the meeting recessed at 9:45 a.m.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN KEENER: Commander, I hereby move that the report be adopted and accepted as written.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER TROIOLA: Do I hear a second? ...Second. Is there any discussion? All those in favor signify by saying aye. Opposed? The report of Finance is adopted. The Chair recognizes the Honorable Vincent Gaughan of Illinois, chairman of the Convention Committee on Constitutional Amendments, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Constitutional Amendments
Hon. Vincent M. Gaughan, Illinois, Chairman


The Committee on Constitutional Amendments met at 9:00 a.m., Sunday, August 20, 2017, in the Grand Ballroom, Section 3, 2nd Floor of the Atlantis Hotel, Reno, Nevada. Committee Liaison Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. (MD) called the roll and announced that 42 members of the Constitutional Amendments Committee were present. The following report was authorized by the members and is hereby submitted to this Convention.

The meeting was opened by Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. (MD), who acted as temporary chairman. He stated a quorum was present and proceeded to the first order of business, which was the election of a chairman and secretary.

Vincent M. Gaughan (IL) was elected Chairman and Cathy J. Gorst (WI) was duly elected Secretary. Thereupon they assumed their respective places.

Copies of the Resolutions, the Report of the Standing Committee, the Charter of The American Legion, National Constitution and By-Laws and the Uniform Code of Procedure for the Organization of National Conventions of The American Legion, which include the Standing Rules of Convention, were made available to all members of the Committee.

The Chair called upon Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., National Judge Advocate, to give a summary background report on the resolutions assigned to the Committee, which was done.

A motion was made by Charles G. Mills (NY) and seconded by Gerald E. Lakey (OK) that all members of the Standing Committee on Constitution and By-Laws who were present at the meeting, but not actual delegates to the Convention Committee be seated with voice but no vote. The motion was carried.

The Chair then announced that he was in agreement with the Report of the Standing Committee on the Constitution and By-laws.

Resolution No. 30 (OH) was considered. The Chair announced this resolution is out of order. It does not provide the complete text to be voted on for The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and the American Legion Corporate Charter and it also...
does not provide that the change cannot take effect until Congress changes the charter. It would also end the right of The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and American Legion Charities to accept tax deductible donations. In addition, it would require The American Legion to incur the expense of returning donations to the donors.

James R. Johnson (LA) made a motion, seconded by Frank A. Porter (MD) to reject Resolution No. 30 (OH). Motion carried unanimously.

**Resolution No. 31 (OH)** was considered. The Chair announced this resolution is out of order. It does not provide the complete text to be voted on for The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and the American Legion Corporate Charter and it also does not provide that the change cannot take effect until Congress changes the charter. It would also end the right of The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and American Legion Charities to accept tax deductible donations. In addition, it would require The American Legion to incur the expense of returning donations to the donors.

Joe Sims (GA) made a motion to reject Resolution No. 31 (OH), which was seconded by J. W. Smith (AR). Motion carried unanimously.

**Resolution No. 32 (OH)** was considered. The Chair announced this resolution is out of order. It does not provide the complete text to be voted on for The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and the American Legion Corporate Charter and it also does not provide that the change cannot take effect until Congress changes the charter. It would also end the right of The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and American Legion Charities to accept tax deductible donations. In addition, it would require The American Legion to incur the expense of returning donations to the donors.

Frank A. Porter (MD) made a motion seconded by James R. Johnson (LA) to reject Resolution No. 32 (OH). Motion carried unanimously.

**Resolution No. 33 (OH)** was considered. The Chair announced this resolution is out of order. It does not provide the complete text to be voted on for The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary, and it also does not provide that the change cannot take effect until Congress changes the charter. It would also end the right of The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and American Legion Charities to accept tax deductible donations. In addition, it would require The American Legion to incur the expense of returning donations to the donors.

Charlie Arkwell (NH) made a motion to reject Resolution No. 33 (OH), seconded by Todd Rikki (ND). Motion carried with one no vote.

The Chair then asked for a motion that the Chairman and Secretary be permitted to sign the report to the Convention on behalf of the members of the Convention Committee. James R. Johnson (LA) made the motion and it was seconded by Bill Stevens (ID). The motion carried unanimously.

Charles Mills (NY) made the motion, seconded by Frank A. Porter (MD) to attach the Report of the Constitution and By-laws Committee to this report as an exhibit. The motion was carried unanimously.

Gerald E. Lakey (OK) made a motion to recess, subject to the call of the Chairman. The motion was seconded by LeRoy Madsen (SD). The motion carried unanimously.

The Chairman then thanked the Committee for its cooperation and productive meeting. The meeting was declared in recess pending a call from the Chairman of the Committee.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN GAUGHAN: Mr. Commander, as a delegate to the 99th National Convention of The American Legion, I move the adoption of this report.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER TROIOLA: Do I hear a second? ...Second. Is there any discussion? All those in favor signify by saying aye. Opposed? The report on
Proceedings of Tuesday, August 22, 2017

Constitutional Amendments is adopted. Please give your attention to the screens while we provide some videos while we set up for our next speaker.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a series of videos. (Applause)

Report: National Commander’s Report to Convention
Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon, National Commander

My fellow Legionnaires, Legion Family members and friends, I am going to ask you the same question that George Jones asked. And, no, I'm not speaking about the legends of country music, but instead the legends of The American Legion. Who is going to fill their shoes? Who is going to advocate for veterans, just as the doughboys returning from World War I did, when they formed an organization that pledged to leave no American servicemember behind and to ensure their widows and orphans would receive the compassion and assistance of a grateful nation? Who?

Who is going to instill the values of great citizenship to the young people by conducting programs like American Legion Baseball, Boys State and Nation, oratoricals, Shooting Sports, Scouting and so many activities? Who? Who is going to educate the public about flag etiquette and champion a constitutional amendment to protect Old Glory from those who desecrate it? Who? Who is going to lobby Congress, encourage the White House and convince the media that freedom is not free and America must maintain a strong national defense in order to protect our way of life? Who?

For the past 98 years, it has been our American Legion that has been doing these things, and I pray to God that we will continue to be the leader on these vital pillars for the next century and beyond. You don't have to be a famous national leader like Past National Commander Harry Colmery or the founding father, the father of American Legion as he may be known, Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., to be a legend in your own communities. In fact, most of the great work by The American Legion Family is performed by unsung heroes, people whose names we don't know and probably will never know.

Who is going to fill the shoes of American Legion volunteers who contributed more than 645,000 hours at the VA last year and saved the government more than $14 million? Who? Who is going to conduct the blood drives in your departments, cities, and communities? Who is going to gather and deliver donations for Operation Comfort Warriors to ensure that our nation's wounded, injured, and ill heroes know that within a grateful nation resides an especially grateful American Legion Family? Who? Who is going to ensure that the accountability that was promised to us at the Department of Veterans Affairs is delivered in such a way that nobody would be able to make a career within that agency if they are not properly serving veterans? Who? Who?

My friends, who is going to fill your shoes, the people in this great convention hall, leaders in your communities and departments? Only time prevents me from citing your individual accomplishments, but The American Legion is better off because of what you have put into it.

My fellow Legionnaires, I'll be frank with you. I'm very concerned. I was cautiously optimistic back in February when we had 45 of our 55 departments meet their 85 percent membership target goal. The caution was because of the tendency of many of our posts and departments to run out of gas early. Sure enough, only Mexico, Idaho, and the Department of the Philippines met their 2017 membership goals. Three out of 55 is simply not enough. Do you know where your department ended up in the membership standings? I know where mine ended up. Our total membership numbers are now below 2 million. We need your help if this organization we all love is going to remain relevant as we prepare to enter our second century of service, serving veterans, serving families, and standing up for America.
I know the challenges that some of you face in your communities. I know what my community faces. I understand that people join Post Everlasting. I think we all get that. But look at all of the Guard and reserve units that have been activated since August 2, 1990. Look at the fact that the current membership window has been open for 27 years, by far the longest window in history of The American Legion. Instead of focusing on those deceased or ineligible veterans who cannot join The American Legion, let's put our efforts toward the more than 18 million who can. A 15 percent penetration of this population would give us 2.7 million members. If over the last 25 years we had replaced all of our deceased members with new ones and renewed those who let their memberships lapse, we would have another 22 million in our national budget every year. I am certain that your departments and posts could benefit from the millions in additional revenue that you would also have if you had just been able to maintain the numbers that we had in the early 1990s.

I'm going to speak to you briefly about another challenge, a challenge that an Iraq War veteran faced when he returned home in Cripple Creek, Colorado. You saw the video this morning. A 100 percent disabled Marine, this single father had an eight-year-old son with special needs. He was forced to vacate his home when it was determined to be uninhabitable due to mold and other severe problems. But American Legion Post 171 in Cripple Creek and the Department of Colorado stepped up. Boy, did they step up. Big time. The post led a 10-month-long renovation of the home. Donations came from around the country, including the Home Depot Foundation. At least 65 members, volunteers combined for more than 2,500 hours. On Father's Day of this year, Andrew Smith and his son were able to move back home.

The American Legion saw a challenge, and our family stepped up. Now, who is going to fill their shoes and help the many other Andrew Smiths that are out there? Who?

Membership determines our ability to implement and execute our Four Pillar programs. It also determines our ability to effectively advocate, since numbers matter to Congress, the White House, governors and state legislatures. The numbers in our communities can also make the difference between mayors and city councils supporting American Legion programs or ignoring us. Everywhere I go, I tell Legionnaires that if each of them would just recruit one new member, we would double our membership. Yet, in 2017, we had only 64,267 new traditional members, according to our report as of July 17.

Keep in mind, that doesn't mean we had anywhere close to 64,267 different recruiters. Some of the recruiters, especially our Gold and Silver Brigade recruiters, carried the weight for the rest of us, and they are doing more than their share. In fact, 7,965 of these new members were recruited by just 107 Gold Brigadiers. Another 1,637 new members were recruited by 54 Silver Brigadiers. And bear in mind that while we may have 64,000 new members, we lost 66,000 members to Post Everlasting during the same year.

When someone recruited three new members this past year, I called or either emailed each of them. One recruiter from Post 29 in the Department of Washington emailed me back: "I'm honored to have served this great nation," she wrote. "I look forward to reinvesting my efforts to garner younger veterans into volunteerism. If I could rejoin the military and serve again, I would. I feel my experience to serve and mentor younger staff could be an asset to our country. Thank you for the encouragement, and I appreciate that you took the time to have an email sent to me. Kind regards, Monica J. Trujillo."

And one morning I picked up the phone and called Richard Greene in North Dakota. I said, "Good morning, Richard. This is your national commander." He said, "Who?" I said, "This is your national commander. I just want to call and thank you for signing up three new members, Richard. I appreciate your efforts." And he said, "But, Mr. Commander, I'm not done. I have approximately six more potential new members lined up."

I'm glad that out there, there are Legionnaires like Richard and Monica working to get new members and also to mentor younger ones to someday fill our shoes. But what about
the rest of us? Are we doing all that we can to reach out to active-duty, reserve and Guard members and say, "Join us. We're The American Legion, and we are your friends"? Are we bringing membership applications and brochures to our American Legion programs such as American Legion Baseball games and recruiting eligible parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends into our organization? Are we fighting every day to bring The American Legion back above the highly significant 2 million mark? If we are going to do that, we need to keep recruiting and recruiting all year, from the very beginning until the very end. In 2018 we should not settle for 100 percent. We need departments to achieve 105 percent or, even better, 110 percent of their goals if we are going to turn this around.

The reason Congress pays attention to us is because we are large, we are principled, and we are altruistic. While I see no diminishment of our principles and our good works, our voice will get proportionally smaller as our numbers go down and so will our ability to run the programs that so many people and their communities benefit from. Don't believe for one second that other revenue sources can save us. A smaller magazine circulation lessens our ability to attract advertising. Fewer Legionnaires means fewer customers for Emblem Sales. It's a vicious cycle.

Would you like to be on a national commission to decide which of our outstanding programs to cut? After seeing this morning's champs, I think not. Do you want to attend a national convention where there are fewer Youth Champions to recognize? I don't think so. Do we want fewer accredited service officers to assist veterans with their claims and appeals? I think not. Would you like to consider a dues increase, knowing that it will often result in fewer members because of the dues increase? I think not.

We have a great tool called mylegion.org. Hopefully, many of you are already familiar with it. This is a great resource. MyLegion can provide a county-by-county list of those who have not renewed their membership in The American Legion. Unless a Legionnaire has joined Post Everlasting, make sure that every one of those former members within your post, district and department receives a personal contact, not just a form letter, from someone who cares. Sometimes a phone number is not included in the contact information. If that is the case, Google the information that you have or else call directory assistance for a phone number. But a personal visit works even better. Find out why they left the fold, and find a way to fix it. If people feel wanted and appreciated, they will renew.

We all believe in leadership by example, and this is your opportunity to do so throughout your communities. By being at this National Convention, your presence indicates to me that you have an even greater interest in our organization than the typical member. Delegates and other Conventioneers, you are all leaders in The American Legion Family. Since we are counting on you to reach out to past members of your posts, squadrons and units, expect other Legion leaders that you know to do the same. Every post has a commander. Expect no less from them.

The military has an ethos: "Leave no man or woman behind." We shall do the same and make sure that our post members are not left behind and not forgotten. Stay up on and follow through on all of our good ideas that you hear discussed during your time here in Reno. Information and communications are crucial. If you don't already subscribe to The American Legion Dispatch newsletter, please do so. Visit legion.org regularly.

We are about to make history as we approach our 100th anniversary of still serving America. Our next national commander, whomever she may be, will testify before Congress next spring. Wouldn't it be great if our next national commander could begin by saying, "Mr. Chairman, on behalf of more than 2 million American Legion members"? Wouldn't it? I am hopeful that we all, with all your help, we will stop the membership slide. I'd like to say to you, once again, turn your attention to the video monitors.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video.
NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: George Jones found someone to fill his shoes. My fellow Legionnaires, do you know who’s going to fill your shoes? (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The son of Cuban refugees, our next guest is a native of Miami who earned undergraduate and law degrees at Harvard University. He clerked for current U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito while at the Third Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. He worked at a law firm and went on to teach law at George Mason University's Antonin Scalia School of Law. He was nominated by President Trump to lead the Department of Labor and was sworn in on April 28, 2017. Please welcome Secretary of Labor Alex Acosta. (Applause)

Address: Honorable R. Alexander Acosta
Secretary, United States Department of Labor

Good afternoon! Thank you for the kind introduction and the warm welcome, and thank you for your service and your ongoing commitment to our nation. Before I begin my remarks, I would like to ask that you join me in a moment of silence for those aboard the USS John McCain, for those injured, still missing, and for those whose remains have not been found.

I am honored to be among so many who have served with such distinction. Your devotion to our nation during your tours of duty is clear to all. Your patriotism did not end, however, with your tours of duty. It continues to this day. My challenge today is how to express my respect for what you have done and what you continue to do. Sometimes the word "hero" is used to describe those who served our nation. Hero. It is a small word. It is often used to describe the smallest act of kindness nowadays.

How many times do you hear, "You are my hero," for volunteering to baby sit a neighbor's child or for bringing an extra cup of coffee to the office in the morning? It is a phrase that has lost its meaning. When I think of a hero, I think of the young men who sacrificed on the beaches of Normandy. I think of George Washington and his soldiers crossing the Delaware, loudly declaring that Americans ought to be free. I think of the men and women of all races who serve each day to defeat the terrorists who despise our American way of life. (Applause)

I think of the men and women who have given so much, so much for our freedom. What distinguishes each of these individuals and what is shared by all of you in this room is something very important. It is service. When someone says, "Thank you for your service," what they mean is thank you for laying your life on the line in service to your nation. When someone says, "You are my hero," what they mean is thank you for risking your blood on behalf of my freedom. What you have done and what you continue to do through The American Legion is place your nation, our nation, above your personal well-being. That is what a hero does. (Applause)

Our nation was founded by the blood of those who served. Every generation renews that sacrifice. Our military might is unparalleled in the world, yet the greatness of the American military and of America itself is not in our tanks or our ships, it is in our people and our ideals. Later this week I have the privilege of visiting the Reagan Library. I was a young child when Ronald Reagan was elected. I remember his vision of America: our nation as a shining city upon a hill. I later learned he was not the first to apply this image, this wonderful image, to this land. Puritan leader John Winthrop, sailing to freedom upon the Arbella, challenged his parishioners to be a light to the world. Winthrop said: "We shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." This land that we now call the United States, was then, has been, is, and will be a beacon of freedom. (Applause)
It is a freedom earned at great price. As Ronald Reagan reminded us: "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same."

I know this well. My parents were born in Cuba. As children, they witnessed the rise of the Castro regime. They came to these shores in search of freedom and opportunity. It is hard to believe that a place so close, a mere 90 miles off our shores, can be so different. A place where even the most basic human rights, the right to speak your mind, the right to worship, the right to own property, are denied. Because he understood the value of freedom, my father enlisted in the Army. My parents appreciated the freedoms offered by this nation and worked every day of their lives to provide me opportunity. They are my heroes. (Applause)

They, like so many in this room, risked life, offered sweat, and in doing so created opportunities for the next generation. I am here because of them. (Applause)

President Trump's focus is on providing opportunities for all Americans. That is why his top three priorities with respect to labor are fairly straightforward: Jobs, more jobs, and even more jobs. (Applause)

For the individual seeking a career or a new start, a job can come from an apprenticeship. For a servicemember returning to civilian life, a job can come from recognition and credit for the skills they learned in the military. (Applause)

For the military spouse, near to the hearts of all in this room, this issue of giving credit and skills and licensing is particularly important. (Applause)

There are many great job opportunities for Americans right now. Currently, there are more than 6 million open jobs in the United States, a record high since we started keeping this statistic. To unlock these job opportunities, American workers need the opportunity to learn the skills those jobs demand. Let me be clear. The American workforce is and always has been the best in the world. Americans are hard working. (Applause)

Americans are dedicated. Americans, however, need an education system that focuses on the skills required by the modern workplace. Today only 60 percent of Americans who enter college graduate within six years. And this statistic is not much different for veterans enrolled in college. This is unacceptable. Millions of American students leave college with no degree, yet take with them tens of thousands of dollars in debt. Veterans use up their GI Bill benefits, yet fail to earn degrees that lead to family-sustaining jobs. Our nation's education system must focus on what we call demand-driven education.

Demand-driven education empowers students with the skills demanded by the modern workplace. Demand-driven education leads to family-sustaining jobs, offering students clear reason to complete their education. Apprenticeships are an important form of demand-driven education. Apprenticeships combine a paid-work component with an educational component. Apprentices earn while they learn. Apprentices avoid the burden of student debt. And studies show apprentices enjoy better job prospects. The average apprentice starting salary is nearly $60,000, substantially higher than the average college graduate.

Let me give you an example. Earlier this summer, I met two veterans who discovered great opportunity through an apprenticeship program. Both veterans were named Chris. After leaving military service, the Chrises were recruited into Mercuria's intensive one-year apprenticeship program. I like telling their story because Mercuria's apprenticeship program is in commodities trading operations. When people hear "apprenticeship," they immediately think of the successful apprenticeship programs found in the building trades. The story of the two Chrises reminds us that apprenticeship programs work well across all industries. Mercuria wants individuals with the right experience and the right attitude. They see veterans as an untapped pool of incredible talents. (Applause)
It's so true. Both Chris's graduated from the apprenticeship program and now work full-time at Mercuria. And they have family-sustaining jobs. (Applause)

President Trump knows the success of apprenticeships from his background in the building trades. That is why the President Trump issued an Executive Order calling on the Labor Department to expand apprenticeships broadly across all industries. The order requires the Labor Department to work closely with the Department of Defense to promote apprenticeship opportunities for members of the armed services and for veterans. I am proud of this partnership with the Department of Defense. It is important. (Applause)

It is the least we can do for those who served. (Applause)

Apprenticeships create new opportunities. It is just as important, however, to remove regulatory barriers to existing opportunities. (Applause)

Eliminating excessive occupational licensing is an important way to remove obstacle to opportunity. Not long ago, fewer than 1 in 20 Americans required a license to work. Today, more than 1 in 4 Americans require a license to do something very simple, to work. 1 in 4 need a license to work. Think about that. More than 1,100 careers are licensed in at least one state. Certainly, some licenses satisfy valid health and safety needs, yet most licenses simply limit competition, bar entry, or create a privileged class. Our veterans and their families are some of the hardest hit by these licensing requirements. Servicemembers learn important skills in the military. Veterans have a proven ability to lead under pressure and to deliver results. These are valuable skills. (Applause)

Yet, when servicemen and women transition to civilian life, states often fail to recognize the credentials and skills gained while in service to this, our nation. Military spouses also suffer. When a servicemember enlists in the Armed Forces, his or her family enlists as well. The servicemember's spouse understands that they, too, may need to move from assignment to assignment in support of the servicemember's obligation to our nation. Yet, the requirement of obtaining a new license to work in each state hinders many military spouses' career opportunities. A teacher in one state should not be prohibited from teaching in another simply because they moved in support of their nation. (Applause)

A spouse should not have to give up his or her career or choose not to move with his or her family each time the family is reassigned. This administration is working with governors across the nation to address this issue. If licenses are unnecessary, eliminate them. If licenses are needed, streamline them. And if they are honored in one state, honor them in all states. And, finally, credit the skills and credentials earned by the men and women in service to their nation. (Applause)

It will happen. I want to conclude with two words: Thank you. (Applause)

Our world is dangerous; you know that more than most. We ask our servicemen and women to risk their lives to protect us. Our military doesn't fight for land or for treasure. Our military fights for our liberty and for our opportunity. The least we can do is ensure that our men and women in uniform serve, confident in the knowledge that great opportunities await them. (Applause)

From the bottom of my heart, thank you. Thank you for serving our nation in uniform. Thank you for continuing to serve through The American Legion. Thank you for inviting me to join you today. It is an honor to be here in this roomful of true heroes. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Tomorrow the Child Welfare Foundation donations will follow the Children & Youth Awards, and Operation Comfort Warriors donations will occur Thursday morning after the National Security report. We will also have the president of the United States with us tomorrow. We are a non-partisan organization, and we treat all of our guests with dignity and respect. That includes visiting media. I know that I can count on all of you to represent our organization
well, which means that we will show every speaker the utmost courtesy. The magnetometers will be in place, and long lines are expected, so get here early. I now call on the national adjutant for announcements.

**Announcements**

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: The shuttles will begin running at 6:00 a.m. tomorrow. The convention center proper will open at 6:00 a.m. tomorrow. You will only be able to enter through the north doors or the Atlantis Skywalk. The hall in which you are in will open at 7:00 a.m. They will have magnetometers. You must go through the magnetometers in order to enter. If you leave, you must re-go through the magnetometers. It is expected that Secret Service will stop all movement around 10:15 a.m., which means if you have not gone through the magnetometers and are not in your seat, you probably will not be able to enter the hall. So just be early, as the commander said, be patient, and we'll all get in here and hear the president of the United States. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Legionnaires, please join me in a salute to the flag of our United States of America. By the numbers. One!

... *At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Two! The time now is 2:23 p.m. The Convention will stand in recess until 9:00 a.m. tomorrow morning.

... *At 2:23 p.m., the Convention was recessed to reconvene the following day, August 23, 2017, at 9:00 a.m.*
PROCEEDINGS
SECOND DAY

Wednesday, August 23, 2017

... At 9:00 a.m., the Delegates assembled for the second day of the 99th Annual National Convention, and the following proceedings were had:

Call to Order
Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon, National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Convention will come to order. Sergeant-at-Arms.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS OWENS: With the flag of our nation in place, hand salute.

... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Two! For the invocation, I call on National Chaplain Harvey Klee of Texas. Ladies and gentlemen, please uncover.

Invocation
Harvey H. Klee, Texas, National Chaplain

Almighty God, we thank You for the grace of another precious day, precious in the life it brings forth and the opportunities it presents and the challenges that lie ahead. May we be ever mindful of Your presence among us, and may You accompany us along the way, ever guiding us along righteous paths. As we consider the many presentations made at convention, the meetings held, workshops presented and the numerous activities planned, we thank those in the shadows who have made this convention possible. And may Your blessing be upon them, The American Legion Family, staff, the sponsors, and those many others serving this convention.

Compassionate Lord, in a world seemingly without a moral compass, may we return to our spiritual roots to rescue us from chaos and anarchy. In Your great mercy may You again stir hearts, awaken dead souls, and transform lives, young and old. We beseech You to heal our land, not because we are deserving, but because You are merciful. Creator of all things good, let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with those here today. Let peace run rampant across all the countries of the world. And while the storm clouds gather far across the sea, let us swear allegiance to a land that is free. Let us all be grateful for a land so fair as we raise our voices in a solemn prayer. God bless America. This is our prayer. Amen.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Chaplain Klee. Ladies and gentlemen, please remain uncovered, and I call on Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin J. Owens of Oregon to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Pledge of Allegiance
Kevin J. Owens, Oregon, National Sergeant-at-Arms

... At this time, the delegation recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: You may cover. The Convention is now in session. You know, The American Legion Family continues to amaze me. You know, this past year we’ve had fundraisers for our American Legion charities, and yesterday we received more funds from those who raised for those charities. As of today, The American
Legion charities, the funds that you have raised to serve veterans and families total now over $8 million. *(Cheers and applause)*

You make me proud. Be proud yourself for what you do and especially for whom you serve, our veterans and their families.

**Presentation: Certificate of Appreciation**  
**Harvey H. Klee, Texas, National Chaplain**

**NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT:** The man who has served as our national chaplain this year is a truly dedicated man of God. He is also a licensed attorney to practice in Texas, California, and before the United States Supreme Court. He is the founder of the Texas Chaplains Association and a Korean War veteran of the United States Navy. He and his wife, Suzanne Klee, have a blended family of 11 children, 15 grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. Chaplain, your words have given us peace, inspiration, and hope. And also confidence into whom we know who you pray to. It is an honor for me to present a certificate of appreciation marking his year of service as national chaplain to Harvey H. Klee of Texas. Chaplain. *(Applause)*


**NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT:** Our next guest is a man who epitomizes public service. He served his country, first as an Air Force officer during the Vietnam War and later as one of our most respected national leaders. In 2007, Time Magazine listed him as one of that year's most influential people. The following year he was named as one of America's best leaders by U.S. News & World Report. A Washington Post book review said he is, "Widely considered the best Defense Secretary of the post-World War II era."

As you are about to hear from his award citation, that is just one of the many jobs he excelled at. He has earned a Presidential Medal of Freedom, and I am proud to say he is also a member of American Legion Post 110 in Lacey, Washington. It is my distinct pleasure to present the 2017 American Legion Patriot Award to Dr. Robert M. Gates, former U.S. secretary of defense. *(Applause)*

**ANNOUNCER:** The American Legion Patriot Award presented to Dr. Robert M. Gates for stalwart service and leadership to America as an officer in the U.S. Air Force, as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, as President of Texas A&M University, as the 22nd U.S. Secretary of Defense, as President of the Boy Scouts of America, and as Chancellor of the College of William & Mary, you have demonstrated the highest level of integrity and excellence throughout your career. Your service to both Republican and Democratic administrations demonstrated a commitment that transcends partisan politics. Your reminder to European allies that they have a responsibility to live up to the defense requirements as members of NATO struck a chord that still resonates today. You maintain a seat as a valued member of The American Legion 100th Anniversary Honorary Committee. Your advocacy for and service to U.S. military, veterans, public servants, and the young people of America epitomize the Four Pillars upon which The American Legion was founded. On behalf of the 2 million members of The American Legion, we thank you for your patriotism and service to America. *(Applause)*
Thank you very much for this honor. It is humbling to be recognized with this Patriot Award by The American Legion. I last stood before you on August 31, 2010, when as secretary of defense I spoke at your National Convention in Milwaukee. I told you then that it was a real pleasure to be with you, but that it was a real pleasure to be anywhere but Washington, D.C. Much has happened in the last seven years, but that hasn't changed.

First of all, I want to thank you for all The American Legion has done for our nation and for our military, and especially for those returning from the battlefield. When I was asked in October of 2006 if I would be willing to serve as secretary of defense, I said that because all those kids were out there doing their duty, I had no choice but to do mine. The troops were the reason I took the job, and they were the reason I stayed. Being called the soldier's secretary because I cared so much about them was the highest compliment imaginable.

The tone for my tenure as secretary of defense was unexpectedly set in an encounter in Washington, D.C. prior to my confirmation hearings. I was having dinner alone in a hotel dining room when a middle-aged woman came up to my table and asked if I were Mr. Gates, the new secretary of defense. I said I was. She congratulated me, and then, with tears in her eyes, said, "I have two sons serving in Iraq. For God's sake, bring them home alive."

Our wars suddenly became very real to me along with the responsibility I was taking on for all those in the fight. It only took a few visits to the frontline troops in Iraq and Afghanistan before I began to feel a deep emotional attachment to them, a growing feeling that I personally was responsible for each of them. I soon was telling the troops on the front lines that I had come to regard them as though they were my own sons and daughters and that I would do everything in my power to get them the equipment they needed to accomplish their mission and to come home safely and, if wounded, to ensure they got the best care in the world.

What I didn't expect was that I would have to fight the Pentagon bureaucracy itself to fulfill my pledge to those amazing young people whose selfless service and sacrifice contrasted so vividly with so many self-serving elected and non-elected officials back home. There will always be a special place in my heart for all those who served on the front lines in Iraq and Afghanistan, most in their 20s, some in their teens.

During World War II General George Marshall once told his wife, "I cannot afford the luxury of sentiment. Mine must be cold logic. Sentiment is for others." Such icy detachment was never an option for me. Because of the nature of the wars I oversaw, I could afford the luxury of sentiment, and at times it nearly overwhelmed me. It wasn't long before I had signed the orders deploying every single person in an American uniform to Iraq and Afghanistan. Every single soldier, Marine, airman, and sailor who was wounded or killed was in harm's way because I sent him there.

Determined never to let the fallen become statistics for me, I asked that every condolence letter I had to write be accompanied by a photo of the individual, along with hometown news stories so I could read what his parents and brothers and sisters or spouse or coaches or friends had to say. So I could know whether he had been an athlete, an honor student, or had been aimless and found direction in life through military service. I wanted to know each of them as I handwrote the condolence letter.

I came to believe, as so many of you have long known from personal experience, that no one who had actually been in combat could walk away without scars, some measure of post-traumatic stress. And while the wounded troops I visited in the hospitals put on a brave
I would wake in the night and think back to a Marine or a soldier I had seen at Landstuhl or Bethesda or Walter Reed, and in my imagination I would put myself in his hospital room, and I would hold him to my chest and comfort him. And so my answer to a young soldier's question in Afghanistan about what kept me awake at night: He did.

My wars are over, but for all of you who have served and fought, for the wounded and their families, for the families of the fallen, our nation's wars will continue for the rest of their lives. Thanks to The American Legion we will never forget what they did and what they sacrificed, and we will never forget what you did and what you sacrificed. Thank you again for this honor. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Our next guest is dedicated to the causes of economic growth and job expansion. His own résumé includes occupations such as opera singer, actor, salesman and, most famously, television host. His Eagle Scout service project involved reading to students at the Maryland School for the Blind. In 2012, he was awarded the Distinguished Eagle Scout Award by the Boy Scouts of America. His message is simple: Work hard, you can achieve the American dream. A graduate of Towson University, he has a degree in communications studies. His wit and his passion for workers of every economic class comes through in all of his productions and multimedia platforms. It is my pleasure to present our 2017 Media & Communications Award to Mike Rowe, founder of mikeroweWORKS. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: National Commander’s 2017 Media & Communications Award presented to Mike Rowe for your inspirational message about the value of work, the greatness of America, and the importance of accomplishment. You have been one of our nation's leading advocates of blue-collar trades, employment opportunities for veterans, and the Second Amendment. You have been able to use your platforms as host of shows such as Dirty Jobs and Somebody's Gotta Do It to advance values that were demonstrated during your service as an Eagle Scout. The mikeroweWORKS website and mikeroweWORKS Foundation reward people with a passion to get trained for skilled jobs that actually exist. Through your scholarship programs, you have provided financial assistance to individuals with a desire to learn skills that are in demand. On behalf of the 2 million members of The American Legion, we thank you for your patriotism and service to America. (Applause)

Presentation: National Commander’s Media & Communications Award
Mike Rowe, American Television Host and Actor

Thank you very much. Hi and good morning. In no way does my gratitude and my humility for what was just said, in no way is that reflected in my lack of a tie or my blue jeans. I apologize for my dress. I have a whole series of excuses. I won't bore you with them. Most of my suits are rubber anyway. (Laughter)

So I just really didn't think, all things considered. Although, if anybody could understand the value of a rubber suit, surely the men and women assembled here do. Such an honor and such a privilege. Dirty Jobs was a TV show that I assume some of you might have a passing familiarity with. (Cheers and applause) Oh, no, no. I really wasn't looking for cheap applause, but I will always take it. (Laughter)

That show, like so much of the rest of my misspent career, happened by accident. It was a tribute to my grandfather who some of you might know, not by name. His name was Carl Noble. I grew up next to him in Baltimore County. My grandfather was one of those
guys who could build a house without a blueprint, which he actually did from time to time. He only went to the seventh grade, but by the time he was 30, he was a master electrician, a plumber, a steamfitter, pipefitter, welder, mechanic. He had the chip, you know, in the back of his head. He just knew how to fix things. I wanted to do a TV show that honored people who knew how to fix things and weren't afraid to roll their sleeves up and get dirty. We did a one-hour pilot and it went on the air, and I got 10,000 letters very quickly from people saying: You should meet my brother, my uncle, my cousin, my mom, my aunt, my niece, my nephew. Wait until you see what they do.

It was so interesting the number of people who wrote to me who that show struck a chord with who were in the military, who understood intuitively what a dirty job meant, what it meant to go to work every day, not just with the competence and the courage and the willingness to do whatever had to be done, but with a smile on their face.

That's what my show became. It became an attempt to find people who understood that hard work and humor weren't mutually exclusive. Once again, the U.S. Armed Forces were right there in spades. We did 300 dirty jobs. If I made a list of the people who we profiled who served, more than half would be on there. In fact, for our 130th dirty job, where did we go? In Carolina, Fort Jackson. Right? (Cheers)

187th Fixed Wheel Battalion wanted to honor the most bad-ass, pardon me, most bad-ass mechanics in the world. And those guys were incredible. They were just incredible. And the viewers loved it. And after that I said to the network: Look, every season we've got to go somewhere. We've got to highlight the military. They said, look, do whatever you want to do. At that point the show was a hit; nobody was going to tell me no. So went with the Coast Guard out in San Francisco to do a little buoy tending. The buoy tenders. This is a phenomenal job, bringing those giant buoys out of the bay. Then they shoot the tube. They crawl up inside of this thing and they hack the barnacles off, and they laugh and they whistle while they work. These coasties were crazy. I loved them.

I went over to Fort McConnell season after that, KC-135, the Stratotanker, they let me swap out a fuel bladder. You know? When you see that in your inbox, "Mike, we'd like to invite you down to do some work with our bladders," you say, well maybe we should do that. And so we did.

The Seabees. The Seabees nearly killed me down in Hattiesburg a couple years ago, building a bridge in the mud. Those guys are out of their minds. And the Army Corps of Engineers. Really. Everybody but the Marines called me. I can't figure that out. (Laughter)

What's going on with the Marines? No, actually, the Marines called every year. They were like: Come on down to Quantico. We got a little something you're going to love. I'm like, Nah, I'll put them on the list.

Anyway, 300 dirty jobs. 300 hardworking men and women who do the kinds of jobs that make civilized life possible for the rest of us. It was far more than a TV show; it was a legacy. I hope it's going to be a legacy.

But more importantly it was a platform. It was a platform for me to shine a little light in my little slice of cable television on the people I thought were worth knowing and very slowly and somewhat subversively get my world view into that show, and I couldn't have done it without the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces.

I can also tell you that the reason I believe I'm here today, I'm not entirely sure. I Googled the earlier recipients of this award, and I still think there may have been some mistake. I'm not sure that I've lived up to their company yet. It's some pretty high cotton. But in 2008 when the economy tanked, an interesting thing happened. The headlines made Dirty Jobs relevant in ways that the network never anticipated, nor I, and suddenly the whole country was having a conversation about the definition of a good job. And it was interesting because everywhere I went on the show, this is really 2009, the headlines were
constantly talking about record numbers of people who were unemployed. Everywhere I went, you know what I saw? "Help Wanted" signs. It was the craziest thing.

There was this alternative narrative, I think, going on in the country. And the people who ran the small businesses that we typically profiled on the show were struggling mightily to find people who were willing to learn a skill that was actually in demand, show up early, stay late and do all the stuff that we all know is ultimately the key to every success story worth telling.

So I thought maybe there was a way to give something back to the industries that had allowed my little show to prosper, a way to do something that might make my grandfather proud. So we started a modest foundation. We raised money. We give it through a Work Ethic Scholarship program to people who are willing to learn a skill that's in demand. And wouldn't you know it, as soon as we started doing it, you know who stepped up first? It was the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces. (Applause)

There they were. Not just helping the foundation, but coming to it to say: Listen, I get it. My soft skills are already in order. I show up early. I stay late. You don't have to train me to do that. What you can train me to do is weld or plumbing or electric. Right now, as I stand here talking to you, there's 6 million jobs in this country that don't require a four-year degree. And they're available right now. (Applause)

The skills gap is real. It's getting wider, and our best hope of filling it is with people who are coming back, transitioning back into society, looking to apply the skills that they already have. So there's nothing I can tell this crowd that you haven't heard before in terms of building vet-friendly onramps into these industries. I know a lot of people are doing it. But we have to do more of it. We have to do more because the unemployment rate for recently returning servicemembers is just too damn high. And there's no reason for it because the opportunities are still here.

So in my own little small way with my TV shows and my five million friends on Facebook and my little foundation, I'm going to do what I can to continue to be a jagged little pill, tell the story about opportunities that actually exist, reward work ethic where I can find it, and most importantly thank each and every one of you for being a choir that is so much fun to preach to. You guys get it. It's always fun to be in a roomful of people who get it. Thank you for this. Thank you for this. (Hold up gavel) I'm taking it with me. I've been looking at it the whole time. It's very, very difficult to stand in the presence of a gavel and not want to pick it up and do something with it. But I'm afraid what would happen. I would just adjourn everything, wouldn't I? (Laughter)

...Mike Rowe raps gavel three times and the delegation stands.

Oh my, what did I do? (Laughter) What did I do? You guys are the best. Thank you so much. That's the easiest standing ovation I ever got. I love it. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I call on Past National Commander Dale Barnett of Georgia to present the Plaque of Appreciation to the president of the National Convention Corporation of Ohio, James C. Morris, for the outstanding job that the Ohio American Legion Family did in hosting the 2016 Convention in Cincinnati. A city that I kind of like.

Presentation: Plaque of Appreciation to the City of Cincinnati
Host City of the 2016 National Convention

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER BARNETT: As past national commander during the Cincinnati convention, I think we all owe a deep gratitude to the hospitality that was shown to us by the convention division of the Department of Ohio. And at this time, if you
were at Cincinnati and you had a good time, let's give them a big round of applause for the hospitality that was shown us last year. (Applause)

James, if you would like to say anything? Because we put some real curve balls on him. Not only did he have one, but he had two presidential candidates that came to the city, and they did it superbly. James, if you would like to address.

DELEGATE MORRIS (OH): Thank you very much. All that I want to say is I want to say a special thank you to all my chairmen that served on my committees, all the many volunteers that helped, and a special thank you to the City of Cincinnati, the police department and the fire department. They were the most friendliest people and they were there to help you anytime you needed help. Again, we really appreciated everybody coming to Cincinnati, and we're going to have another convention one of these years in Cincinnati or Cleveland, so you will have to come back again. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: America is blessed to have so many amazing and dedicated police officers and firefighters. These are the men and women who are willing to sacrifice their lives to keep us safe. Their split-second decisions can mean life or death and often invite intense scrutiny. One statement that every American should agree with is this: Police officer lives matter! (Cheers and applause)

Our 2017 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year has been a member of the Michigan State Police for 17 years and currently serves at the state's Tri-City Post. As an accomplished investigator, his work led to the discovery of key evidence in a credit card fraud and sex trafficking operation. He was a tireless fundraiser to help the father of a fellow trooper who lost all of his possessions in a house fire. He coordinated his district's participation in a Fallen Trooper Memorial and volunteers at Camp Quality, a recreational escape for children with cancer. His leadership abilities were demonstrated once again in his organization of a Memorial Basketball Tournament for a fallen trooper, and he has recognized the Gladwin Little League organization for their support of a fallen officer. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm round of applause to our Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, Trooper Joseph Rowley. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: This is to certify that The American Legion has bestowed the title of National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year upon Joseph Rowley for outstanding selfless service over and above normal duties through heroic acts, community service, and professional achievement, thereby exemplifying the meaning of the phrase "America's Finest." You reflect great credit upon yourself, Michigan State Police Tri-City Post, and law enforcement officers everywhere.

Presentation: 2017 National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year
Joseph Rowley, Michigan State Police, Tri-City Post, Freeland, Michigan

Thank you, commander, and thank you for the personal invite to the banquet last night. We had a wonderful time, and this has been an honor. Thank you to all Legion members. There's a lot here. I had no idea what The American Legion was all about until this award started back in Michigan. Special shout-out to my Michigan folks back there. (Cheers)

So many people to thank. But I'd like to start with my parents who taught me about work ethic, about morals, values, things like that that ultimately led me into this career. They also took me to a rock church, a stone church every Sunday morning, quite often kicking and screaming. That's where I met my Lord, my Savior, and I know all good things come from Him. So I'm going to give all the glory of this award to Him today. (Applause)

I in no way want this national award to shadow the great work that's being done by thousands of officers across the state every day. So many do exactly what I do, and so much
more, for their communities. I was just fortunate enough to have a sergeant from my post, Jim Lang, put a nice write-up together, submit it to my Michigan folks, and several months later here we are.

There's one accomplishment in that write-up, though, that is missed. I have a beautiful young lady here somewhere Face-Timing this or Facebook-Living. There she is. This next part is directed to my son, Javen. He's 15 years old. He's in driver's training today. He couldn't be here. He's got football all week, and his first game is Thursday night. But I consider him my greatest accomplishment. He is truly the reason I get out of bed every day, the reason I go to work, try to do the right thing so he hopefully learns from that. I can't wait to see what you're going to do with the world, buddy, and can't wait to see you Thursday night at the football game. We will be back for it. (Applause)

I am so grateful for everybody here, the way you have made me feel welcomed as a police officer. As you know, this world we live in today isn't always as welcoming to law enforcement, and you have truly made us feel like guests, appreciated. I don't believe I'm deserving of that from you folks because of your service, not just past service, but currently what you are doing for our veterans, their families. I had no idea what the Legion was all about until this happened, other than my nephew playing Legion ball. Now that I'm aware, I'm a fan. I'm a big fan. I'm a huge supporter. I cannot say thank you enough. Again, this is very flattering, very humbling. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Trooper Rowley is a member of the Sons of The American Legion. (Applause)

When I spoke to him earlier, I told him that regardless of what people say around certain parts of the United States of America, The American Legion believes and appreciates what our law enforcement folks do for us 24/7, 365. The American Legion is standing beside them. (Applause)

Our first responders are never off duty. On April 20, 2016, our Firefighter of the Year was driving home from a funeral of a fallen firefighter. On the road, he witnessed a vehicle fire. Inside he discovered an unresponsive female. Her doors were locked. With the help of two other bystanders, he attempted entry as the fire was getting more serious. While attempting entry, the victim inadvertently stepped on the gas pedal, and the vehicle drove down a slope off the shoulder of the road. The driver's side of the burning vehicle was now inaccessible. Using a construction tool to break a window, our award winner reached over the passenger side and lifted the driver from the vehicle. Shortly afterwards, the vehicle was fully engulfed, but due to the firefighter's actions, the victim was successfully transported to a hospital for treatment. And, yes, firefighters lives matter also. Please welcome a 21-year member of the Prince George's County Maryland Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department and our 2017 American Legion Firefighter of the Year, Assistant Fire Chief Darren O. Ware. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: This is to certify that The American Legion has bestowed the title of National Firefighter of the Year upon Darren O. Ware for outstanding selfless service over and above normal duties through community service and professional achievement, thereby exemplifying the meaning of the phrase "America's Bravest." You reflect great credit upon yourself, Prince George's Fire/EMS Department, and firefighters everywhere.

Presentation: 2017 National Firefighter of the Year
Darren O. Ware, Prince George's Fire/EMS Department, Waldorf, Maryland

Good morning, and thank you. I'd first like to thank the national commander, The American Legion, the Maryland delegation, and also a special thanks to Mr. Gessner.
Throughout this process he has been my point of contact, and he has been nothing short of amazing. (Applause)

I'm honored and humbled to receive this award. As I reflect back on this award, I reflect back on my life up to this point. I would first just like to take a minute to acknowledge my parents. Unfortunately they could not be here today, but I would like to thank them for instilling the values in me that have helped me in my life up to this point. (Applause)

The next thing is I have my son and my daughter in the audience. My son who now has a family of his own, but he took time away from his work to come here to support me. And my daughter, she took time away from college to be here. So I would like to thank them. (Applause)

And before I move on, I would just like to say: They make me the true definition of a proud father. (Applause)

Out of all the thank yous, I have to save my most important thank you for last, and that's to my wife, Roxanna. She has been with me for the last 25 years, starting during my time in the military. She's been nothing short of amazing. I could not have survived without her. Even sometimes I think about what I would have done without her, and I cannot come up with a good answer. So, once again, thank you, and I love you. (Applause)

As I accept this award, I think about all the good work that's being done in the fire service and public safety throughout the country. There's more good work being done than there are awards for the good work. So as I accept this award individually, I would also like to accept it on behalf of the entire fire service from the state of Maryland, throughout the country, and I just consider myself to be the representative of this prestigious award. (Applause.)

In closing, I would like to, once again, thank The American Legion. As a son of a veteran and as a brother of a veteran who just retired with twenty-two and a half years of service, I, once again, want to thank The American Legion, and I would like to say that with a prestigious award like this comes a lot of responsibility. So I will do my best to never bring any dishonor to this award and live up to the high standards of The American Legion and public safety. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: It gives me great pleasure to introduce our next speaker. He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as secretary of Veterans Affairs on February 13, 2017. Unanimously. How often do you ever hear of the Senate agreeing on anything? 100-0 votes. It tells you something. Prior to confirmation, our guest served as VA's under secretary for health, leading the nation's largest integrated health-care system with more than 1,700 sites, serving almost nine million veterans. A physician himself, he has held numerous chief executive roles at Morristown Medical Center, the Atlantic Health System Accountable Care Organization, and president and CEO of Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City. He has been named as one of the 50 most influential physician executives in the country by Modern Health Care. His commitment to bringing accountability to VA was proven when he supported legislation that was signed by President Trump earlier this year. Please give a warm American Legion Family welcome to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David J. Shulkin. (Applause)

Address: Hon. David J. Shulkin
Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Well, thank you. It's great to see you all, and thank you for that very warm introduction. But I know I'm just the warm-up act for my boss. I know we're all excited. It's a great day, and I'm so glad that you'll have a chance to hear directly from him. I want
to thank all of you for your service to the nation and also thank you for your service to your fellow veterans and to families. The American Legion just does fantastic work.

You should feel so proud of your leadership. Your national commander, Charles Schmidt, of course, you know how great he is. You have great leadership in Verna Jones and Lou Celli and Dan Wheeler. It's just an amazing organization, and I love working with The American Legion.

What I always like to do is I like to start with our mission, because really that's why I'm here and that's why the people in VA are here, and I know you share this goal as well. But as President Lincoln said, we really have an obligation as a country to do right by those who have stood up to serve our country. We take this mission very seriously.

We couldn't do this without our veteran service organizations. The American Legion has just been such a terrific partner in everything that we do. This year we've had five pieces of major legislation. Of course, the fifth is going to be witnessed by all of you in about an hour as the president signs that piece of legislation on appeals modernization. But thanks to The American Legion and our other veteran service organizations, we've been able to get things done that haven't been done in a long time. The GI Bill which we did last week, the Accountability Act, the Choice legislation, and just so many important things. So we're really excited and want to thank all of you for being there every step along the way to support us.

One of the first things that I did as secretary was to come out and to talk about what the problems are in the VA. I think everybody knows the VA has gone through some difficult times in the past couple years. If you don't talk about the problems, I don't know how you can begin to start finding solutions and how you can actually ask people for help to help you find those solutions.

So I went to the White House from the White House briefing room and gave a State of the VA, and in the State of the VA I talked about 13 areas that if we don't address the problems and we don't begin to fix these types of issues, that we're not really going to have the type of VA that we all know and believe needs to be there for our veterans.

So I'm not going to go through all these 13 areas, but I want you to understand that this is our strategy. When there are problems, we're going to talk about them and we're going to keep talking about them until we find solutions and to work together to do that. I do believe that we are moving in the right direction in the VA. While we have a lot of work to do and there are some serious problems that we have to address, we are making progress. We're scheduling more appointments now than ever before at any point in time in the VA history. We've seen over a 40 percent increase in the amount of veterans that we're able to get out into the community to be able to make sure that they're not waiting for their care. Our wait times have been reduced significantly. I'll talk a little bit more about that.

We've seen improvement in the quality of care. Eighty-two percent of our VAs made significant improvements in quality from this time to when we saw that a year ago. When we asked veterans whether we're doing better, they're actually saying that we're doing better and they're beginning to trust us much more than just even a few years ago. If you ask veterans directly and you don't go through all these formal surveys, but you actually just see what people are saying, we're seeing some evidence that people are saying that we're doing a better job. Here on Yelp, which, as you know, veterans go right online and rate their experience. You can see that veterans rate their experience in VA hospitals actually higher than patients rate their experience in the private sector. While we have a long way to go till we're going to be satisfied, this is an indication that we're doing some things better and that we're moving in the right direction.

What I'd like to do in a very brief period of time is talk to you about the five priorities that I have to really transform the VA, to get it to be the type of organization that we all
know that it can be. These are the five things that I believe we have to focus on to get us there. So I'm going to take you through it.

The very first is to give you, veterans, greater choice in your decision-making. I think that's fundamentally important. It's our primary strategy on how we're going to make the VA a better place, by making it more competitive. When people want to get services from you, that makes you perform better and it makes you stay on top of your game.

So our major legislative requirement going forward that we're going to work on this fall is to get the Choice Program working in a way that works better for you, takes out the red tape, takes out the complexity, and changes it from a system based on administrative roles to a system that functions in a clinical way, the way health systems should function. So that will give veterans greater choice over their care. We're going to eliminate the 40-mile, 30-day requirement. That just doesn't make sense for people who want to get health care. (Applause)

We're going to add a new benefit for walk-in clinics so that people who live a distance away from the VAs don't have to drive 50 miles or a hundred miles to get a flu shot or a chest x-ray or a lab test. (Applause)

So this is all about giving veterans more choice in their decision-making and making the VA work better for them by working with a stronger VA and with community partners.

The second of our priorities is to really modernize the VA. For too long I think we've neglected modernizing the VA. You're going to see a number of decisions that I'm going to be announcing to modernize this system because I believe veterans deserve the very best that this country can offer.

The first of those decisions that you may have seen is I've announced that we're going to be replacing our information technology system, our electronic medical record, with the same system that the Department of Defense uses. (Applause)

This is a commercial, top-notch, off-the-shelf system. It just makes sense. We know where all of our customers are going to come from, one place, the Department of Defense. Why should we lose all the information that we have on veterans when they come over to the VA? So we're working hard to get that implemented and working with Congress to get the funds appropriated.

We also are going to be updating our facilities. Too many of our facilities are getting old and in disrepair. So I've announced that we're going to be disposing of 1,100 facilities that are vacant or underutilized and reinvesting those resources that we're spending back into facilities that veterans are being cared for in right now. That will allow us to rebuild and to modernize our VA. If you take a look at some of our facilities, we actually have over 400 facilities from the Civil War and the Revolutionary War. These are old buildings. On the other hand, we have some of the best facilities in the country. This is our Palo Alto VA, all single rooms, places where families can stay with the veterans, really beautiful. I want all of our facilities to be able to look like that. So we're now heading in that direction. (Applause)

The third of our priorities is to improve the timeliness of our services. We all know about the wait-time crisis that happened in Phoenix in 2014. That can never happen again. We're working hard to make sure no veteran with an urgent clinical need ever has to wait for care, and we are improving our wait times. We're going to talk about that.

We have to also improve our timeliness of appeals. You're going to see that today when the president signs this bill. This is legislation that was last updated in the 1930s. If we don't fix this, and that's why the president's going to sign this today, we won't be able to get faster decisions to veterans on their appeals. We just have to do that, and we have to do better. And our disability claims, I'm going to talk about how we have to do better on our timeliness of disability decisions as well.
So on our wait times, what you may now know is that the VA is the only health system in the country that publishes its wait times in a public way for everyone to see. So if you want to see what your wait time is at your local VA, it's available on our website. By doing that, we're showing people where our problems are, where we fix the problems, and how we're going to continue to make progress because we update it every week. We're focused on this and we're going to continue to share our results as we make progress with you and the areas where we continue to struggle.

So this is an example of how you can put in your ZIP code, what type of medical care you're looking to get, and you can see your wait time for new appointments and for return appointments. We've also worked hard to get same-day services in every one of our 168 major VA medical centers for primary care and mental health. So if you have an urgent clinical need, you will get it taken care of that day in our medical centers. We're going to be working to expand to every one of our outpatient centers by the end of this year as well.

In areas that we don't have enough health-care professionals or the expertise, we are using telehealth. No other system in the country uses telehealth the way that the VA does. Over 700,000 veterans last year got their care through telehealth. You'll see here the president and I demonstrating new capabilities that we're introducing to allow telehealth to be available to you on your home computers, on your mobile phones. We're continuing to push technology in a way that we believe will serve our veterans better and make care more accessible.

I talked about disability claims. You may remember a couple years ago we had 611,000 disability claims that were waiting greater than 125 days for decisions. Today we're at about 90,000, and that's still too many. Next month, this September, we're going to be announcing a new way of using our disability system, called the Decision Ready Claim, to get veterans a decision in 30 days or less. (Applause)

This is part of our commitment to you to improve the timeliness of our services. And there we have our Decision Ready Claims. And appeals modernization, you can see over 400,000 appeals pending. Today it will take a veteran, if they filed a claim, six years to get a decision. That's unacceptable. That's why you're going to see the president sign this new law today so we can fix that as well. (Applause)

Now, the fourth of the priorities is to actually focus our resources on things that matter more for veterans, to really double down on the things that you rely on that make a difference. So when we talk about strengthening foundational services, there are things that if there wasn't a VA, they just don't exist in the private sector in the way that they need to for veterans. We're talking about care for PTSD, for traumatic brain injury, for blind rehabilitation, for spinal cord injury, for prosthetics and orthotics, for military exposures, environmental exposures, and the list goes on about things that we know really make a difference the VA has the expertise in that doesn't exist in the private sector. So we're actually moving more money into those programs. We're doubling down on those strategies to really build world-class services across the country for things that matter to our veterans.

You're also going to see we're going to work much closer with the Department of Defense. I talked about the IT systems coming together. Secretary Mattis and I have a commitment to really making sure that we're using our resources together in a way that makes sense for taxpayers, veterans, and active servicemembers. We have a lot more opportunity to work closer together. So stay tuned for some announcements that we're going to make about that. And, last, we have to focus our resources by making sure we have the right people in the VA that need to be in the VA. (Applause)

What I wanted to talk about was something that we've been hearing from all of you: Making difficult decisions about who gets to work in the VA is tough. So as it says here: Dealing with issues, employee issues can be difficult, but not dealing with them can be worse. And we have experienced that over the past number of years. So we know longer
are going to tolerate employees that don't share the values that we all share, who believe it's an honor and privilege to be able to serve our veterans. We're moving those people out of the VA because they've lost their right to be able to work in the VA. (Applause)

Now, once again, we're committed to sharing our progress. We're the only federal agency that publishes their disciplinary actions, who they fired, on a public website that we update every week. Since January 20 of this year when the president took over, we have removed over 500 employees from the VA who have lost the right to be able to serve our veterans. (Applause)

We will continue to make sure that everybody understands that we're taking this very seriously and that we're also looking to hire the very best that are out there to be able to come into the VA and to be able to serve the country.

The fifth and final priority, and the only priority that I talk about that's a clinical priority, is to reduce veteran suicides. This is really a public health crisis. Now, this is a crisis across America. Suicides in the general population have been increasing at alarming rates, but among veterans, even more concerning and even more serious. So you can see that while civilian suicides have gone up in the last 14 years by 23.9 percent, among veterans it's gone up 31 percent. You can see at the bottom line that for females, that this has really gone up even more considerably. So that's of significant concern.

Now, what we can see here is, is that if veterans are connected with the right care and getting help, that it makes a difference. It saves lives. For veterans that have been seen in the VA or getting their care in the VA, while suicide rates have gone up by 5.4 percent over the last 14 years, for veterans that did not get their care in the VA, it went up 38.4 percent. Take a look for women veterans, the very bottom line. Women that were getting care in the VA actually saw a decrease of 2.4 percent over the last 14 years, but women that were not getting care in the VA, up 81.6 percent.

So we recognize that not everybody's going to be able to get care in the VA, so we're working with community partners to make sure they understand how we can help get connected with veterans and the community. But for all of you who are out there and if you see somebody who's isolated and needs help, please know that's why we're here. We want you to connect them with the VA. This is really going to make a difference and save lives.

We've developed new tools called predictive modeling where we can actually predict those that may be at highest risk. We're not waiting until people take action. We're actually contacting them ahead of time and bringing them in and seeing if there's a way that we can help. This is a tool that no one else in the country is using but VA, and we are working with the Department of Defense.

Our Veterans Crisis Line. Earlier this year, so many people were calling, we weren't getting the 30 percent of the calls. That's unacceptable. We've hired 280 new Veterans Crisis Line responders. We've opened up new centers across the country. Today, less than 1 percent of people aren't getting through. So the Veterans Crisis Line, which is open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, is available. (Applause)

One of the first decisions I made knowing that veteran suicide reduction is a priority is I used my authority to make sure that those that were other than honorably discharged, not dishonorably discharged, other than honorably discharged, as you know, many times for behavioral health issues, aren't out there without a place to get care. Because we see a very high suicide rate among those that are other than honorably. I am pleased to say that today the VA will provide mental health services for those that are other than honorably discharged. We are not going to leave any of these veterans without care. (Applause)

The other area that we're making great progress is reducing veteran homelessness, a 46 percent reduction over the last five years. We still have much more work to do. But we're not going to stop working at this till we make sure that there are no homeless veterans.
We're working with communities across the country and, one by one, beginning to eliminate veterans homelessness from communities.

We're also working to make sure that when people leave the service that they get jobs and they get good jobs. Now I'm pleased to say that while veteran unemployment five years ago was about 11 percent, today it's 3.6 percent, lower than the general population. The reason is employers know that the very best employees they can get are veterans. These are the leaders in the community. They make great employees. They're really extremely valuable to our employers. So we have a commitment now to hire a million veterans from our employers. We've just reached above the 600,000 mark. We'll continue to work at this to make sure every veteran has a great job. (Applause)

Finally, as we get ready to hear from our president, I can't tell you how grateful I am for his commitment to making sure that we can fulfill our mission. The president's budget that he proposed this year is a strong budget for VA. It provides us with extra resources to strengthen the VA. It provides us with extra funding for mental health services, for women's health services, and the areas that we need. So we have to make sure that Congress supports this budget because it allows us to fulfill our mission.

For those who think that just because we want to work more with the community, that that's privatization, absolutely not. It is essential that we have a strong VA. It is essential to our veterans. It is essential to the country. It is essential to national security. When somebody raises their hand to go and defend their country, they have to know that when they come back, somebody is there who has their back for the rest of their lives. That is our mission, and that's our commitment. We will never let this system be privatized. (Applause)

So I just want to end by thanking you again. We couldn't be doing our work without The American Legion, without all of our veteran service organization partners. We're working together very aligned with the same goals. We're making progress. We continue to push ahead to make the progress that all of you want to see happen, and I thank you for everything you're doing. I appreciate the time with you today. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I would now like to call our national vice commanders to join me onstage for our next presentation, which will be given by Bron Mogenis, trustee for the Chapel of the Four Chaplains Foundation; Foundation Chairman of the Board Louis Cavaliere; and Foundation Executive Director Christine Beady.

ANNOUNCER: The Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion from the Chapel of Four Chaplains is granted for extraordinary contributions to the well-being of others at the national or world level, to world peace, or to interfaith or inter-ethnic understanding. The Medallions are being presented by Bron Mogenis, Trustee, Chapel of the Four Chaplains; Foundation Board Chairman Louis Cavaliere and Foundation Executive Director Christine Beady. They are being awarded to National Commander Charles E. Schmidt, National Vice Commander Paul Martel, National Vice Commander Fae Casper, National Vice Commander Douglas L. Boldt, National Vice Commander Paul L. Espinoza, and National Vice Commander Vincent James Troiola.

Presentation: Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion

Bron Mogenis, Trustee, Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation
Louis Cavaliere, Chairman of the Board, Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation
Christine Beady, Executive Director, Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation

It is indeed an honor to stand here and talk about service people who honored this country, who have honored this country for 20, 30 years and then thereafter joined The
American Legion. And they continue to provide that kind of patriotism and leadership that our country needs.

I was extremely interested in reading the background of the candidates, and we have six of them back there, and finding out just how much they do. What we were looking for is not just how busy he or she has been, but what are some of the things that the candidates have done that are selfless. In other words, where the duty did not require that. But they were selfless in sacrificing more time. Believe me or not, our veterans can use a lot of help. There's a lot of trauma that's going on, lack of employment, elderly, sickness, you name it, and so forth. So to enrich that was sort of difficult.

I guess the heroic act that centers in on my presentation, my honor, is on January 23, 1943, the USAT Dorchester, an old coastal steamer quickly thrust into military service, left New York harbor bound for Greenland. The weather was terrible. Everybody suffered from it. And what made this unusual, the trip, is that on February 3, 1943, the USAT Dorchester was hit with a torpedo in a torpedo alley. On February 2, the captain warned that he had some interceptor communications, for the men to go to sleep in their clothing with life jackets close by. But they were only 150 miles from Greenland. With daylight, there would be air cover from the American base. It was just after midnight on February 3, 1943, where an enemy submarine fired a torpedo into the Dorchester flank. The missile exploded in a boiler room, destroying electric supply, releasing suffocating clouds of steam and ammonia. Many onboard died.

What was even more interesting for me, that I would like to convey to you, I actually met at one of the functions that the Chapel of Four Chaplains, a nonprofit organization located in Philadelphia, they actually were trying to remember bit by bit. And so they produced a person who was from that survivors. When he started to talk about how horrible it was to come up at midnight, freezing temperature, where there were no life jackets available, the people did not give up their life jackets, did not jump overboard to save themselves. They were afraid. This is where the four chaplains came in.

They encouraged people, they helped people, and they gave the lifejackets out to the men that were in fear of their lives. However, they ran out of lifejackets. So the four chaplains gave away their own lifejackets to the young men who didn't have any. The four men of God had given away their only means of saving themselves in order to save others. They linked their arms together. As the slant of the deck became severe and just that way, with their arms linked in brotherhood and their heads bowed in prayer, they sank beneath the waves. That was the only heroic act. But it will still be remembered for many lifetimes.

Today, many years later, the Chapel of Four Chaplains serves the memory of these brave men. They don't want to discourage this kind of patriotism, this kind of love for your country, love for your fellow man.

The people that we selected for the award, I'd like to name, our first candidate was National Commander Schmidt, National Vice Commander Fae Casper, National Vice Commander Paul Martel, National Vice Commander Douglas Boldt, National Vice Commander Paul Espinoza, National Vice Commander Vincent James Troiola. We wouldn't mind giving them a standing ovation.

Thank you. I'd like to also take this opportunity to introduce one of the leaders of the Chapel of Four Chaplains, Managing Director Christine Beady wants to say hello and goodbye.

CHRISTINE BEADY: Good morning, everyone. I want to say thank you to each and every one of you who continue to support us throughout the year at the chapel. We invite all of you, as always, to come visit us in Philadelphia at the Navy yard. Congratulations to all of our award recipients. And especially just a sincere and heartfelt thank you to Mr. Bron Mogenis. He's a true, dedicated member of our team, and we could not be here and present today without his dedication. And to also the two who stand beside him every day,
Ms. Julie Mogenis and Mrs. Christa Mogenis, his wife and daughter who are also here today.

We just want to say thank you to all of you. And again it's an honor and always a privilege to be here, to speak with you. When you come to visit us in Philadelphia, know that we're there for you, we're always open for you. Today I'm happy to say we have 172 Tin Can Sailors visiting the chapel today. So Michelle is in the office presenting the programs that we do and what we're participating in and all the things that we are doing in Philadelphia.

But lastly I want to say the four legs that we stand upon every day to help our veterans, to help our communities, to help our country, is that our Legion of Honor program, which we present today, which is an international program. So please look to your departments, work with the Legion. Let's get those who go above and beyond their day to day, those ordinary people who do extraordinary things, honored and recognized for all the great work that they do.

Our scholarship program, students in fifth through 12th grade, applications come out in October. They're due in March. Get those applications in. Let's get those students awarded for their community service, for their going above and beyond, what they need to do. Let's grow that next generation as much as we possibly can.

For our Emergency Chaplain Corps that's rebuilding and growing, we are ready, willing and able to be there to support our veterans, to support our programs, to support our first responders, to stand beside them and be able to support everything that's going on within the country.

And lastly, and most importantly, our veterans outreach. It has been a huge piece of what we're doing over the last few years, and we are now called upon in multiple ways to have first responders respond, chaplains attend different events, being there and being able to help all of our veterans go where they need to go. Help them in the situations that they need to do. And the things that they need to get, being able to direct them in the right proper ways. So, again, it's truly an honor to be here. Thank you all very much. We look forward to next year. God bless America, and thank you all for your service. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: USAA was founded by veterans and holds strong to its mission of facilitating the financial security of military families and its core values of service, loyalty, honesty and integrity. Before joining USAA, our next guest served in the United States Navy for 30 years, retiring as a force master chief. After leaving the Navy, he worked as a veterans employment representative right here in Nevada. He joined the USAA team in 2007 and is a member of The American Legion Department of Texas. Please welcome Greg Pratt, relationship director of USAA. (Applause)

...At this time, National Vice Commander Espinoza assumed the Chair.

Address: Greg Pratt

Relationship Director for Sea Services, USAA Military Affairs

Good morning, Legionnaires. How are we? I didn't expect such a large crowd, but I understand there's a pretty big speaker coming after me, so that's why everybody's here, right? Hey, good morning. It is great to be in Reno with you, and it's been great to be here all week. I'm honored to be with you because of what you do and continue to do for our veterans, their families and the communities. It really is very humbling.

Before I really roll into what I want to talk about for just a couple of minutes today, I do want to give a couple of shout-outs. I want to shout out to the state of Pennsylvania, because that's where I got my beginning, and I want to shout out to Texas, because that's where I hang my hat now. I'd also like to send my thoughts and prayers out to the families
and the sailors of the USS John McCain as I know we continue to search for some of the missing from the USS John McCain.

I'm very proud of being a member of The American Legion, because it's their members and those of you from the Vietnam and Korea era which inspired me to join the Navy, as I watched you do what you did and serve, wearing the cloth of our nation in the '60s and '70s. That inspired me. In the mid '70s I was off to the Navy. As you all know, in the mid '70s and '80s our Navy went through a rebuilding phase, and we started the all-volunteer force. I was mentored by some great leaders, and early on helped me become a pretty good sailor. I consider myself very lucky that this kid from northwest Pennsylvania had the opportunity to serve a 30-year career, and that was because of those folks that mentored me along the way. As I call them, the best of the best, who helped me, and I learned from their experiences.

Learning from others is what I'd like to talk about briefly this morning, because it's those mentors, those leaders that influenced me and shaped me into who I am today. Dedication is something that I learned early on from those mentors and those other leaders. If you look up the word "dedication" in Webster, it says, "A feeling of strong support or loyalty to someone or something. The quality or state of being dedicated to a person, group or cause." I would tell you, you could replace those words and simply put in "American Legion," because that's what you all do. (Applause)

As I learned early on in my Navy career, from my first chief, and for my Navy brethren here, you'll probably really understand a little bit of this more, but everybody will understand this. I learned from my first chief, and I was on my first deployment, 1976, in the middle of the Indian Ocean, 0530, they get us up. I was a deckhand. Told us to go topside, get our swabs and swab the deck. Well, I asked the chief, "Why the heck are we up here at 5:30, it's pitch dark outside, swabbing the deck?" Of course, you know I'm lucky to be here today because I'm lucky he didn't tear my head off. Right.

But you know, the chief didn't tear my head off. He stood there for the next 45 minutes and explained to me the importance of my job. He talked about dedication. He talked about mission. He talked about leadership. He talked about each one of us playing a role and no matter what our job was that day or at that moment, our role was important to that mission. He said it was dedication, dedication to self, dedication to others, dedication to mission. I'll remember that chief and what he told me forever. I'll remember it today as well as I remembered it the day I asked that question.

Like you, I was dedicated to my service and those I served alongside and their families. After transitioning from the Navy, I wanted to continue to dedicate my efforts to those currently serving veterans and their families. Which brings me back to you. You wore the uniform, the cloth of our nation. You continue to support those in uniform through your continued dedication, efforts and time that you give to veterans, their families and the community.

A quote I recently read from an unknown person: "Dedication is not what others expect of you, it is what you give to others." That is what you do through your many Legion programs, like Legion Baseball, Boys State, Boys Nation, Operation Comfort Warriors, Legion Riders, you provide a future for those that have served, those that are serving, those who will serve in the communities that they live in. When I look into the eyes of a young servicemember, I see dedication, desire, and often I know one of the Legionnaires or one of the programs is something that has put that desire in those young folks.

I have the opportunity to see some of this dedication from sailors in action many years ago, but really it's one of those things that we all remember aboard the USS Cole back in October of 2000. They were put into a situation from an attack on their ship that required them to save their ship and their shipmates. It was their training and commitment to the ship and shipmates that helped them save that. But it was the dedication through their
adverse conditions and their determination and dedication to help them persevere in that environment.

The USS Cole is only one story of dedication to each other that we could all talk about today. It's what the servicemembers. It's what you do. It's what servicemembers do, whether it be on the battlefield, whether it be here at home, helping someone adjust, reacquaint or even transition from the military. Servicemembers like you are dedicated and do so many things greater than themselves. It is you, they are, and, again, that's you in that picture. You support them through your many legislative benefits. We've heard about so many of the great accomplishments this week and they continue through the family support programs, through scholarships and on.

When I look at The American Legion, I look at a group that had the dedication and the commitment to wear the uniform and continue to serve, dedication of The Legion to our military, their veterans and their families. I see many parallels in The American Legion and what USAA works to do every day, taking care of our veterans, those serving and their families. I'm proud that I have the opportunity to work for a company that knows what it means to serve. I'm proud to be a member of The American Legion who continues to serve those who serve or have served. It's you making a difference through the dedication that makes that all possible. (Applause)

Before I close, I want to remind everybody of one thing, and we've seen many of you this week. If you haven't signed up and got your post entered in the drawing that will happen in November for the opportunity for your post to win $20,000, make sure you do that.

In closing, I really want to simply say this: I want to offer a quote from Pat Tillman, football star who joined the Army Rangers after 9/11 and was killed in action in Afghanistan. The quote is: "A passion for life is contagious and uplifting. Passion cuts both ways. I want to create passion in my life and with those I care for. I want to feel, experience, and live every emotion. I will suffer through the bad for the heights of the good."

Thank you all for your dedication and your passion and your vision to support those that are serving, those that have served, those that will serve and their families. Thank you for having me here today. I see us being able to make the difference, making things work together for those that are serving, have served and their families. You make a difference. Thank you for your patriotism. May God bless those serving in uniform, our veterans, their families, and may God bless the United States of America. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER ESPINOZA: Thank you for your efforts. We want to give you a national commander's medallion, from The American Legion and thank you for everything that you've done.

As horrendous as World War I was, it gave birth to the greatest veterans organization that the world has ever known. Our next guest is dedicated to reminding us about the significance of what was at the time thought to be "the war to end all wars." A 20-year-veteran of the U.S. Army, he holds a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Rhode Island and a master's in European studies from Cornell University. He is a member of The American Legion Post 18 in Essex, Connecticut. Please give a warm welcome to John D. Monahan of the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission. (Applause)

Address: John D. Monahan
Commissioner, United States World War One Centennial Commission

Good morning. Thank you, Vice Commander Espinoza, distinguished guests, friends, comrades. The cataclysm of the First World War changed literally everything. Empires fell. The social and moral fabric of Europe was torn asunder. War was systematized,
mechanized, resulting in death and destruction on an unprecedented scale. America entered the war on the world stage owing to this war. The Great War is the hinge literally upon which the 20th century turns, and it is in fact the American century that it became the 20th century.

The United States World War One Centennial Commission was formed in 2013 and entrusted with three missions: To foster education about the conflict; to commemorate its important anniversaries; and to honor the contributions of those who served in the Great War. Honorary commission co-chairs include all of the living past presidents of the United States. The honorary commission co-chairs also include three former secretaries of state and two former secretaries of defense, including our awardee this morning, Dr. Gates. The Centennial Commission itself is comprised of 12 commissioners appointed by the President, Congress and The American Legion and the VFW. The commission is also guided by a diplomatic advisory board of distinguished former diplomats and as well as historical advisory board of eminent historians. The commission is also privileged to have a number of special advisors, many of whom I'm sure are known to you, including General McCaffrey, Admiral Mullen, Gary Sinise, General Gordon Sullivan, and former senator from Virginia, John Warner.

The commission has partnered with a number of organizations, including The American Legion, which is a main sponsor, in honoring the service of the Great War generation. As you can see these are a number of substantial organizations that are assisting us in this effort. We have international partners as well as you might imagine, including the coordinating organizations in France, Belgium, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, all of which are places, I might add, where the American Battle Monuments Commission also maintains U.S. cemeteries.

So who served in the Great War? We see a scene from 100 years ago. But these scenes and these faces are reminiscent of those that stare out at us from the tintypes that you see of the Civil War. The images from our own time in service, in fact, those faces are the same ones we see in photos from Iraq and from Afghanistan. There is a brotherhood of warriors that transcends service, that transcends, in fact, time itself. The doughboys and the bluejackets of the Great War are our spiritual brothers and sisters. For this reason, we should be interested and concerned about World War I. 4.7 million Americans served in World War I. 200,000 came home with physical and psychological wounds. 116,000 Americans did not come home at all. These men and women deserve to be commemorated. But just as importantly, by remembering those who served in the Great War 100 years later, we assure that those serving today, that they, too, will be remembered in 100 years' time.

Our education mission is to inform Americans of all ages about the key World War I facts and concepts, to teach American students meaningful lessons about World War I's history and its impact, and to inspire Americans to individually pursue deeper engagement and participation in the commemoration efforts. In fact, The American Legion, I'm proud to say, has sponsored a teacher-training initiative, which will in this next academic year provide educational grant that is administered by Gilder Lehrman Institute. This will be a train-the-teacher arrangement whereby we'll equip teachers in schools nationwide with resources and materials necessary to conduct classroom studies on World War I, its conduct, and its lasting impact.

We commemorate World War I, of course, we started this on April 6 of this year with our ceremony called "In Sacrifice for Liberty and Peace." This was held at the World War I Memorial in Kansas City, and it was an amazing, lovely ceremony. We were fortunate to have Commander Schmidt with us that day, as well as Past National Commander Rehbein, who was chairing our own 100th anniversary commemoration committee.

We have a very robust state outreach program, which has grown into literally a national movement. We currently have 42 states which have active centennial
commissions. It is their network that we seek to build upon. I'm also proud to say The American Legion has, in fact, been very helpful in establishing this network nationwide.

In honoring the veterans of World War I, we have established a program of matching grants called 100 Cities/100 Memorials. The submissions, I can say from personal experience, are truly amazing. They are indicative that their community's impulse to honor those who served is still alive. Many are deeply touching. I served on the selection committee myself, and I understand the efforts that have been involved. Many Legion posts and VFW posts, in fact the majority, were from Legion and VFW posts and multiple posts, in fact, cooperating on the same projects in certain cases. The submission period lasted from July 2016 to June 2017, and has focused on local World War I Memorials to awaken interest in the war. The 100 Cities/100 Memorials team is now working on a plan to extend the program potentially with the initial awards being announced September 13 and 14, and subsequent awards, if the program is extended with a further extended submission window. If that is in fact the case, that will be announced September 13-14.

We wish to honor the World War I doughboys and bluejackets by creating a memorial at Pershing Park in Washington, D.C. This location is not on a National Mall, but it is nearby. Pershing Park is approximately a block from the White House itself and about three blocks from the National Mall, directly on Pennsylvania Avenue. So it is a most prominent and worthy location, a fitting location for the memorial.

The main element of the memorial will be a monumental 65-foot, bronze bough relief wall with water cascading down the sides into a pool. Similar in fashion to the Vietnam wall, a visitor will be able to literally go up to the memorial and touch it. The memorial itself will have a series of images centered on the recurring image of the soldier who leaves his family, answers the call to service and joins the nation's march to war, experiences the violent chaos and passion of battle, suffers the aftermath and loss of that battle, and then, after reflecting on his accomplishments, marches forward into the great American century which is to be. In the first scene the soldier takes his helmet symbolically from his young daughter. In the last scene, he returns the helmet to her, marking a pass of the torch to the next generation, the generation which will come to be known as the Greatest Generation, but sadly would have to fight another war 20 years in the future.

The timeline for this memorial in Washington, D.C. is shown here. The key points at this point is that a design has been approved and all of the relevant approvals are in place from the various commissions and committees, and a groundbreaking is scheduled for this November 9 in Washington, D.C. We hope to dedicate the memorial itself the following year on November 11, 2018, which of course marks the centennial of the original Armistice Day.

Why is this of importance to The American Legion? The spirit of the doughboy, his courage, character, values and ideals was the spirit tempered in the crucible of combat which formed the values of The American Legion as expressed so eloquently by the founders in the preamble to our constitution. We Legionnaires stand on the shoulders of giants who were the founders, all of whom were World War I veterans.

Some of the people you see here I'm sure you recognize. Theodore Roosevelt, later Medal of Honor winner at D-Day. Franklin D'Olier, who later became president at Prudential Insurance. Bennett Clark, later senator. Thomas Miller, who we honored just the other day, buried here in Reno, who was president pro tem of the Paris Caucus and before the war had served as a Congressman from Delaware. George White, later Major General, first editor of our American Legion Magazine. Milton Foreman, past national commander 1921. William Donovan, Wild Bill, later chief of OSS, Medal of Honor winner. Of course, the OSS was the precursor of the CIA. Eric Fisher Wood, later brigadier general. Hamilton Fish of New York, later Congressman, who was literally the author of the preamble. We owe the doughboys and our founders a debt which we cannot fully repay,
but we have it within our power, we have it within our means to honor their service and their sacrifice.

I close with a short story. On June 1, 1918, the Indian Head Division was attached to the Sixth French Army, which was under heavy pressure from the Germans. Colonel Preston Brown, division chief of staff, reported to General Duchesne, the Army commander, and he was somewhat hesitant to receive the orders. General Duchesne, south of the Paris-Metz Highway, he was directed to be astride the expected German main access of approach. Duchesne asked Colonel Brown, "Will they hold?" to which Brown replied, "General, these are American regulars. In 150 years, they have never been beaten. They will hold."

Fellow Legionnaires, we, too, are American regulars. In nearly 100 years we have never failed our mission. Our mission today is to ensure that a fitting memorial to the doughboys, to those who bequeathed us our beloved American Legion, is erected in our nation's capital. I ask for your help in achieving this. It must be done, and with your help and with the grace of God it shall be done. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER ESPINOZA: Ladies and gentlemen, fellow Legionnaires, please direct your attention to the screens as we prepare for our next speaker. ... At this time, the delegation viewed a series of videos. (Applause)

...National Commander Schmidt resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: A graduate of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania, our next guest built a number of highly successful international real estate, hotel, sports, and entertainment businesses. On November 8, 2016, he was elected 45th president of the United States of America. (Applause)

The president and senior officials in the administration have since met The American Legion on numerous occasions, and on June 23, he signed the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017 into law. (Applause)

His administration has proposed a $54 billion increase in military spending and, consistent with American Legion resolutions, authorized construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline. The White House has also taken steps to reduce illegal immigration, and the president has publicly called for legally protecting the flag of our United States of America from desecration. (Applause)

My fellow Legionnaires, ladies and gentlemen, proud Americans, it is my honor to introduce the president of the United States, Donald J. Trump. (Cheers and applause)

Address: The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States of America

Thank you, Commander Schmidt, for that wonderful introduction and for your steadfast devotion to our country. I want to thank all of our distinguished guests with us today, including HUD secretary Ben Carson, VA Secretary David Shulkin, and former Secretary of Defense Bob Gates. Bob Gates has been so great. I tell you, he started off saying bad things about me, and then he said great things, and now I like him. Thank you, Bob. It's a great honor to be back here with all of my friends at The American Legion and your national convention. I want to thank Governor Sandoval for being here. Dean Heller is here someplace or will shortly be here. He caught the first flight out. So I want to thank Dean Heller, senator, for being here.

The American Legion embodies the spirit of patriotism; that is the true source of our strength and the best hope for our future. You love our country. You cherish our values
and you definitely defend our great American flag. No doubt about that. *(Cheers and applause)*

Above all else, you believe in America, just like America believes in you. *(Applause)*

Today we are here to honor you for the sacrifices you have made to defend our nation and preserve our way of life. But we're also here for another reason. We are here to hold you up as an example of strength, courage, and resolve that our country will need to overcome the many challenges that we face. We are here to draw inspiration from you as we seek to renew the bonds of loyalty that bind us together as one people and one nation.

Those who wear the nation's uniform come from all different backgrounds and from every single walk of life. But they are all united by shared values and a shared sense of duty. They are all part of one team with only one mission in mind. Most importantly, they're all Americans, and they work together, they fight together, and they sacrifice together to defend our magnificent home. Thank you. *(Applause)*

Now our nation must follow that same work ethic, that same devotion to a greater cause, to achieve our country's full potential. Here with us today are veterans who have fought in every major military engagement dating all the way back to World War II. You've endured bitter winters, treacherous jungles, barren deserts, and stormy waters. You have left your families, charged into danger, faced down your enemies, and bore the scars and wounds of war. Each of you took an oath to support and defend the Constitution. With that oath, you pledged your honor and your very lives for our great nation. Every veteran here today is part of a long, unbroken chain of American heroes. We salute your service. The American Legion not only remembers history, you help keep history alive. *(Applause)*

You teach young Americans to have pride in our history so that they will have confidence in our future. History and culture, so important. For generations now, The American Legion has taught our young people the principles of Americanism. You emphasize the need to preserve the nation's cultural, moral, and patriotic values. You encourage the observation of patriotic holidays. You stress the need to enforce our laws, including our immigration laws. *(Applause)*

You teach the responsibilities of citizenship and the importance of the Pledge of Allegiance. *(Applause)*

True. So important. And you do it all, as your motto says, for God and country. *(Cheers and applause)*

That's why we're here today, for America and for God. But to fulfill our patriotic duties, we must take care of our great veterans. *(Applause)*

One year ago at this gathering, and I remember so many of you so well, I promised you that I would make it my priority to fix the broken VA and deliver our veterans the care they so richly deserve. *(Applause)*

And you see what's been happening. Now you have a true reformer in Secretary David Shulkin. He has done an incredible job. *(Applause)*

He's working night and day to implement the ten-point reform plan that I discussed with you last year. Already we have made incredible progress. We are publishing wait times online for every VA facility so you know what the wait is. We've delivered same-day emergency mental health services at every VA medical center. *(Applause)*

We've opened the promised White House VA Hotline. That's a big deal. That's a big deal. We've dramatically increased the number of veterans approved to see the doctor of their choice and signal legislation to continue that very important Choice Program that I spoke to you about last year, and I want to thank The American Legion for your help in getting this done. You have been so helpful. Thank you very much. *(Applause)*

Something that they've been trying to pass for 40 years, and we've passed, VA Accountability legislation. *(Applause)*
So if somebody that works at the VA is bad to the people of the VA, disrespectful, not treating our fellow patriots well, we look at them, and we say, "You're fired." That's it. (Cheers and applause)

That's it. They don't do a good job, they're out. We have great people at the VA, but we want people that do a great job. We weren't able to do that before. That was a hard piece of legislation to get passed. It's been worked on for so long. We got it done, so we're very proud of that.

Last week I also signed the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act. That's a big thing. (Applause)

This legislation bears the name of one of the first members of the Legion, your past commander, a man who wrote the original draft of the first landmark GI Bill in 1944. (Applause)

Now under this legislation, veterans can use their GI benefits at any point in their lifetime. Some difference. And in just a few moments, right here on this stage, I will sign another historic bill that The American Legion helped us deliver, the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act, and you all know what that means. (Applause)

No longer will veterans be kept waiting for years to get an answer to their appeals. They will receive timely updates, and they will get decisions much more quickly, in a fraction of the time. (Applause)

And The Legion, I have to say, pressed so hard for that legislation. So I want to thank you very much. I want to thank you. I want to thank you so much. You really helped. They have a lot of power, a lot of power. And they use it well. (Applause)

When I spoke to you last year, I also promised that we would build up our military, and that's exactly what we have done. I am proud to report that we have worked with Congress to achieve a dramatic increase in defense spending this year. We are committed to expanding and improving a state-of-the-art missile defense system to shoot down missiles in flight, and we're getting better and better and better at it. It's actually incredible what's taking place. And we will develop new surveillance and long-range strike capabilities to prevent our enemies from launching them in the first place. (Applause)

Thank you. In every foreign policy decision, we are making clear that we will always put the safety and security of our citizens first. That is why early this week I announced a new strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia. We will pursue an honorable and enduring outcome in Afghanistan, worthy of the tremendous sacrifice our troops have already made. We will give our men and women in uniform the tools they need and the trust they have earned to fight and to win. (Applause)

And we have made, as you have been reading and seeing, tremendous progress in the fight against terrorism. Just over a month ago in Iraq, Mosul was liberated from the barbaric rule of ISIS. We are stripping terrorists of their territory at a record clip of their funding, their networks, and the false allure of their ideology. And I will tell you, we're going to start working very hard on the Internet, because they're using the Internet at a level that they should not be allowed to use the Internet. They're recruiting from the Internet. We are going to work under my administration very hard so that doesn't happen. (Applause)

No longer are we using our military to build democracies. Instead, we're forming a coalition of nations that share the aim of stamping out extremism, defeating terrorism, and pursuing stability, prosperity, and peace. Through the generations, America has always prevailed, not by military might alone, but also by the strength of our spirit. We have, in this country today, such spirit. I see it when I meet the people backstage. They're so proud once again. I must say, much more proud than they were last year at this time. They are feeling very good about our country. (Applause)

Very, very good about our country. Because our people have always had that will to endure and to overcome. This is now the challenge of our times. We must ask ourselves
who we are, what we stand for, and what together we can achieve. If American patriots
could secure our independence, carve out a home in the wilderness and free millions from
tyranny and oppression around the world, then that same spirit of strength, courage, and
resolve can help us create a better future for our people today, a future like even our people
have never had before in this great country. That's what we're aiming for. (Applause)

We don't have to be content with a dilapidated road system, with crumbling buildings
or rusted-out factories. We can build gleaming new highways, state-of-the-art
manufacturing, and modern works of wonder, and we can do it all with American workers
and American iron, aluminum, and steel. We can do it ourselves. (Applause)

We do not have to accept the economic decay of once-thriving hubs of industry where
they leave and they let all those jobs go and those companies move to other countries.
We've stopped that flow, and companies are now coming back into the United States. I am
so proud of that. (Applause)

We can bring new jobs to Pittsburgh and Detroit and Baltimore and help struggling
communities thrive and dream and prosper. We do not need to limit the potential of our
children by trapping them in failing government schools. Every child should have the
chance to explore their talents, pursue their passions, and know the joy of achieving their
ambitions. We will never tolerate crime in our cities, bloodshed in our communities, or acts
of hatred or terrorism against our citizens. We will not stand for it. (Applause)

We will always support our great law enforcement personnel. (Cheers and applause)

These are great people. Build bridges of trust and cooperation, and keep our families
safe. It is time to heal the wounds that divide us and to seek a new unity based on the
common values that unite us. We are one people with one home and one great flag. (Cheers
and applause)

We are not defined by the color of our skin, the figure on our paycheck, or the party
of our politics. We are defined by our shared humanity, by our citizenship in this
magnificent nation, and by the love that fills our hearts. (Applause)

I know I speak for all of you when I say our hearts beat for America. Our souls fill
with pride every time we hear the National Anthem. (Applause)

This is the spirit we need to overcome our challenges, to pursue our common destiny,
and to achieve a brighter future for our people. We will win. Watch. We will win. (Applause)

This is the future we can build together if we have the courage to act, the strength to
endure, and the patriotism to join together with true affection for our fellow citizen.
(Applause)

I want to close with a story of a hero who defines this spirit of service and sacrifice, a
man whose strength, patriotism, and courage knows no bounds, a Vietnam veteran who
threw himself on top of a grenade to protect his fellow comrades. This true American hero
went on to serve in the National Guard for over 27 years. He is now a retired captain at his
local fire department and owns a funeral home that memorializes our heroes. He has
worked tirelessly to bring another veterans post to Kansas City so that those who return
from combat have a place to go that honors and supports them. Some of you know this
incredible patriot. He's a friend to many in this room. He is with us here today, and he's
onstage with us right now. Medal of Honor recipient, Donald E. Ballard. (Applause)

He's got to say a word, right? This wasn't in the planning. Do I have your approval?

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Come on, Don, get up here.

DONALD E. BALLARD: There is no greater love than someone that loves this
country, and I believe we've elected the right leader to lead us out, to drain the swamp.
(Cheers and applause)
PRESIDENT TRUMP: See, that's very risky of me. That could ruin the whole day for me. If he got up and said the opposite, I would be in trouble. Thank you, Don, that was very risky. I didn't know what was going to happen. I had a pretty good idea. But, Don, on behalf of the people of the United States of America, I want to thank you for your courageous service. You inspire us all.

Today we are reminded that the greatness of our nation is found in our people like Don. As long as we have faith in each other and confidence in our values, then there is no challenge too great for us to conquer. We are people, we are people who love. We are people with heart. We are people who adore. We are people that are great. There is no country like the United States of America. (Cheers and applause)

We have no division too deep for us to heal. And there is no enemy too strong for us to overcome. Because in America, we never lose faith, we never forget who we are, and we never stop striving for a better future. Together we cannot fail. We will not fail. We will make America great again, greater than ever before, I promise. (Cheers and applause)

So I want to thank you to The American Legion. You talk of greatness. You talk of greatness. The American Legion is greatness. Thank you very much to our servicemembers and to Don and to everybody in the room. Thank you to our great, great veterans. May God bless you. May God bless the United States of America. Thank you very much. It's my honor. Thank you. Thank you. (Standing applause)

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: This is a big one. (Cheers and applause)

... At this time, President Trump signed Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: Thank you, everybody. (Cheers and applause)

... At this time, the delegation viewed a series of videos.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Ladies and gentlemen, we'll proceed to the next order of business. Our next guest directs a health-care system with an annual budget of $68 billion and is responsible for overseeing the delivery of care to more than nine million enrolled veterans. She has a diverse background in health-care administration and delivery, to include clinical practice, hospital practice and administration, managed care, pharmaceutical medicine, and health-care policy. Please welcome the acting under secretary for health at the Veterans Health Administration, Dr. Poonam Alaigh. (Applause)

Thank you, everyone. What an amazing, amazing speech by our president and his commitment to all the veterans in our VA health-care system. Round of applause for our president. (Applause)

First of all, I do want to thank everyone for being here. My most important identity is as a physician in the VA, and I've learned so much from all of you, from all the veterans, whether it was part of my training or whether it was part of my weekend work that I do where I see my veterans in the nursing home, or whether it's the opportunity that I have and the privilege I have of leading the nation's largest health-care system in changing the health-care delivery for not just the veterans but also for the whole country. So it is a true, true honor and privilege to be here and to be serving all of you.

I do want to thank Commander Schmidt for his leadership. I have to tell you, The American Legion executive team with Verna and Lou are just tremendous in terms of how we're working shoulder to shoulder to bring about transformation and solutions to our health-care delivery infrastructure. I can reassure you that your voices are heard every single time. As we're coming up with changing programs, as we're coming up with
improving a Choice Program or improving our outreach when it comes to suicide prevention and other key initiatives that all of you are involved with, you are represented so well with the executive team. As a result of our constant interactions, we go back to the drawing board and come up with a design and a plan and a policy as a result of hearing from you through them. And so, again, a tremendous, tremendous contribution that all of you have directly into how VA will continue to improve care and lead change.

It's not just as part of what we do formally in D.C. as we're coming up with innovative solutions. It's also what you do at the grassroots level. As you help to champion change when we're delivering care in our medical facilities, your program, the System Worth Saving program, which, again, I know PNC Conley and chair of the VA&R Commission, Ralph Bozella, is so tremendous in their leadership and ensuring that we at the VA medical facilities are getting that unbiased outside perspective on what's working and what's not working. It's so valuable as we're improving health care.

Health care, as you know, is going through a lot of transformation as such, but as a result of The American Legion and programs like the System Worth Saving program, we know in real time when to work together and how we fix things before they become huge crises. One of the things that had happened in the recent past is in D.C., in the medical center in D.C. And many of you may have heard of some of the challenges that we faced in the medical center. Verna with her team was right there with us as we spoke to the leadership, as I sat down with the frontline workers to understand what was working and what wasn't working. Then it was your American Legion and your VA that got together and had town halls where Verna, again, chaired that town hall, and we heard directly your voices around how we needed to change and what were the root causes of some of the challenges that we were facing.

So thank you for being such a great partner, as together we're evolving and transforming our health-care delivery so that our VA system is not just preserved but it absolutely is our crown jewel for the country, our foundational services continue to get strengthened, and we invest in the care that you so deserve and need. (Applause)

So what are we, the VA health-care system? So just to give you a perspective on the enormity of who we are, we have over 300,000 employees. We have 25,000 physicians. We have 65,000 nurses and health-care professionals. We have over 75,000 volunteers that work in the VA. We have over 1,700 access points, 168 medical centers, over 300 vet centers. All of them the fabric of the VA system, the fabric of the system that belongs to you, the fabric of the system that leads change.

In addition, we have 70 percent of physicians, one of them being me, who trained at the VA. We have 1,800 academic facilities that partner with the VA. We have 125,000 health-care professionals that every year get trained in the VA in over 40 different disciplines. So you can see how important and how critical we are to not just the VA system but to the fabric of our entire country when it comes to delivering health care.

Something that I always tell my veterans, my patients that I truly, truly am so honored to treat and be there for, is that they've not only served once but they continue to serve as a result of teaching me and teaching so many people like us around what works and what doesn't work and how we have to evolve the system.

We serve over nine million veterans, and we have 100,000 veterans who work in the VA. So the VA taking care of the VA. That's what it is. The veterans taking care of our veterans. They're the ones who understand what the issues are. Our veterans, all of you know, you've walked in those shoes of what it means to have served and in many ways sacrificed. I have to tell you, when everything else is gone, the veterans, for my patients, when they've lost as a result of medical illness their memory or their thought process, the thing that stays is the fact that they've served. So the changes and the impact that your
service has made not just to you but to all of us is something that is sustainable and continues into the future.

So what have we done so far? We've embarked upon a journey where we've come about a rapid transformation, and every month, ever since the secretary took office, the leader that we have, we've actually impacted and changed things on a fast-track basis. So in February he became the secretary. Very soon after that, we've seen successive changes. In April we launched the Access website. That's the site, if you guys haven't been on that site, you have to go on that website. It's the Access to Care website. It gives you the tools to empower you so that you can compare what the wait times are, what the satisfaction surveys are, and what the quality is in your medical center compared to others and in many times compared to those in the community, the private hospitals in the community. So you can choose where you want to get care and how you want to get care.

Again, every month we've seen major, major changes as far as what we've been doing. In April we had the accountability legislation. In June we had a whole bunch of other things we've been working on. In July for the first time we opened up our panels to the other than honorable. We also worked on making sure that we set up something called the VSO Advisory Council for Suicide Prevention. As the secretary said, our number one clinical priority is suicide prevention.

We can't come up with that comprehensive program until we hear from you directly around what's working and what's not working. We need you every step of the way as we're looking at these audacious goals in bringing about change that is going to be long lasting and sustainable and change upon which we're going to continue to build our VA system.

As I said, suicide prevention is going to be key. Suicide prevention, there is no veteran, and I repeat, that should ever feel so alone and with so much loss of hope that he or she resorts to this. We have to work together for this. For the 20 suicides that take place every year in our veteran population, 14 of them happen outside of the VA where they have never had contact with the VA in the last year. So we have to do everything possible to band together as a community to help our veterans. We have to be there. We have to make sure that they have a purpose to live, they have something that they look forward to, that energy, that adrenaline rush that our veterans are so used to is reinfused in them, and we have to work together to make that happen. As part of that, there are other aspects of suicide prevention we're working on, whether it's substance abuse, whether it's taking care of PTSD, whether it's identifying risk before our veteran gets to the point of becoming suicidal. How do we help them before they get to that point?

Those are the things that we're working on. We're spending lots of research dollars in understanding that. But in the meantime, all of us have to band together. I don't think there's a single person here who doesn't know of a veteran, either personally or have heard of a veteran, that has been impacted by a suicide. We have to be there for their families. We have to be there for their loved ones.

Access, as I said, is an important piece. We will continue to work on improving access. Not only do we have same-day services in all of our medical facilities, but we're embarking upon this journey where we're committed to having same-day services in our CBOCs also. So when you as the veteran need care and you decide you need care, you should be able to get it at the same time. This again is a high bar, but you deserve it, and we're committed to making that happen. (Applause)

In addition, the anywhere-to-anywhere program, where we again launched that just this month with the president and the secretary, is a very important program. It's about being able to care anywhere, no matter where you are in the country, and not have to drive into your medical facility or your CBOCs to be able to get care. If you choose to have care using a smartphone or a mobile device, then you should be able to get it using a secured Skype or FaceTime-like technology, which we just launched.
And we're so proud of this because this also helps our health-care professionals. They don't have to be in the medical center to render care. It could be after hours. It could be weekends. But if you wanted to talk to your physician or your health-care provider, you should be able to do that. We have studies that show 70 percent of issues can be resolved by just a quick face-to-face virtual care visit that we can launch using technology like that.

That is so important to be able to render care in your terms based on what you find convenient, when you want the care, in the way you want the care. So no physician in a VA or a nurse in the VA should say, "No, you don't need care." It cannot be a paternalistic culture. It has to be a culture where you're in the driver's seat and you're leading the care decisions that's personalized to you. So this is another huge advancement. (Applause)

And the Choice Program. We've heard about the Choice Program from all of you. It's a program that has helped meet the needs today, but it is not the program that will continue to bring about a high-performing network and a high clinically integrated program if it continues without change. We have to take the insurance companies, we have to take the TriWest and Health Net out of the middle of the care that your physician and your community provider want to work on.

So the new program that we're launching where, again, The American Legion under Lou and Verna's leadership have worked so hard with us, and I have to tell you seriously, they had us go to the drawing board four times before it became acceptable. That's the program that we're about to release, and that's the program where your physician inside of the VA with you in the driver's seat works with the physician in the community to make sure you're getting the best care whether inside of the VA or outside of the VA. (Applause)

And the electronic health system will help with that, because the electronic health system right now, a decision that's taken over a decade to make, we've been able to make that decision in the few months that the secretary has been in office. In June we announced our intention. That was the other big thing that we did. In June we announced the intention of working with the same electronic health care system that DoD has. So from the time that you get enlisted to the time you serve in the military and post-military service as a civilian and a veteran, we have your longitudinal health-care records. So whatever happened in military service or before that, we have a way of looking at what that impact will be in terms of your prognosis and your course of illness as a result of having all your electronic health records on one platform. And this is something that, again, no other health-care system has ever done or is able to do.

One of the other things we're trying to do is bring the community providers, the Choice care providers into this mix so that the electronic health system is going to be there on one platform from DoD to VHA, whether it's inside the VA or outside of the VA. Again, we'll reduce a lot of the bureaucracy, a lot of the redundancy, a lot of the fragmentation in care. It will help coordinate the care better as a result of it. (Applause)

Something that I'm really proud of that we're just starting to sort of dabble in is something called whole health. It is so important that as we're caring for you, as our system is caring for our nation's heroes, we are making sure that we're not just empowering you when putting you in the driver's seat but we're also equipping you with the system and the resilience that you need by integrating care using integrative medicine like your tai chi, like your meditation, like your mindfulness so that you can deal with adversity better, you can deal with the inevitable better, and you become stronger inside to be able to take care of your illness. And, again, you have that positive mind-set that no matter what happens we're going to win. You're going to win when it comes to taking care of your health. That's the whole health model we're building, and we're really excited about it.

One of the things that comes out of the whole health model, which, again, is going to be key. I've worked most of my professional career in geriatrics with nursing home veterans and patients. One of the things that we're so committed to do is making sure that we provide
all the resources possible so our veterans can live in the home- and community-based setting and they don't as a default have to be admitted into the nursing home for the rest of their lives, unless that's absolutely needed. (Applause)

I see my nursing home patients, and I have to tell you, there's so many of them that inspire me, so many of them that have taught me so much. One of the things they tell me is that: The system has failed when there's nothing available for me to be at home, when I have my wits, when I have my functioning arms and legs, but I need a little bit of help so that I can be safe at home, and the system doesn't provide me that. And as an immediate resort, I'm put into a nursing home. So we can't do this. It is for my veterans, for my patients that I take care of on weekends that I am committed to making sure that we provide everything possible, a system of support so that the inevitable, when we get to that point, all of us will one day. We have to make that decision, we are in the home and comfort of what makes more sense to us based on our personal values and our personal preferences. So I'm committed to making sure that we provide that to all of you. (Applause)

And the Million Veteran Program, again, remember we have four principles, core mission principles here at the VA. One is our health-care system; the second is our research; the third is our training, and we went through how much we do in terms of training the American health-care professionals; and then the emergency preparedness. The research piece is like the Million Veteran Program where today we have over 600,000 blood samples that we can do genetic analysis on as a result of all of you continuing to contribute.

That connected with our health care, electronic health records, that connected with our social determinants of care, our lifestyle history, our military history, all together provides such valuable databases where we will be seeing breakthrough research and cure of disease that we could never have even fathomed in the past. It's because of all of you and, again, your service to the country that you continue to commit to that we're going to be able to change the care and come up with so many different advances around our chronic conditions that will help to improve not just the age but also our longevity, our wellness.

It is so important as we grow older to have three main things in life, to be able to have the richness and quality of life no matter what happens. You do this through The American Legion.

The three main things is getting up every morning with a purpose, having that fire inside you to serve and have a purpose. Secondly, to be connected as a social network. And I see you as I walk down the halls, all of you connecting together. It's family. I come here, I feel like this is family. All of you are connected socially and are there for one another. And the third piece is that spirit of constant service. So you have a purpose. You are socially connected. And you have that spirit of purpose.

So it's going to be so important, so important to make sure that you stay strong, because I'm going to need you as we continue to go down this transformation journey. And this is my commitment to you on behalf of the VA. There are times and there will come a time in all of our lives when we're most vulnerable, when we feel most feeble, where we're most frail, where mortality is looking into our eyes. But I can't thank you enough for allowing us to enter that space, that personal space and doing a small bit in terms of serving you as we all go through this journey of the inevitable.

But here, again, thank you for your service. We are there for you. We will continue to make sure that the VA health-care system is strong and something that you're going to continue to be proud of. And again thank you for your service. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: When groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and other secular organizations targeted veterans memorials, The American Legion understood that if we want to defend both "God and Country," we would need friends like First Liberty Institute. The legal scholars there specialize in religious
liberty cases. Our next speaker has been named one of the 25 greatest Texas lawyers of the last quarter century by Texas Lawyer Magazine. He is a frequent guest on Fox and Friends, Good Morning America, and the Today Show. He has been president and CEO of First Liberty Institute since 1997. Two years ago, he presented his organization's first Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. Religious Liberty Award to the man for whom it is named, our very own national judge advocate. Last year it went to our national adjutant, Dan Wheeler. Today he is to present the award to another deserving recipient. Please give a warm American Legion welcome to Kelly Shackelford, Esquire. (Applause)

Presentation: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. Religious Liberty Award
Kelly Shackelford, President & CEO, First Liberty Institute

First Liberty Institute is the largest legal organization in the country that focuses exclusively on religious liberty in the United States. For 13 years we are proud to say that we have partnered with The American Legion and represented The American Legion when the attacks have begun on our veterans memorials across the country. When the Mojave Desert Veterans Memorial was actually declared by a court that it had to be torn down, we went to the Supreme Court and we got that reversed and that memorial, that World War I memorial, stands today. (Applause)

When the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial, outside of San Diego, came under attack, we entered that case. We made sure that that memorial still stands again today. You can go see that memorial. It's one of the most beautiful memorials in our country. (Applause)

When the Pledge of Allegiance or our national motto have come under attack, we have joined The American Legion and gone into court and we have won those cases every single time. (Applause)

Now the Bladensburg Memorial is under attack. In fact, on Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, we had to argue at the Federal Court of Appeals to keep this memorial from being torn down. One of the judges asked the following question during the oral argument: "If we just cut the arms off this cross, won't that take care of any offense?" So we're not sure what kind of decision we're going to get from this court, but I want to assure you that we are not going to stop until this is a victory and this memorial is left standing. (Applause)

Now, I'm here today to give the Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. Religious Liberty Award to somebody who has really shown sacrifice and courage and real advancement for our veterans and for religious liberty. The prize that goes with this award is fairly incredible. It's a Henry repeating arms special edition rifle that only a few people have: Philip Onderdonk and Dan Wheeler. And one more person is about to get that award. I want to show you a video that explains the award and shows the prize up close so you can see what they're about to receive.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

The recipient of our award this year, before he was ever elected to office, was known as one of the leading attorneys in the country and donated hundreds of thousands of dollars of his time for the veterans and religious liberty. When the Mojave Desert Cross was under attack, he went all the way to the United States Supreme Court to get that victory. In fact, his brief was cited 12 times by the justices of the Supreme Court in upholding that memorial. When Houston National Cemetery decided that the burial ritual that had been used by the veterans for 100 years could not be said anymore because it mentioned God, this man entered the fray and we won a great victory, making sure and in fact preserving the rights of 22 million veterans who had the right to be buried in our national cemeteries. So I am proud to announce that this year's winner of the Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. Religious Liberty Award is now Senator Ted Cruz. (Applause)
Address: Honorable Ted Cruz  
United States Senate

God bless The American Legion. (Cheers and applause)
What an incredible, incredible privilege to be with each of you. What a privilege to be with heroes and patriots. (Applause)

It is humbling and it is powerful that when we live in an era when someone who can throw a ball or sing a song is called a hero, to be reminded that the real one percent are the men and women gathered here. The real one percent are those who answered the call and rose up to defend our nation and fought and bled and far too many who died to protect our freedom. (Applause)

I am honored to be with you. I thank you. I salute you. And, in particular, I wanted today to thank you for your commitment to defending our first liberty, to defending religious liberty. When our nation was founded, we fought a bloody revolution, a war with guns and bayonets, where a handful of scrappy revolutionaries defeated what was then the mightiest armada on the face of the earth. But it wasn't just a revolution of arms we fought; it was a revolution of ideas. Because the ideas behind the American founding transformed the world.

We began with two fundamental propositions. Number one, that our rights, they don't come from a king, they don't come from a queen, they don't come from a president. Rather, they come from God almighty. (Applause)

As the Declaration so powerfully put it: We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; and we are endowed not by a king, not by a queen, not by a president, we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. (Applause)

When each of you took up arms to defend our nation, those are the rights, those are the freedom you were defending. And the second revolution of ideas is from time immemorial we have been told that power emanates from the top, it emanates from the monarch. The American Revolution upended that. We said power, sovereignty comes from down-up. It comes from we the people. (Applause)

And our founders created what Thomas Jefferson called a constitution to bind the mischief of government. Well, in modern days, there's a lot of mischief of government. That right, that first liberty, religious liberty, the right for every one of us to seek out the Lord God almighty with all of our hearts, minds and souls, to live according to our faith, without government getting in the way, that is foundational to everything else. (Applause)

And I want to commend The American Legion because it would have been easy for you to sit back and say, "You know what? I stood and fight. I gave my service. My time is done." But The American Legion, the patriots in this room and across the country, you cannot leave a man on the battlefield, and you cannot stop fighting for the country you love. (Applause)

When you look at faith and religious liberty, one of the great blessings I've had is meeting across the state of Texas and across the country so many chaplains who serve. Can everyone here who has been an active duty or is a retired chaplain in the military, I would ask you if you would please stand that we can thank you and recognize you. (Applause)

The service of so many chaplains for centuries has made such a profound difference to our soldiers and sailors and airmen and Marines, and yet we saw just a few years ago an Air Force chaplain in the state of Alaska reprimanded because he wrote a blog post saying: There are no atheists in foxholes. His political superiors reprimanded him for doing that. I guess they thought he was being insensitive to atheists. I kind of thought that was a chaplain's job, to welcome and embrace them with God's forgiving love.
But it's interesting, if you look at that phrase, "There are no atheists in foxholes," it can be traced back to a 1954 speech that President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave to The American Legion. Now, I'd note President Eisenhower had some passing familiarity with the military. And President Eisenhower, in that speech, he told the tale of what's come to be known as the Four Immortal Chaplains.

The USS _Dorchester_, coming off the tip of Greenland, was hit by a German U-boat, and the boat began to sink. There were four chaplains aboard the _Dorchester_, two who were Protestant, one who was Catholic, and one who was Jewish. And as the boat began to go down, they looked around and realized there were not enough lifejackets for the people on board. So each of those chaplains took the lifejacket he had around his neck, and he put it around the neck of another man. And when those chaplains did so, they didn't ask that man in front of them "Are you a Catholic? Are you a Protestant? Are you a Jew?" He simply gave his life that the other man might live. And those four chaplains, arm in arm, began singing and praying and went down with the ship, giving their lives so their brothers might live. That truly is the definition of love. And the idea that we have had litigating organizations and political appointees that would want to make it a punishable offense to acknowledge God truly staggers the minds.

Another example that we saw in my home state of Texas, in Houston, the VA directed The American Legion and other private organizations, other private clergy, that if you were presiding over a military funeral, you could not invoke the name of God. You could not say Jesus. You could not say God. This is the VA saying God's name is not allowed in a military funeral. And a Houston pastor, who refused to be silenced, brought a lawsuit. The American Legion brought me in to represent you, and I was honored to represent The American Legion and that pastor fighting for religious liberty. And we won, defending that fundamental liberty. (Applause)

Yet, another example, in recent years, we saw the prior administration litigating against the Little Sisters of the Poor. Now, what are the Little Sisters of the Poor? A Catholic charity of nuns who have taken vows of poverty. They devote their lives to caring for the poor and elderly. The Obama administration litigated against them, arguing that the nuns must be fined millions of dollars unless they agree to pay for abortion-inducing drugs and others. Now, let me give y'all a very, very simple rule of thumb: If you're litigating against nuns, you've probably done something wrong. (Laughter)

By the way, there's a corollary to that: If you're litigating against The American Legion, you've definitely done something wrong! (Applause)

That case, the Little Sisters of the Poor, went all the way to the Supreme Court. I'm pleased to tell you the new administration, with President Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions, have come in with a renewed commitment to religious liberty, and they are no longer persecuting the Little Sisters of the Poor. (Applause)

Yet another example, one that my friend Kelly talked about, the Mojave Desert Veterans Memorial. This is a lone, white, Latin cross in the middle of the Mojave Desert erected to honor the men and women who gave their lives in World War I. Has stood there for over 80 years, until one day the ACLU came along, and they were offended. Let me just say for a minute to everyone who gets offended at everything they see: Can't everyone just chill out. (Laughter and applause)

Look, I see nuts doing offensive things all day long. You don't have to whine about it, and you don't have to run to a federal court and say: Oh, oh, guard my eyes.

The ACLU filed a lawsuit seeking to tear down that monument in the Federal District Court. They won. In the Federal Court of Appeals, they won. The federal court ordered that 80-year-old veterans memorial to be covered with a burlap sack, with a chain and a padlock at the bottom, because the federal court concluded you could not gaze upon the image of a cross on public lands. Well, I'll agree with the court on one thing: There is power
in the image of a cross. Well, The American Legion, as has been your pattern and practice, did not shy away from the fight. You stood forward to fight to preserve that veterans memorial, and I was incredibly privileged to be your lawyer, pro bono, for free, defending that memorial. (Applause)

We went before the U.S. Supreme Court, Kelly Shackelford and I, on behalf of The American Legion, on behalf of millions of veterans across this nation, defending religious liberty, and we won 5-4. (Applause)

But it was 5-4. Those stakes should give you pause. We were one justice away from the Supreme Court ordering: Tear down that veterans memorial. And mark my words, when they tear down the cross on a veterans memorial in the middle of deserts, we are but moments away from the next order to tear down the tombstone with the cross or Star of David lined one after the other after the other.

That's not America. That's not who we are. Those are not the fundamental freedoms and values everyone, regardless of your faith, regardless if you have no faith, America protects your right to live according to your faith and conscience. It is not government that should be an enemy of religious faith. (Applause)

So I want to say to the men and women gathered here, thank you. Thank you for standing and answering the call. We face a dangerous time in our nation's history. We face enemies abroad that are getting more and more dangerous, that are on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons or have nuclear weapons. We face radical Islamic terrorists that seek murder and mayhem. We face a military whose readiness has been degraded for far too many years. I pledge to you, I'm committed to working hand in hand with the president and the administration and Congress to rebuild the military. (Applause)

To ensure that our servicemen and women have every resource, every training, every tool to keep this nation safe, to defeat our enemies, and to preserve our nation. (Applause)

For those who have served, for the veterans, I remain committed to ensuring that we honor our commitment to you, our solemn commitment to every veteran, and that includes when it comes to health care, I believe every veteran should have the right to choose your doctor, whoever that doctor may be. (Applause)

We should strengthen and improve the VA, but at the same time give veterans the ability that if you choose, you want to go to the cardiologist down the street, you ought to have the right to make the choice for your health care. (Applause)

And then I give you my solemn pledge that the fight to defend religious liberty, the fight to defend the First Amendment and the Second Amendment, by the way, I had four people say to make sure that there wasn't a chamber in the round in that rifle. There wasn't. And all of our fundamental rights. I give you my solemn pledge that just as each of you have risen to the occasion over and over again to defend our lives, our rights, our freedoms, that I will continue to be honored to stand shoulder to shoulder with you in that same fight for that same freedom that makes this nation, the United States, the greatest nation in the history of the world. Thank you and God bless you! (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Our next guest is a true patriot who truly loves veterans. He sits on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and he's a great friend of The American Legion. Please give a warm welcome to United States Senator Dean Heller of Nevada. (Applause)

Welcome: Honorable Dean Heller
United States Senate

Good afternoon, everybody. What a pleasure it is to be here. I caught the earliest flight I could to get up here to hear the president's speech. And you know how best laid out plans
go, right? But I'm sorry I missed it. But there were some activities I'd like to talk to you just a little bit about today, but I want to welcome you. It's great to be part of the 99th Annual American Legion National Convention. Welcome to Reno. I am your host. Thank you for being here. (Applause)

So I want to welcome President Trump, even though I saw his plane take off as I was driving into Reno today. You know, I couldn't land my plane in Reno. I had to land it in Carson City. So I drove up 30 minutes hoping to catch him at the airport, just to watch it fly away. So we'll have a phone call this afternoon and iron that out.

But it's great to have Senator Cruz here, a good friend of mine here in the great state of Nevada. I hope you're enjoying Reno and I hope you're enjoying this host city. There's a lot of activities, a lot of things to do inside the convention and outside the convention, so I certainly hope you enjoy yourself.

I especially want to thank National Commander Charles Schmidt for the introduction. I want to thank National Adjutant Daniel Wheeler; Executive Director Verna Jones; National Legislative Director Matthew Shuman; Department of Nevada Commander Bob Terhune from Ely, Nevada. Thank you for being here and for hosting us here today. And I also want to thank all The American Legion staff, volunteers in Washington, D.C., Nevada and across this country for the work that you do. Thank you so much. (Applause)

With more than 300,000 veterans living in Nevada, The American Legion is an integral part of our communities across our state and, furthermore, across our nation. To the veterans, family members, and those of you in the armed forces, thank you for your service. I'm truly grateful and humbled by your commitment to defend what makes this country so great, and that's the freedoms that make us proud to be Americans.

One of my most important responsibilities is standing up for Nevadans' veterans. As a senior member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I use my role to ensure that our veterans receive the care and benefits that they have earned and that they have deserved. Over the past few months, we've been able to make real progress on behalf of the veteran community. That's due to bipartisan cooperation in Congress and the president's commitment of taking care of the men and women who serve. And today I'm proud the president signed a bill that I worked to help pass through Congress, bring a much needed overhaul to the VA appeals process into law. What does it mean to our nation's veterans? More options to appeal their cases to the VA, allowing veterans to fast track their claims. This means veterans will ultimately, ultimately have more money in their pockets for their injuries and get it faster than they do right now.

The president also signed another bill we introduced and that's the legislation to continue funding the Veterans Choice program. You've heard a lot about it the last couple of days. The Choice Program is critical to our veterans who need access to the service that VA cannot provide, such as chemotherapy and other critical lifesaving surgeries. It also ensures veterans living in rural communities, like those surrounding Reno and Sparks, do not have to travel hundreds of miles just to reach a VA facility. One more bill of mine that I'd like to mention is the legislation that expands the GI Bill benefits, giving more veterans and their dependents the opportunity to pursue an education. The president signed it just last week, an acknowledgment that we need to do everything we can to empower our veterans with the tools that they need to succeed.

And, lastly, Nevada just received great news from Secretary Shulkin at the beginning of this week. The VA will change its process for rewarding grants under the State Veterans Home Construction Grant Program. That's something I've been asking the VA to do several times to help veterans living in rural areas. It's particularly important for veterans living in this part of Nevada because it will help secure funding for the new State Veterans Home in Northern Nevada.
I'm extremely proud of what we've been able to accomplish for our veterans and believe they're examples of what we can achieve when both parties set aside their differences and work together. However, we still have a lot of work to do. We have a long way to go to fulfill our country's promise to those who stepped up to the plate. After all, we have the privilege of living in the freest nation on earth, because of the bravery of men and women who have sacrificed so much for us. We owe debt that could never be fully repaid, and we need to continue to work hard to make sure that we take care of those who take care of us.

So in closing, I want to thank President Trump for being here today, commend the great work that both he and Secretary Shulkin are doing to make sure that no Nevada veteran is left behind. Thank you so very much. Thank you, everybody. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: We meet a lot of heroes at our national conventions, but our next guest clearly has earned that title. A veteran of 85 F-4 combat missions, including 65 over North Vietnam, he was held at the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" POW camp from 1968 to 1973. His 24 awards and decorations include two Silver Stars, the Defense Superior Service Medal, two Legions of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star for valor, two Purple Hearts, and seven Air Medals. Representing the National Veterans Memorial and Museum, please welcome retired United States Air Force Colonel Tom Moe. *(Applause)*

My fellow Legionnaires, let's salute a true hero. By the numbers. One.

... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to Colonel Moe.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Two! Colonel Moe, sir. *(Applause)*

Address: Colonel Tom Moe, USAF (Ret.)
National Veterans Memorial and Museum

That was an extra special treat, commander. Thank you. Well, good afternoon. Thank you for the honor to present the new National Veterans Memorial Museum, being built in America's Heartland, central Ohio, where over half the U.S. population lives within a day's drive.

I want to thank a couple of individuals who are behind-the-scenes people because, you know, I had the pleasure of being at the convention last year and been to some other national conventions. There's so many moving parts. And those moving parts are kept in place by people like Jack Monahan, who spoke earlier; Jack Querfeld who has been indispensable; and way behind the scenes, but very, very important, Mary Rooney. I'm sure many of you worked with her as she got things on track during this busy schedule. Of course, special thanks to Commander Schmidt for allowing me to be here, and best of luck to sister Denise Rohan for the coming year. I have to say: Go Bucs. Although, I can't see the Ohio delegation. Are you out there somewhere? *(Cheers)*

All right. I love it. Well, of course, most of all, thank you all for your service. I'm proud to be a member of The American Legion. *(Applause)*

Absolutely, and I applaud you as well.

There's no single comprehensive museum dedicated to share the veteran's experience in this country. Until now. This facility will also memorialize those who died in service, those who could never enjoy as a civilian the fruits of their service and sacrifice. We remembered them at the dinner last night with the table set for one, a very moving tribute. So I'm honored to be a part of the team that is creating that place.

Today, as I share with you the mission of the museum, I will include photos of construction progress and renderings of the exhibits that are being planned, led by the late Senator John Glenn, a diverse committee of veterans came up with a visionary concept, to
create this National Veterans Memorial & Museum. This vision is now a reality. The memorial and museum will open next summer, 2018, and it's already paid for with over $77 million raised. (Applause)

That's impressive. Here are the four pillars on which we're going to build your story: We will honor, connect, inspire, and educate through this facility. We will honor American's contributions through military and veterans service. We will connect visitors with veterans by demonstrating the military training and experiences that form them. We hope to inspire visitors with your stories so that they might go forward and serve or continue to serve their community and nation in many ways. We will educate visitors, especially schoolchildren, through interactive permanent exhibits about the history and value of service. Professional designers are already creating exhibits that tell the story, your stories, beginning with what prepared you to serve, what it was like to leave home, take the oath, live on a base or on a ship, go through training, and then come home with those experiences and continue to serve your communities.

This is not a military museum. It's not about tanks or other technologies. It's about people and founded on the principle that veterans' stories have value and need to be told. Visitors will walk through various thematic alcoves, with each alcove highlighting key themes and moments in a veteran's journey. We'll incorporate personal stories, past and present, to share a wide range of your challenges, your sacrifices and achievements. Visitors will explore a chronology of real veteran stories and experiences. The particular example on the screen demonstrates the transformation that occurs for those of us who serve. You will see a depiction of the servicemember before he or she were deployed, while in service, and photos of when they returned to civilian life. We want visitors to learn what that transformation was like.

We would fail in our mission if we did not honor the servicemen and women who did not make it back to civilian life, who could not enjoy the benefits they created and paid for with their lives. This rendering shows the Remembrance Gallery where we pay tribute to those fallen brothers and sisters. It's a place for contemplation and reflection to think about those who made the ultimate sacrifice and remember them.

There will also be a beautiful Memorial Grove on the property next to the Scioto River Park, itself newly developed. The Memorial Grove will serve as a site of reflection but also a place for celebration, to celebrate the ties that bind us together. We would expect that as time goes by, veterans service organizations and even individuals might want to create their own memorials here. This place is your home, a place to honor you like nowhere else.

Finally, we'll have a rooftop sanctuary, accessible not only from the inside but also by an open-air, grand, spiral ramp perfectly designed for processions and ceremonies. This open-air space can also be a place for memorial ceremonies, but like the grove, a place for celebration, for ceremonies, to include military weddings and receptions. Some groups have already reserved the facility for just that.

So, please, connect with us as we connect with you. Get in touch with us at the email address on the screen so that we not only have your support, but your ideas as well. Exhibit designers are already gathering personal memorabilia and veteran stories to be featured in the core exhibits program. So contact us, check out our website and look at the flyer in your convention packet where we solicit donations of items that you might have, letters, service items, examples of your service as a veteran. We certainly expect to commemorate the great service of our VSOs, not the least of which is The American Legion.

This memorial and museum is not a fantasy. We look forward to the grand opening next summer. We have universal support for this project, and I hope we have yours as well. During this convention, you'll vote on a resolution of support, and I ask very much for that support. Bipartisan legislation has been introduced into the House and Senate to officially designate the museum as a national institution. We have asked your leadership to reach out
to Congress and the president as this legislation moves forward to completion. Testimony will take place this September in Washington. Our 22 million living veterans and the countless millions who have gone before us have earned a national museum to call home. Now we will have that home. Thank you for allowing me to present it to you.

Now, if I might deviate from my prepared remarks, I'd like to close with a story of my vision of veterans in service, especially those that I call the unnamed veteran, those veterans who serve our brothers and sisters every day. So I'd like to just give one example of what I think of when I think of veterans in service, not a veteran who became president or an astronaut or senator or governor or what have you. That's important, too, they brought their lessons from military service, but every day the unnamed veteran.

I had the chance to become the director of the Ohio Veterans Department. Served under Governor Kasich. One of the things he wanted me to add was an attorney to help me some of the difficult issues that veterans face in the legal system. So I got a list of names, and I'm interviewing a bunch of folks, and this one gentleman impressed me very much. I told him I was very interested in hiring him. He said, "Well, I appreciate that you took the time," he said, "but you need to know I'm in the National Guard, the 37th Buckeye Division," the very same division my uncle fought in in World War I on the front lines in France. He said, you know, "I'll be deployed from time to time." And I said, "Shawn, you're hired."

He did great work for me. The months went by, and then one day he got a notice that he was going to deploy to Afghanistan. And he was killed. I had an unbelievable honor to go to Delaware and pick up Shawn and the two brothers that died with him that day from a terrorist bomb. We flew in a KC-135 back to Ohio and landed in a driving rain. It's one of the hardest rains I've ever experienced anytime. Just constant, solid rain. As I got out of the airplane to join the group that was waiting, including the governor, the attorney general, the adjutant general, but beyond the staff, well over a thousand people standing there in the rain, no umbrellas, that tiny sacrifice for their brothers, and hundreds of bikers, veterans bikers standing there ready to escort our brothers to their funeral homes. They divided up into three groups, the hearse following each of these hundreds of bikers off into the falling rain. Unnamed veterans serving their brothers. God bless. (Applause)

... At this time, National Vice Commander Martel assumed the Chair.

Presentation: Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER MARTEL: Daniel J. O'Connor was the chairman of the National Americanism Commission from 1962 to 1983. He was chairman emeritus from 1984 until his passing in 2004. The Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy is given to the department that achieves the most outstanding results in conducting Americanism programs. These programs advance patriotism among the citizens of this nation and participation in our youth activities. Ladies and Gentlemen, the winner of the Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy is the Department of Virginia. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy awarded to The American Legion Department of Virginia in recognition of the most outstanding Americanism program, presented at the 99th National Convention of The American Legion.

DELEGATE QUECK: Once again, I'd like to thank the Department of Virginia for giving me the opportunity of being their Americanism chairman for two years in a row. This is the second year we've taken this trophy, and we're not going to stop at that. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER MARTEL: The Chair recognizes Richard Anderson of Connecticut, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Americanism, for the purpose of making a report.
At 8:30 am, Sunday, August 20, 2017, the Convention Committee on Americanism, consisting of the two subcommittees of Americanism and Children & Youth, met in the Atlantis Resort, Grand Ballroom Section 4, Second Floor, in Reno, Nevada, for the purpose of electing a chairman and secretary for Americanism. Richard Anderson (CT) was elected chairman and Charles Tucker (GA) was elected secretary for the purpose of reporting to the Convention.

It was moved, seconded and carried that the committee chairman and secretary be authorized to accept and sign the report of the Convention Committee on Americanism on behalf of its delegates.

It was moved and seconded that the chairman, Americanism Convention Committee be authorized to accept the actions of the two subcommittees assigned to Americanism on the resolutions assigned to the respective subcommittees.

It was also regularly moved, seconded and carried that the chairman and secretary may make technical corrections to the resolutions reported out of this committee to ensure proper wording and form without changing the substance or meaning of the resolution(s).

No further business was discussed at this point and the delegates were then released to the two subcommittees assigned to the Americanism Convention Committee—Children & Youth and Americanism—for the purpose of reviewing and acting on the assigned resolutions.

The Americanism Convention Committee was recessed at this point, subject to call by the chairman if required.

The Convention subcommittees met and considered their assigned resolutions as follows:

**Children & Youth**

**Herbert Petit, Louisiana, Chairman**

At 9:00 am, Sunday, August 20, 2017, 49 delegates assigned to the Convention Subcommittee on Children & Youth met in the Atlantis Resort, Grand Ballroom, Section 7, Second Floor, in Reno, Nevada. Herbert Petit (LA) was elected chairman and Donald Suchy (NE) was elected secretary. The subcommittee considered one resolution and its disposition is as follows:

- **Referred to the Standing Americanism Commission**

**Resolution No. 12 (AR): War on Drugs Poster Contest**

**Americanism**

**Richard Anderson, Connecticut, Chairman**

At 9:00 am, Sunday, August 20, 2017, 47 delegates assigned to the Convention Subcommittee on Americanism met in the Atlantis Resort, Grand Ballroom, Section 4, Second Floor, in Reno, Nevada. Richard Anderson (CT) was elected chairman and Charles Tucker (GA) was elected secretary. The committee considered nine resolutions and their dispositions are as follows:
Referred to the Standing Americanism Commission

Resolution No. 10 (AR): Proposed Change to the Oratorical Contest National Finals
Resolution No. 11 (AR): Oratorical Contest National Scholarship Awards Structure
Resolution No. 37 (ID): Ashes to Graves Flag Disposal
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 38 (WA) Ashes to Graves Flag Disposal)
Resolution No. 48 (IL): Recruitment of American Legion Baseball Players
Resolution No. 69 (CA): 21st Century Policy of Remembrance

Resolutions Rejected

Resolution No. 18 (MD): Establishment of a National Day of Remembrance in Honor of Our Cold War Veterans and Their Families
Resolution No. 43 (MS): Proposed Renaming and Format Change to the National Oratorical Contest Finals
Resolution No. 68 (AZ): Advance Eighteen Contestants from the Oratorical Contest National Quarterfinals to Semifinals

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN ANDERSON: As a duly elected and registered delegate from the Department of Connecticut, I move for the adoption of this report. ...Second.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER MARTEL: Is there any discussion? Hearing none, all in favor so indicate by the usual sign. Opposed? Ayes have it. The report of Americanism is adopted. Thank you very much. Having completed the adoption of the Americanism report, it is appropriate to announce the winners of two Americanism awards.

Presentation: Frank N. Belgrano, Jr., Trophy

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER MARTEL: Frank Belgrano Jr., was National Commander from 1934-1935. He was a founder of the Galileo Post in San Francisco and was the Department Commander of California during a peak year for membership and activity in the Golden State. The Frank Belgrano, Jr., Trophy is given annually to the department rendering the most outstanding service to the Boys Scout of America program during the 12-month period beginning August 1. This year's winner is the Department of Missouri. (Applause)

Presentation: Ralph T. O’Neil Education Trophy

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER MARTEL: It is only fitting that an educational award be named after the national commander who graduated from Harvard Law School and interrupted his term as a county attorney in Kansas so he could serve in World War I. The Ralph T. O’Neil Education Award is given to the department within the United States documenting the greatest activity in operating The American Legion School Medal Program. The winning department shows what can be accomplished by an active and involved American Legion. The winner is the Department of Delaware. (Applause)

Presentation: Garland D. Murphy, Jr. Award

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER MARTEL: In 1952, Department Commander Dr. Garland D. Murphy, Jr., of Arkansas came to The American Legion with an offer to provide a valuable contribution to be used solely for children. After much study and discussion, the idea of a foundation was adopted. Eventually, on October 15, 1953, the
National Executive Committee approved the establishment of the foundation and entered into a trust agreement with Dr. Murphy. Legal work was completed, and on July 9, 1954, the foundation was duly incorporated under the laws of the State of Indiana. At that time, Dr. Murphy assigned to the foundation deeds to fractional mineral rights on nearly 10,000 acres of land in the oil-rich Williston Basin in Montana and North Dakota. To date, more than $13 million has been awarded to organizations to assist the children of this country from the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc. I now have the pleasure of presenting the Garland D. Murphy, Jr., award to the department that raised the most money for the Child Welfare Foundation during the past program year. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to present this award to the Department of Arizona. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The Garland D. Murphy, Jr. Award is presented by The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation to The American Legion Department of Arizona for the program year 2016-2017. In recognition of their designation as the number one department, in total contributions received from their volunteers, in support of our annual program designed to meet the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of our nation's children through productive and meaningful grants.

Presentation: U.S. Grant Legacy Award

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER MARTEL: It is now time for me to present the U.S. "Udie" Grant Legacy Award. Udie was a member of the National Executive Committee for 38 years from the Department of Kansas. He also served as a longtime director and later president of our National Child Welfare Foundation until he joined Post Everlasting in 2004. The U.S. "Udie" Grant Legacy Award recognizes the collective effort of The American Legion Family in a department. It goes to the department that collectively raised the most money for the Child Welfare Foundation during the past program year. The winner of this prestigious award is the Department of Arizona. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The U.S. Grant Legacy Award presented by The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation to the Department of Arizona for the program year 2016-2017 in recognition of outstanding support of The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. We thank you.

DELEGATE BOLAND (FL): As president of the Child Welfare Foundation, it is indeed an honor to present the meritorious achievement award. "There is a wonderful mythical law of nature that the three things we crave most in life, happiness, freedom, and peace of mind, are always obtained by giving them to someone else." Peyton Conway March.

Achieving the highest increase in per capita giving for 2016-2017, The American Legion Department of Arizona. The board of directors greatly recognize your outstanding support of The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. Service to the critical needs of America's children is made possible through your caring and generosity. (Applause)

The Excellence Award. "You will find, as you look back on your life, that the moments that stand out are the moments when you have done things for others." Henry Drummond.

Achieving the highest in per capita giving for the 2016-2017 year, The American Legion Department of Arizona. The board of directors greatly recognize your outstanding support of The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. Service to the critical needs of America's children is made possible through your caring and generosity. (Applause)
NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER MARTEL: If anyone has a donation to the Child Welfare Foundation, I will now accept those onstage.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Boldt assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER BOLDT: For those that are donating to the Child Welfare Foundation, please come to the microphone and announce the amount.

Donations to The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation

DELEGATE CLEWELL (WI): Hi, I'm Laurel Clewell, the Department of Wisconsin commander, and we are proud to donate to and support the Child Welfare Foundation.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MI): From the Mitten State, home of this year's National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year and birthplace of the American Legion Riders, Michigan, we donate $2,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NE): From the great state of Nebraska, The American Legion Family would like to donate $1,796.84.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OH): The American Legion Department of Ohio Family would like to add to the Child Welfare Foundation a donation of $5,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PA): The great state of Pennsylvania donates $1,396 to the Child Welfare Foundation.

DELEGATE FUELLING (FR): I'm Robert Fuelling from the Department of France. I have two checks totaling $500. One from the Department of France for $250, and one from the Paris Post No. 1 for $250.


UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (CA): From District 13, Department of California, also known as Santa Clara County, the home of Silicon Valley, $2,210.82.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TN): Department of Tennessee would like to add to our previous donation of $150.

DELEGATE GREELING (AR): I'm Jake Greeling, the Alternate NEC from the Department of Arkansas, also past department commander. My wife, Karen, and I would like to donate $1,000 to the Child Welfare Foundation.


DELEGATE KILEN (ND): Orletta Kilen, past department commander of the Peace Garden State of North Dakota. We donate $250 to the Child Welfare Foundation.

DELEGATE MEANEY (NH): Dave Meaney, Department of New Hampshire, $1,000 Child Welfare Foundation.

DELEGATE ELSTON (WA): Wayne Elston, department commander, Washington State, and Alternate National Executive Committeeman Ken Lee, with an initial check of $4,118 for CWF. (Applause) ...National Commander Schmidt resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The American Legion has supported Scouting since our organization's founding in 1919. American Legion posts sponsor thousands of Scouting units serving more than 60,000 young people nationwide. The national commissioner of the Boy Scouts of America earned a bachelor's degree at Brigham Young University and a J.D. at the University of Utah. He has previously served as the 20th president of the Young Men organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the national commissioner of the Boy Scouts of America, Charles Dahlquist. (Applause)
Good afternoon. I love the way you respond both when somebody says "Good morning" or "Good afternoon" but also when you say "Amen." You don't see that very often, so thank you very much.

I'm honored to be here for this wonderful convention. It's been good being here since early this morning and also joining you last evening for the commander's dinner. I have learned an awful lot about The American Legion. In fact, in preparation for this, I watched some YouTube videos, and I got so excited watching the YouTube videos that I went online and registered as a new member of The American Legion. (Cheers and applause)

So I am in. I'm thrilled to be here as representative of the Boy Scouts of America. Thank you for all you do, not only what you do looking back and making sure that those who have defended our country and served and our veterans are taken care of, but also in looking forward and making sure that the rising generation is taken care of and well-schooled. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to be here to celebrate this almost-100-year partnership. You may not know that in 1919 when The American Legion was organized that its first convention, one of the very first items of business was to recognize the Boy Scouts of America and begin this wonderful partnership. Today, The American Legion sponsors 50,000 Scouts and has 22,000 leaders who are making a great difference.

There's a great poem that goes: We are blind until we see that in the eternal plan nothing's worth the making if it does not make the man. Why build these cities glorious if men unbuilded goes? In vain we build the work, unless the builder also grows. And these youth of the rising generation are the builders. So thanks to each of you for sponsoring troops, cub packs, explorer units, venture crews all over this great country. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. (Applause)

In July, I had the opportunity of being with Commander Schmidt at the National Scout Jamboree at the Summit in West Virginia. Wonderful, beautiful, almost heaven, West Virginia. It was wonderful to have Commander Schmidt there, but there was something that was missing. That is every leader, at least in Scouting, needs to have a walking stick. So, Commander Schmidt, I have something for you. Commander Schmidt, when you and I met at the Summit, you didn't have a walking stick. And you needed a walking stick. So I have one here that is engraved. It says: Charles E. Schmidt, National Commander, American Legion, 2016-2017; 2017 National Scout Jamboree, and it has the logo of The American Legion on it, of the Summit Scout Ranch, of the Jamboree. And most importantly, when you go hiking, you always wear hiking boots, right?

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Yes, sir.
CHARLES DAHLQUIST: And so does your walking stick. (Laughter)
NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Fantastic. Thank you, sir.
CHARLES DAHLQUIST: Thank you. My pleasure.

When I was a young cadet in the Air Force ROTC program, we didn't have an awful lot of money. So I worked nights at KSL, at a Clear Channel radio station. During that time there was a man by the name of Charlie Freed who taped a program every night that I was there, and the program was called "Windows." And what he would do, he would talk about a day in history, and he'd talk about what happened and the people that were impacted, and then at the end he would say: And that's the way it was, August 5th, 1947, as we watched from windows at KSL home of radio.

Our lives are a series of windows. Because of what you do with the Boy Scouts of America, you are making windows for these young people that will impact their lives forever. Let me just give you one example, one window occurred in the life of Andy Flosdorf a number of years ago. This 13-year-old boy was a normal, garden-variety young
man, but just happened to be a great speller. He was involved in the National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C. He came from Fonda, New York. Andy got up and was asked to spell "echolalia." He spelled it. The judges weren't sure that he spelled it correctly, and so they went back and listened, and then they approved it. Andy then sat down. One of his friends said, "So how did you spell it?" And all of a sudden he realized that he had spelled it incorrectly. Not the way that the judges thought it might have been, but he had used an "e" instead of the first "a."

So he went to the judges, and he went to Chief Judge Robert Baker, and he said, "I misspelled echolalia." The judge said, "No, we went through it." He said, "No, I misspelled the word." They went back over the tapes, and, sure enough, he had misspelled the word, and, as a result, was disqualified from any more participation. Someone from The New York Times, a reporter, said, "Why did you do that?" He said, "Well," he says, "I didn't want to feel like slime." The typical 13-year-old boy expression. And then he said, "No, why did you do it? It took a lot of courage to do that." This young man said, "I am a Boy Scout, and, above all, a Boy Scout is honest."

When that was announced to the large gathering in Washington, D.C., there was a standing ovation for this simple 13-year-old boy who realized the very first Scouting Law, a Scout is trustworthy. It's because of what you do in the lives of these Scouts that they stand out wherever they are. That's the reason why a Scout, one of your Scouts, when he takes a test, keeps his eyes on his own paper because a Scout is honest. A Scout is trustworthy. That's why when a Scout goes through a door, he always looks behind him to see if there is someone else following for whom he can open the door because a Scout is courteous.

There are all types of stories. One particular window that was brought to my attention was by a father who talked about a pinewood derby experience that he had with his son Jeffrey. As you may know, every year, about the first part of the year, Cub Scouts get together and make small pinewood derby cars and they race them. Well, as is true to form, Jeffrey's father did most of the work on this car. They went to the pinewood derby, and they were so proud. The car looked so good. The paint job was good. The decals were great. The wheels were aligned. There was enough graphite to make sure that they ran really well. When pit row was there before the race began, it was mostly filled with fathers instead of boys. When the races began, the fathers moved out of pit row, and the sons began to race the cars.

After a few races, Jeffrey was doing pretty well, and he came to his dad and said, "Dad, I need to have you do something with my car." His dad was ready to check the alignment of the wheels, and Jeffrey said, "No, Dad, you don't understand." He pointed over to a friend of his who obviously had special needs, and he said, "My next race is against Steven. And Steven hasn't won a race all night. Will you do something with my car to make sure that Steven wins?"

So his dad first looked at his son, and then he looked at the car. He took the front wheel and he tweaked it just enough so it was out of alignment, gave it back to his son. The two cars were up there. They got ready. The cub master pulled the handle down, the cars went down, and Steven won. But the dad recalled: When I looked down at the end of that race and the two boys grabbed their cars, I saw two happy boys. You see, Jeffrey learned at the hands of your leaders that a Scout is kind and a Scout is helpful and a Scout is courteous.

I had a window occur to me just a few months ago when I was on Normandy Beach. I had been asked to speak at an encampment of the North Atlantic Council of the Boy Scouts of America. As I prepared myself, I read all of these books. I read everything I could. I watched movies. I did everything to prepare. And in the midst of all of that, a thought came to me over and over again: I wonder where Dad was during that time.
It haunted me as I read these books and as I watched the movies. Just as a week before, I went to some papers that Dad had before he passed away. And in there, as I opened a little box, there was an envelope that I had never seen before that said: Winston's military records. So I opened it up, pulled up his certificate of service and realized a week before I went to Normandy that Dad was there. For on his record, his discharge record, battles and campaigns, Rhineland, Central Europe, Air Offensive Europe, Normandy, Ardennes.

Then I realized what these little V-Mail notes meant. They didn't mean anything to the family because they didn't realize what my dad never told them, because Dad never talked about his experiences in the war. I asked him one day, "Dad, why don't you talk about it?" He said, "When you go out and you get one buddy blown off from one side and one shot off from the other side, and that happens day after day, why would you want to talk about it?"

And, yet, this individual that I called Father and was one of the greatest heroes I ever had, he gave me a wonderful feeling of patriotism for this great country. So on that day after I participated in the encampment and watched along Omaha Beach, I tried to picture in my mind what it was like for my father to come onto Utah Beach and for all those GIs to come onto Omaha Beach on that day when instead of a sunny day it was overcast and stormy.

The next morning we met in the American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer with 3,500 Scouts and leaders and parents. If you have been there, there's a wonderful memorial and it overlooks 10,000 crosses of many of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice that we might preserve freedoms. On that day, as I spoke about my experience and my father, I asked those 3,500 young men, many of your Scouts, to turn and raise their arm to the square in the Scout Oath. Together as we faced those crosses of those men who had given their all, we pledged to them that we would live the Scout Oath all our lives: On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country, to obey the Scout Law, to help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

Then I had each of those young men salute. And together we pledged allegiance and promised our allegiance to those great principles upon which this country was based and for which they gave their lives; that we would forever be true to this great country.

Now, in Stephen Ambrose's book on D-Day, there's a great quote. It says: When Hitler declared war on the United States, he bet that the young men brought up in the Hitler Youth would outfight the youngsters brought up in the Boy Scouts. Hitler was about ready to find out how wrong he was.

We are together, the Boy Scouts of America and The American Legion, with your Four Pillars and your preamble to the Constitution and with our Scout Oath and Scout Law, we're building a rising generation who will be able to follow in your footsteps and the footsteps of my father and all of those who have gone before to keep this country free. There is too much dissension in this country now, but there are more things that unite us than divide us. Those young men under your tutelage are learning to unite and bring peace in a troubled word.

Somebody once said: If we are really to get serious about world peace, we ought to start at a Scout Jamboree. My suggestion is we start at a Scout Jamboree, then we come to an American Legion convention, and there we understand what it means to be patriot-loving, freedom-loving, peaceful individuals of this human race.

May God bless each of you as you strive to strengthen the youth of the noble birthright, this rising generation. I pledge to you that we as the Boy Scouts of America will continue to do everything in our power to strengthen the youth of today; that they might be strong and understand the principles for which their grandfathers and fathers and mothers and grandmothers lived and died; that we might keep this country free. God bless you for
all you do to strengthen the rising generation. I am honored to be part of this great organization. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Charles. Thank you for that great speech. You know, the Boy Scouts, one of The American Legion's programs, our very first program of youth, giving youth an opportunity. And we had, as a leader of this great organization, an opportunity to go to the Boy Scout Jamboree which happens every four years. I tell you what, Legionnaires, you've never seen nothing like it, 20,000 Boy Scouts, 6,000 volunteers there, young men learning about being a good citizen and learn about patriotism as well, because there were Legionnaires on site. Legionnaires tutoring, helping the young men. This young man here, the commissioner of Boy Scouts of America, you would think that he would be in an office or something. The first time I saw him, they said, "You're going to be meeting the commissioner of the Boy Scouts of America." And I said, "Well, who is he and where is he?" "It's that gentleman over there sitting underneath that cover with a bunch of young men," and he was teaching them different knots. That's the type of leader we have in the Boy Scouts of America. Charles, on behalf of The American Legion, we'd like to present to you our medallion.

CHARLES DAHLQUIST: Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The American Legion's generosity has once again come forward. Today's Child Welfare Foundation donations that just took place here on the stage a few minutes ago totals $40,699. Which brings the year's total to $925,743.62. Which adds to the all American Legion donations for the year, $8,136,661.89. The American Legion Family has stepped up again! (Applause)

The Chair now recognizes Robert Newman of Indiana, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Internal Affairs, for the purpose of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs**
**Robert E. Newman, Indiana, Chairman**

At 9:30 am, Sunday, August 20, 2017, the Convention Committee of Internal Affairs, consisting of the two Subcommittees of Other Internal Matters and Membership met in the Grand Ballroom, Sections 1 & 2, Second Floor, at the Atlantis Resort for the purpose of electing a Chairman and Secretary for Internal Affairs. Robert Newman (IN) was elected Chairman and Randy Goodman (GA) was elected Secretary for the purpose of reporting to the Convention.

It was regularly moved, seconded and carried that the Committee Chairman and Secretary be authorized to accept and sign the report of the Convention Committee on Internal Affairs on behalf of its delegates.

It was moved and seconded that the Chairman, Internal Affairs Convention Committee be authorized to accept the actions of the two sub-committees assigned to Internal Affairs on the resolutions assigned to the respective sub-committees.

It was also regularly moved, seconded and carried that the Chairman and Secretary may make technical corrections to the resolutions reported out of this Committee to ensure proper wording and form without changing the substance or meaning of the resolution(s).

No further business was discussed at this point and the delegates were then released to the two sub-committees assigned to the Internal Affairs Convention Committee---Membership and Other Internal Matters--- for the purpose of reviewing and acting on the assigned resolutions.

The Internal Affairs Committee was recessed at this point subject to call by the chairman if required.
The Convention Sub-Committees met and considered their assigned resolutions as follows:

**Membership Sub-Committee**
*Randy Goodman, Georgia, Chairman*

At 10:00 am, Sunday, August 20, 2017, 46 delegates assigned to the Convention Subcommittee Membership met in the Emerald Room Section B & C on the second floor of the Atlantis Resort. Randy Goodman (GA) was elected Chairman and Gary Schacher (NY) was elected Secretary. The committee considered one resolution and its disposition is as follows:

**Referred Resolutions**

The following resolution was referred to the Standing Committee on Membership & Post Activities:

**Resolution No: 36 (CO): Payment of Membership Dues for Multiple Years**

**Other Internal Matters Sub-Committee**
*Robert E. Newman, Indiana, Chairman*

At 10:00 am, Sunday, August 20, 2017, 42 delegates assigned to the Convention Subcommittee on Other Internal Matters met in the Grand Ballroom A on the second floor of the Atlantis Resort. Robert E Newman (IN) was elected Chairman and William O. Moore, Jr. (KY) was elected Secretary. The committee considered eighteen resolutions and their dispositions are as follows:

**Approved Resolutions**

**Resolution No. 86: Appreciation to Host City**
*Origin: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs*
*Submitted by: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs*

WHEREAS, The 99th National Convention has been held in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23 and 24, 2017; and

WHEREAS, There has been a spirit of cooperation and friendship along with mutual helpfulness evidenced by the Legionnaires of Nevada, the officers of the convention corporation and the department, and by the officials and the people of Reno, Nevada; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That we express our deep appreciation to the Department of Nevada, Governor of Nevada Brian Sandoval; Mayor of Reno, Nevada, Hillary L. Schieve; the city of Reno, Nevada, including the fire department, police department, and other public safety officials, and to The American Legion National Convention Corporation of Nevada, Inc., John F. Warden, president, around this nucleus has been built the moving force that provided for every necessity that made for a successful and enjoyable convention.
Resolution No. 87: WWI National Memorial in Pershing Park, Washington, D.C.
Origin: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs

WHEREAS, One of the founding principles of The American Legion is to “preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars,” as stated in the preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion; and
WHEREAS, World War I was one of the great wars from which The American Legion was founded; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion previously expressed support of a National World War I Memorial without financial obligation to The American Legion in Resolution No. 15, National Executive Committee (October 2010), Resolution No. 13, National Executive Committee (October 2015) and Resolution No. 4 National Executive Committee (May 2017); and
WHEREAS, The Congress, in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 (NDAA) Pub. L. 113-291 Paragraph 3091, has endorsed the memorial by passing the legislation that authorizes the United States World War I Centennial Commission to build said National World War I Memorial; and
WHEREAS, The National Capital Memorials Advisory Commission which consists of representatives from several agencies, including the National Parks Service, the National Planning Commission, the General Services Administration, the Commission of Fine Arts, as well as the American Battle Monument Commission supported the legislation; and
WHEREAS, The National Capital Planning Commission gave their final approval on July 13, 2017 for the memorial design as did the Commission of Fine Arts on May 18, 2017 for dedication in November 2017 in Washington, D.C.; and
WHEREAS, The World War I Centennial Commission is still conducting a fundraising campaign to collect private and individual donations for the construction of the memorial; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion national organization donated $50,000 as approved in Resolution No. 4 (May 2017) for continuing education of the importance of World War I as well as $20,000 from American Legion Charities for the WWI Commemoration Ceremony of the U.S. entry into World War I conducted in Kansas City at the National WWI Museum and Memorial (Liberty Memorial) on April 6, 2017; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That the national organization supports the concept of constructing the World War I Memorial on the site known as Pershing Park in Washington, D.C. without any further financial obligation from the national organization; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That individual, post or department donations, if they so choose to support, may be made directly to the National World War I Centennial Commission and that our national American Legion media channels be utilized to advance awareness to our membership on the construction status this memorial.

Resolution No. 88: National Veterans Memorial and Museum
Origin: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs

WHEREAS, One of the founding principles of The American Legion is “To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the great wars”; and
WHEREAS, The National Veterans Memorial and Museum (NVMM) has a nonprofit organization incorporated in the State Of Ohio currently conducting a campaign to raise
money to construct a memorial and museum in Columbus, Ohio in honor of all military veterans; and

WHEREAS, They have currently raised in excess of $75 million for the design and construction with a completion date for opening in Summer 2018; and

WHEREAS, The Columbus, Ohio Downtown Development Corporation is currently serving as the project manager for the design and construction of the NVMM and once constructed ownership will be transferred to a different 501(c)(3) organization to manage the ongoing operations and maintenance of the memorial and museum; and

WHEREAS, The NVMM purpose is to honor the contributions of our nation’s veterans, connect civilians and veterans, inspire communities and citizens to honor service in the military, and educate our youth on the value of serving our nation; and

WHEREAS, Senator John Glenn served as the founding chairman of National Veterans Memorial and Museum Advisory Committee and it was his vision to construct this memorial and museum in the heartland of America so more citizens would be able to visit in order to honor those who served this nation in uniform; and

WHEREAS, There is legislation pending in the 115th Congress to approve the National Veterans Memorial and Museum as a national landmark with the idea the bill will be included in the current National Defense Authorization Act currently under review; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion is in favor of honoring veterans with such a memorial; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion goes on record to support the construction of a memorial dedicated to our veterans in Columbus, Ohio which is to be named the National Veterans Memorial and Museum without financial obligation by The American Legion; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the national organization supports legislation to designate the memorial and museum as a national landmark and that our national American Legion media channels be utilized to advance awareness to our membership on the progress of the National Veterans Memorial and Museum.

Referred to the Standing Convention Commission

Resolution No. 34 (CO): Reject Sanctuary Cities in Selection of National Convention Cities

Referred to the Standing Media & Communications Commission

Resolution No. 63 (NY): Supply Copies of The American Legion Magazine to Facilities that Provide Services to Veterans

Referred to the Standing Internal Affairs Commission

Resolution No. 4 (MT): Reexamination of the Paid Up For Life Program
Resolution No. 6 (MA): Award Congressional Gold Medal to the Chinese American Veterans of WWII
Resolution No. 29 (OH): Definition of Active Duty for Membership Eligibility
Resolution No. 35 (CO): Use of Gender Neutral Language in Official Documents
Resolution No. 42 (WA): Free Admission to National Parks for Honorably Discharged Veterans
Resolution No. 45 (IL): Increase National Emergency Fund Relief Amounts
Resolution No. 60 (NY): Update Funeral Honors Section of Consolidated Post Report
Resolutions Received and Recorded

Resolution No. 50 (WI): Endorsement of Roger P. Mathison for National Vice Commander
Resolution No. 67 (AZ): Endorsement of Robert B. Gilmore, Jr. for National Historian

Rejected Resolutions

Resolution No. 44 (OK): Male Spouse Eligibility in the Sons of The American Legion
Resolution No. 66 (MO): Tractor Cruisers

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN NEWMAN: Mr. Commander, as a duly elected and registered delegate from the Department of Indiana, I move for the adoption of this report.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: You've heard the motion. Do I have a second? …Second. Is there any discussion? Hearing none, all in favor say aye. Opposed? The ayes have it. The report of Internal Affairs is adopted. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Chair now recognizes Paul Dillard of Texas, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Paul E. Dillard, Texas, Chairman

Eighty-four (84) members of your Committees on Employment and Veterans’ Preference and on Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness met at 9:00am on August 20, 2017, in the Atlantis, Grand Ballroom, Sections 5 & 6, Second Floor, Reno, Nevada, and agreed on the following report, which is respectfully submitted for your consideration.

The Committees were called to order by Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr. (DC), Liaison Representative appointed by the National Adjutant to act as temporary chairman. Ariel De Jesus, Jr. (DC), Assistant Director for the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission, acted as temporary secretary and called the roll. A quorum being present, nominations were received: Paul Dillard (TX) was elected Chairman and James Fratolillo (MA) was elected Secretary of the Convention Committee.

James Fratolillo (MA) was elected Chairman of the Employment and Veterans’ Preference Committee and Dennis Tipsword (IL) was elected Secretary. Eric Measles (CA) was elected Chairman of the Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness Committee, and Geraldine Hince (TX), as Secretary.

A Veterans Employment & Education Resolutions Screening Committee met earlier to screen and group the resolutions. A report of their actions, with recommendations, was presented to the Convention Committees for consideration.

The Screening Committee conserved the time of the Convention Committees substantially. It was chaired by Paul Dillard (TX), Chairman of the National Veterans Employment & Education Commission, and was composed of the following persons:
There were 11 resolutions presented for the consideration of this Convention. The following actions on the resolutions were taken by the Convention Committees:

Approved or Approved w/Amendment ............................................ 10
Consolidated with Resolutions Approved .......................................... 0
Referred to the Standing Commission ................................................ 0
Received and Recorded ................................................................. 1
Rejected .............................................................................................. 0

A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Chairman and Secretary to sign and deliver the report on the Convention Committees’ behalf.

A report of action taken on the 11 resolutions referred to the Standing National Veterans Employment & Education Commission will be made to the National Executive Committee and to the Adjutant of the Department concerned.

Employment and Veterans’ Preference Committee
Approved Resolutions or Approved with Amendment

Resolution No. 81: Military Veterans Spouse Employment
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Military spouses struggle to find jobs and are more likely to work for less pay, or in positions lower than their education level, with over 40 percent of spouses stating that the biggest barrier to employment is employers not wanting to hire spouses due to frequent moves; and
WHEREAS, Military spouses earned less on average than their civilian counterparts; and
WHEREAS, Military families identified spouse unemployment and underemployment as the highest obstacle to financial security, with 44 percent of spouses reported living paycheck to paycheck or struggling financially; and
WHEREAS, Struggling with frequent moves, deployments, and unpredictable schedules of their servicemember spouses, military spouses have a much higher unemployment rate of 16 percent, compared to the national unemployment rate of 4.4 percent; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion fully supports all veterans, servicemembers, and their family members to the fullest extent possible in order to further expand the economy, and enhance veteran economic prosperity; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The America Legion supports legislative and administrative measures that seek to encourage and recognize organizations that hire veteran and military spouses; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That The American Legion reminds employers, both public and private sectors, of their moral obligation to hire, not only veterans, but their civilian spouses as well.
Resolution No. 85: Support Employment and Veterans Reemployment Rights of National Guard and Reservists Returning from Deployment  
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education  
WHEREAS, Over seven years of war has caused record high deployment rates of citizen soldiers, who have the responsibility of maintaining civilian employment while waiting for the call to serve their country; and  
WHEREAS, Many of these soldiers, who struggle daily to balance their dual military and civilian lives, have returned home from deployment to find that same contract of balance was not upheld by their employers; and  
WHEREAS, According to the Department of Defense’s Status of Forces study released in November 2007, among post-9/11 returning reservists and National Guard, nearly 11,000 were denied prompt reemployment, and more than 20,000 lost seniority, pay and other benefits awarded to them through their dedicated service; and  
WHEREAS, It was the intent of Congress in enacting the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 that no veteran be denied employment, reemployment, advancement or discrimination in employment for serving their country in the interest of protecting our nation; and  
WHEREAS, As currently drafted, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 fails to adequately support military personnel upon their return to civilian employment as countless employers have violated the rules laid out in Title 38 of the United States Code; and  
WHEREAS, Legislation is under consideration that will help ensure that servicemembers and veterans are promptly reinstated in their civilian jobs when they return from tours abroad; and  
WHEREAS, This legislation would strengthen the protections in current law to ensure that servicemembers’ and veterans’ employment and reemployment rights are effectively enforced under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion supports and urges Congress to adopt and enforce the provisions as outlined in the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA); and, be it further  
RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports the amending and strengthening of USERRA to ensure that National Guard and reservists receive the employment and reemployment rights afforded to them through their dedicated service to the country and as required under law; and, be it finally  
RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports legislation that would assert explicitly in the USERRA law that servicemembers cannot be blocked from the court system by arbitration agreements.

Committee on Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness  
Approved Resolutions or Approved with Amendment  

Resolution No. 26: Support Effort of the Small Business Administration’s Office of Veterans Business Development and Veterans Business Outreach Centers  
Origin: Maryland  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education  
WHEREAS, Assistance to veterans who have honorably served our country is a veterans benefit that dates back to the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944; and
WHEREAS, Benefits to veterans have always included assistance in creating and operating veteran-owned small businesses; and
WHEREAS, The Veteran Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs) offer veterans in-depth counseling and mentor services that are vital in aiding veterans in starting or growing their small businesses; and
WHEREAS, Currently, there are not enough VBOC offices to fully support business-aspiring veterans; and
WHEREAS, The military is currently in the process of downsizing, which will mean that thousands of former military personnel who have honorably served their country will be unemployed; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion supports increased funding for the efforts of the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) Office of Veterans Business Development in its initiatives to provide enhanced outreach and specific community-based assistance to veterans and self-employed members of the Reserve and National Guard; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation that would permit the SBA’s Office of Veterans Business Development to enter into contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements to further its outreach goals and develop a nationwide community-based service delivery system specifically for veterans and members of Reserve Components of the United States military; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion fully supports SBA funding that would allow for there to be a Veteran Business Outreach Center in every state, including Puerto Rico.

Resolution No. 77: Authorization to Build Veteran College Search Tool
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
WHEREAS, The American Legion wants to ensure that student-veterans and their family members using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and military student programs achieve educational success and a positive transition to the civilian workforce; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion has identified the complicated and challenging process of selecting and applying for schools; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion desires to assist veterans in acquiring information necessary to make informed decisions on education; and
WHEREAS, Home Front Alliance, LLC, created the virtual tool “College Recon” to provide an unbiased and secure environment for current and former military personnel to connect with over 3,000 not-for-profit colleges and universities from across the country; and
WHEREAS, Home Front Alliance, LLC, desires to create and produce at no cost to The American Legion a college search tool that compounds “College Recon” with geolocated information on American Legion posts and resources; and
WHEREAS, Home Front Alliance, LLC, agrees to grant The American Legion “final approval” of all content; and
WHEREAS, Both parties share a common purpose of supporting the military and veteran community; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion supports Home Front Alliance, LLC, designing an American Legion veterans’ college search tool that incorporates Legion posts and our relevant programs/services that enable veterans and their families to successfully transition into the civilian workforce.
Resolution No. 78: Support Greater GI Bill Outcomes by Closing 90-10 Loophole
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion wants to ensure that student-veterans and their family members using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and military student programs achieve educational success and a positive transition to the civilian workforce; and

WHEREAS, Under current law, for-profit colleges may receive no more than 90 percent of their revenues from federal aid, but military education events in order to ensure colleges are not funded solely by federal taxpayers; and

WHEREAS, Under current law, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) funds and Department of Defense (DOD) funds are counted as private dollars on the 10 percent side, allowing schools to count GI Bill and Department of Defense tuition assistance as private dollars on the 10 percent side, resulting in aggressive recruitment of veterans and servicemembers; and

WHEREAS, Veterans and military students are targeted for deceptive and aggressive recruiting – as documented by many major news outlets, including an Emmy-nominated PBS NewsHour expose, as well as U.S. Senate reports and two undercover U.S. Government Accountability Office investigations – because of a loophole in federal education law through which the GI Bill and DOD student program funds are able to be counted as “private funds” to offset a cap the schools face on federal funds; and

WHEREAS, In December 2016, the Department of Education issued a report that 191 colleges receive more than 90 percent of their revenue from federal student aid, GI Bill education benefits, and DOD education programs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion expresses its strong support for legislation and federal agency action to ensure better quality and student outcomes for institutions approved for use of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits by excluding Department of Defense and VA funds from the 90/10 calculation as defined by section 487(a) of the Higher Education Act.

Resolution No. 79: Expanding Department of Veterans Affairs Employment Pathways
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, In order to recruit and retain top talent, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers an Education Debt Reduction Program to provide student loan payments to employees; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) runs a similar program that places providers in underserved areas; and

WHEREAS, The student loan benefits offered through HHS are significantly greater than they are for the VA, even though our nation’s veterans are clearly “underserved”; and

WHEREAS, 2017 analysis of department operations shows shortfalls in human resources specialists across the department are hurting retention and slowing the hiring of new employees, resulting in a growing number of vacancies across the VA bureaucracy; and

WHEREAS, Pilot initiatives have been developed to cultivate initial entry talent through scholarships for critical VA positions, such as the Grow Our Own Directive (GOOD) Pilot Program; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That with the intention of improving the quality of care and user experience veterans receive through the Department of
Veterans Affairs (VA), The American Legion supports increasing education benefits to VA veteran employees to match competing federal employment opportunities in order to competitively recruit veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports financial assistance for veterans seeking to complete their education in exchange for commitment to continued service; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support innovative retention practices that provide education and training incentives for VA veteran employees to achieve credentials and licenses to fill critical vacancies.

Resolution No. 80: Support Expansion of Microsoft Software and Systems Academy

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Servicemembers transition from active-duty to a civilian sector that often overlooks or underestimates their employment potential; and

WHEREAS, The Global War on Terror has incurred record high deployment rates of citizen soldiers, who have the responsibility of competing for civilian employment while waiting for the call to serve their country; and

WHEREAS, The unemployment rate for veterans ages 25-34 is 7.2 percent compared to 4.6 percent amongst nonveterans; and

WHEREAS, Servicemembers and veterans need proper training and tools to begin new careers transitioning from military service; and

WHEREAS, The Microsoft Software & Systems Academy (MSSA) bridges this gap with comprehensive training and career mentorship that helps prepare servicemembers for long-term, high-paying tech careers; and

WHEREAS, MSSA has a 91 percent graduation rate with 85 percent working in information technology fields earning an average salary of more than $70,000; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion supports the Microsoft Software & Systems Academy (MSSA) in order to provide servicemembers with necessary skills and resources to obtain gainful employment in today’s global information technology marketplace; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports adaptation and expansion of the MSSA across eligible military installations.

Resolution No. 82: Preserve Veteran and Servicemember Rights to Gainful Employment and Borrower Defense Protections

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) rule on Gainful Employment [Docket ID ED–2014–OPE–0039] requires vocational programs at for-profit higher education institutions and non-degree programs at community colleges to meet minimum thresholds with respect to the debt-to-income rates of their graduates at the risk of losing access to all federal financial aid; and

WHEREAS, This requirement protects both students and taxpayers from waste, fraud and abuse by requiring schools to disclose basic information about program costs and outcomes and prevents funding for programs that consistently leave students with debts they cannot repay; and

WHEREAS, ED’s rule on Borrower Defense [Docket ID ED-2015-OPE-0103] codifies a process for providing student loan relief to defrauded borrowers, ensures that
students at schools that close suddenly know their options and that their loans are automatically discharged if they do not continue their studies within three years of the school’s closure, and protects veterans and military servicemembers for bearing the costs for the wrongdoing of schools; and

WHEREAS, In June 2017, the secretary of education suspended said rules from taking effect, resetting a rulemaking process that took two years to complete with no solicitation from military stakeholders for input; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion support legislation and/or administrative rulemaking that protects and enforces the principles upon which Gainful Employment and Borrower Relief were drafted in previous rulemaking; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion insists that veterans’ interests be represented on any new negotiated rulemaking committee on Gainful Employment and Borrower Defense, as they have been for previous negotiations.

Resolution No. 83: Protect Veteran and Servicemember Rights to Fair Consumer Arbitration

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's (CFPB) rule on Arbitration Agreements (Docket No. CFPB-2016-0020; RIN 3170-AA51) addresses the widespread harm of forced arbitration by restoring the ability of servicemembers, veterans and other consumers to join together and seek relief in class action lawsuits when financial institutions break the law; and

WHEREAS, Congress enacted the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA), 50 U.S.C. app. §§ 501 et seq., to strengthen and expedite national defense by granting servicemembers certain protections in civil actions against default judgments, foreclosures and repossessions, enforceable in a court of law; and

WHEREAS, In some cases, financial institutions violate SCRA or other statutory or constitutional protections in their interactions with servicemembers; and

WHEREAS, Many financial institutions include pre-dispute mandatory arbitration clauses in contracts of adhesion that bar servicemembers and others from bringing a legal action in court or banding together in a class action lawsuit to seek relief under federal or state law; and

WHEREAS, Class action waivers are particularly burdensome to servicemembers, who may not be able to challenge a financial institution’s illegal or unfair practices individually due to limited resources, deployment or frequent relocations; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Defense concluded in 2006 that “Servicemembers should maintain full legal recourse against unscrupulous lenders. Loan contracts to servicemembers should not include mandatory arbitration clauses or onerous notice provisions, and should not require the servicemember to waive his or her right of recourse, such as the right to participate in a plaintiff class”; and

WHEREAS, This is extremely unfair to bar servicemembers, veterans and other consumers from joining together to enforce statutory and constitutional protections in court, placing an extreme hardship on the individual; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion oppose legislation to repeal the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's rule on arbitration agreements
and bar servicemembers, veterans and other consumers from joining together in court against unscrupulous financial institutions.

Resolution No. 84: Support and Strengthen the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA)

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The American Legion has been the leading veterans advocacy organization since its inception in 1919; and

WHEREAS, Such advocacy resulted in the creation and passage of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA), formerly known as the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Civil Relief Act, and the original GI Bill, codifying into federal law benefits earned by active and former members of the United States military as a result of their honorable service during a time of war; and

WHEREAS, Both the GI Bill and SCRA have been legislatively updated on occasion by the United States Congress to reflect societal changes and rising costs of providing said benefits; and

WHEREAS, One of these benefits allows servicemembers to keep their residency at one state throughout their military service, rather than changing it after every permanent change of station move for tax purposes; and

WHEREAS, Spouses are not protected or given this benefit as spouses are forced to legally change their state of residency for state and local income tax purposes after each move, which can cause undue financial burden to the servicemember; and

WHEREAS, It is the intention of the SCRA to protect members of the United States military called to active-duty by duly authorized and issued orders and their immediate family; and

WHEREAS, Such protection is not extended to include the necessary termination of a contract under family or group plans, nor to the necessary cancellation of reservations for air or train transportation, resulting in unnecessary, unintended and expensive costs incurred by servicemembers who are obeying the task placed upon them by duly authorized orders; and

WHEREAS, Such costs coincide with negative credit reports which further exacerbate the ability of the servicemember to perform his or her duty, and impacts the ability of the individual or family to realize the American dream and own a home by punitive credit rates; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That Congress be urged to amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to include protections for members of the armed forces, and their families, acting under duly authorized and issued orders to include, but not limited to, deployment and temporary duty assignment orders against fees, fines and the resulting negative credit reports by cancellation of ticketed travel on U.S. airlines or train transportation; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion supports amending the current Servicemember Civil Relief Act to include extending residency benefits to military spouses for tax purposes, thus, alleviating any unnecessary financial burden to the servicemember.

Received and Recorded Resolutions

Resolution No. 46 (IL): Eliminating Tax on Discharged Education Debt for Veterans
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN DILLARD: Mr. Commander, as a duly elected and registered delegate to this Convention from the Department of Texas, I move for the adoption of this report.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: You've heard the motion. Do I hear a second? ...Second. Is there any discussion? Hearing none, all in favor so indicate by the usual sign. Opposed? The report of Veterans Employment & Education is adopted. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Military members transitioning home have few priorities that are more important than finding meaningful employment. A number of outstanding employers were recognized by The American Legion at the Veterans Employment & Education Convention Committee meeting for their work in hiring veterans. But we would like to recognize a couple of other award winners today.

**Presentation: Employer of the Year Award for Hiring Veterans**

**Large Category**

_Sansone Auto Mall, Avenel, New Jersey_

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: For their outstanding record of hiring veterans in the large business category of 200 or more employees, The American Legion recognizes Sansone Auto Mall based in Avenel, New Jersey. Accepting the award are Chairman Paul Sasone, Jr.; Veteran Coordinator Richard Liebler; Corporate Counsel Bob Dato; and department employment chairman of New Jersey, Robert Looby. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion National Award for Outstanding Employer of Veterans presented to Sansone Auto Mall, Avenel, New Jersey, for an exceptional record in the employment of veterans.

PAUL SASONE: Good afternoon, Legionnaires. We had a wonderful afternoon having the secretary of Veterans Affairs, the progress that they're making in the VA and the military, and then having our president here, I mean, it's really a full agenda. And being here myself and feeling the warmth of all your people has made me feel more dedicated than I was when I left home to come here. (Applause)

On behalf of the Sansone Auto Mall and its 400 dedicated employees, I wish to take a moment to thank The American Legion for this special honor and award. Many things can happen, but you can't do it alone. I feel that I have to mention one of my senior people who is a Marine pilot. He has helped me develop this program over the past years. Why we are so successful is the dedication of the team that I put forward. We have employed over 150 military people. Not only at my auto mall, but throughout the state. (Applause)

It wasn't an easy task in the beginning, but I can tell you that we have a more serious problem. We have 200,000 veterans that are incarcerated. So Rich Leibler, who is my right arm in this program, I would just like to give him briefly a round of applause. Rich, will you stand up. (Applause)

So we developed a program which we just started about a year ago, and we have now begun to employ the incarcerated. I have to just give you a brief example of the four or five people that I have employed in my business that have turned out to be wonderful employees that went through this drug problem and all these other things that happened. We have two females that were in this program that are now presently making just under $100,000 a year working for me. They are very successful. (Applause)

So successful that Governor Christie and former Governor McGreevey and even Kim Guadagno, our lieutenant governor, independently came down to my facility to meet some of these individuals. We are so proud of them, and we have about 20 working for us right
now. They are marvelous human beings and employees. So I feel the training that we have given them and the follow-up that we do really helps them succeed.

For over 55 years, I have been in the automobile business. And one thing that I recognize was that many of our veterans were experiencing great difficulty in securing employment upon being discharged from the military. So a few years back I put the words into action. I created a large-scale training program for the veterans and their families, with employment opportunities in the business of selling and servicing automobiles. I initiated this program with the construction of a 7,500-square-feet facility. I call the program Sansone Military Assistance and Training Center. (Applause)

You can look it up on the Internet, if you'd like. I agreed to a substantial grant to provide hands-on education and training. Many of our graduates now work at Sansone and in dealerships across the state. The automobile business needs employees. They need technicians. They need business development center people. So there are many facets in the automobile business, and there's about 7,000 nationwide, that could use employees that are trained. Now, we can't train everyone. So I'm going to ask different dealerships to take our model and then try to implement it with our help. (Applause)

I would like to thank Bob Looby of local American Legion Post 471 in Iselin, New Jersey, on facilitating our job fairs and employment opportunities. We at Sansone Auto greatly respect our veterans for what they've done for us in our great country. I promise to continue doing all we can to assist veterans and their families in providing employment opportunities in the automotive business. (Applause)

Thank you. So I'm going to strongly encourage all employers to follow in our footsteps. If we could place 150 people, then other dealerships can do the same. But even if, for their own personal benefit, they can employ ten through our training, just as the other dealerships are benefitting in the state of New Jersey, the employment of solid automobile people, not everyone has worked out. I'm not going to say something that's not factual. They have to have the right attitude. Most of them do.

We make sure we're training properly. We have a whole training center. We have quality people doing the training. Led by me financially, but led by Rich Liebler who's dedicated to the program. We're going to continue working with the at-risk people that are coming out of the incarcerated program. But 200,000 veterans are in our system, most of them through drugs. I think maybe rather than incarcerate all of them, I think we take some and maybe put them through a one-year program of detoxing them. I think we would be better off. That's my personal opinion. (Applause)

This is a tremendous honor to be here, to address you, people that have been so dedicated for years and years. I would like to end by saying thank you so much for allowing me to be here and accepting this honor. I really appreciate it, and I truly appreciate the efforts that The American Legion has done. So I want to say thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The American Legion is also proud of the men and women who work on behalf of disabled veterans seeking employment. This year I am happy to present the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program, DVOP, Specialist of the Year Award to Bradley Aune of Fargo, North Dakota. (Applause)

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion National Award for Outstanding Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist Presented to Bradley Aune of Fargo, North Dakota, for your outstanding service to the veterans of the state of North Dakota. We thank you.
Presentation: Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year Award
Bradley Aune, Fargo, North Dakota

Thank you very much for this honor. I'm humbled to accept this. I work out of the Fargo Job Service office, and I would like to thank the state of North Dakota Legion department for putting me in for this prestigious award. And just to let you know that I enjoy working with vets. I'm a vet. I had 22 years in the Marine Corps and the Army. I have been doing this for about nine years now, and I go to the homeless shelters in the area and into the Cass County jail and work with the veterans that there to get them back on track and help them find their honor and get their honor back in their service and get them back on the road to employment. So I'm very honored to be here, and I appreciate this honor. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: On behalf of every veteran in America, I extend to you our congratulations and say those words all workers love to hear: "Thank you for a job well done." We're certain you will keep hiring or assisting veterans. Please tell other employers about the reliability and work ethic of veterans. No veteran should be in need of a job, nor should veterans have to live on the streets. And those with disabilities often prove to have many abilities. Thank you and congratulations to our award winners. Let give them another hand. (Applause)

Our next guest is a 1983 graduate of the United States Air Force Academy and has earned more than 3,000 flight hours as a command pilot for T-37, T-38, B-52G, B-1B bomber and B-2 aircraft. As the commander of Air Force Recruiting Service, Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas, he is responsible for more than 2,470 airmen and veterans in more than 1,100 recruiting offices across the United States and abroad. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Major General Garrett Harencak of the United States Air Force. (Applause)

Address: Major General Garrett Harencak
Commander, USAF Recruiting Service

Off we go! All right! Good afternoon, Legionnaires! I'll tell you, I'm so thrilled to be here and the opportunity to come talk to you. I'm a member of The American Legion. I've been a part of this family my entire life, as my father and uncles all were members of American Legion Post 347 in Clifton, New Jersey, where I grew up in. (Applause)

I got to tell you, ladies and gentlemen I'm very, very excited to be here. Although I understand that the national commander is an Air Force veteran. Thank you for your great service to our great Air Force. Yesterday there was an Army general here who made fun of my beloved Air Force. Now, you might expect that I'm going to respond in-kind, but, no, I'm going to take the higher road today. Because as a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, I could tell you I have tremendous respect for graduates of West Point and all they've done despite the fact that they never got a formal education or graduated from an accredited university. (Laughter and applause)

And to help out all our Army veterans here, you're going to notice I took all the words off of my slides, all right? So you don't have to worry anymore about looking them up. (Laughter and applause)

But let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, I am so excited to be here. On behalf of our secretary of the Air Force, the Honorable Heather Wilson, and our chief of staff, General David Goldfein, I'm thrilled to represent the United States Air Force to talk to you. I'm going to talk to you just for a short period of time. I know they told me they only gave me
15 minutes. If you know me, when I drive through McDonald's I talk longer than 15 minutes.

So I'm going to try to condense what I'm going to do here today. But I'm here for three reasons. One, I'm here to hug your necks and rub your tummies and to tell you thank you for what you do for everybody who has ever, ever worn the cloth of our great United States military and of our nation. I'm here to thank you on behalf of all of us, because what you do each and every day as The American Legion is truly inspiring. And our airmen and our soldiers, sailors, Marine Corps and Coast Guardsmen, we all thank you for what you're doing as you fight each and every day for the veterans of our great nation. *(Applause)*

I'm also here to talk to you a little bit about recruiting and the environment that it takes to recruit today. Many of you, I believe, are going to be shocked by some of the things I'm going to talk to you about in the next few minutes, about just how difficult it is to recruit these days and the misconceptions and the mythologies out there that hinder us getting the best and brightest to serve in the world's greatest Air Force and the world's greatest military. Lastly, I'm going to ask for your help, because you're needed. You're doing a lot. I'm going to ask you to do more, specifically when it comes to recruiting our next generation of airmen and our next generation of soldiers, sailors, Marine, and Coast Guardsmen.

You know, I have the absolute best job in the world because we get to inspire and engage and recruit the next generation of airmen. And it's the most important job. I've had a lot of important jobs in the Air Force. We always say, oh, every job you do is important. Yeah, this one, just a little bit more important. Because we make sure in Air Force recruiting that, as our song says, we are followed by more. But more importantly, I believe, I believe we're bringing the single greatest weapon system into our Air Force. I have flown some great weapon systems, the B-2 bomber, the B-1, the B-52. We have some awesome, awesome weapons, smart bombs, all that's needed to hunt down and destroy American's enemies wherever they may be hiding. We have great weapon systems out there, and we need them, and we thank you for your support to giving it to us.

But what I learned in my 38 years in this great Air Force is the greatest weapon system we have, ladies and gentlemen, does not come with a tail number. The greatest weapon system we have does not come with a serial number stamped on it. The greatest weapon system we have comes with a Social Security number. *(Applause)*

We believe at Air Force Recruiting we're bringing that great system in each and every day, and there's one last reason why I have the best job in the world: Because I know that we are changing positively people's lives when they join the Air Force. I'm going to ask for some audience participation here. Everybody in this room, if you believe that your service in the United States military, whether it be for two years, four years, six years or 40 years, are you a better person because you served? Raise your hand if you believe. *(Cheers)*

Of course we are. So when we brought in 35,000 airmen last year, we know we changed their lives for the better. We tell our recruiters all the time: We can talk about the education benefits, we can talk about the adventure, we can talk about all the cool things that they're going to get to do when they join the military and our United States Air Force, but what I really tell our recruiters that we do every day is just tell your story.

Here's my story. I left Elmwood Park, New Jersey, on 21 June 1979, and everything good and great in my life happened because I left to join America's Air Force. Everything. I owe everything to this great Air Force. I'm a better person. The adventures, my wife, my children, the dogs we rescued along the way, everything about my Air Force family, it has made me the person that I am. And every single day I have gotten to wear this uniform has been a gift. And that's our story. That's your story, too, ladies and gentlemen. The time, the place, the circumstances have changed, but the end result is all of us are better because we served. *(Applause)*
That story needs to be told. Because let me explain a little bit of the environment that we deal with as recruiters, all the services do. There are 20 million, 17- and 21-year-olds, which is our target market. 20 million. I know what you're saying: Oh, General Harencak, you mean it's hard to get 35,000 out of 20 million? My God, you're incompetent. Well, I may be. But let me tell you about that 20 million. Only 11 million meet our academic standards. Only 11 million. It's still 11 million. You should be able to get 35,000 out of that, pretty easily.

Out of that 11 million, only 4.4 million are not obese, don't have drug convictions, don't have any of 202 different medical disqualifying factors. We're down to 4.4 million. Out of that 4.4 million, only about 450,000 are propensed. That's a word I learned when I took over this job. That means they have some knowledge, they understand the value of serving in our great military. Out of that, less than 500,000, all the services need 250,000 of them a year. It is, ladies and gentlemen, something that many of us did not experience when we joined our services so many decades ago.

Let me give you some other facts. Here's a simple fact: Young adults are more disconnected from the military than ever before. I don't need to tell this audience, but I'll say it anyway. More disconnected than ever before. Forty-nine percent of young adults ages 17 to 35 can name all four DoD services. You know what I say to that? How is that even possible? Over half of 17- to 35-year-olds could not name all four services. 34 percent of young adults 17 to 35, well over a third, do not comprehend the most basic, basic military fundamentals, ranks, officer, enlisted, standards, requirements. We see them every day as we recruit. Well, I'd join the military, but I want to have a family. Duh, we have families. I'd join the military, but I heard you can't have dogs. Uhh, we have dogs. What are you talking about? Absolutely, absolutely, complete lack of understanding of the most basic military fundamentals.

Here's the one that really, really concerns all of us and all of my fellow commanding generals of the other recruiting services: 52 percent of American parents will not recommend the military to their children. If one or both of those parents have a college degree, the number is in the 70 percent. If one or both have a college degree and they're in certain minority diversity groups, it could be as high as 85 percent will not recommend the military to their children. That's the environment that we're working in. And why is that? Here's a simple reason: Influencers. Lack thereof.

Now, I was born in 1960. On 1 September 1965, that's the date I started my second year in kindergarten. And let me tell you 91 percent of American households in September of 1965 had a core influencer in their family unit that had served in the military. My dad was a World War II vet. All of his brothers and all of my mother's brothers had all served. Had all served. Most of them were members of American Legion Post 347. I used to go there all the time and personally hear how every single member of that Legion won World War II. And then on the side they also won Korea. (Laughter)

Everybody in my high school, all the faculty, if they weren't personally veterans, they were spouses of veterans. We had cousins, everybody. There was a draft going on. Everybody. 91 percent. Some of them did not enjoy their military service. Okay. But they certainly understand the fundamentals of it and they understood the opportunities that were inherent in serving even for a short period of time in our United States military.

Thirty years later, 1995, September 1995, that number is down to 40 percent. Today, today, almost September of 2017, that number is 14 percent. And the math majors tell me that if you solve for the slope, that number never gets better. Less than 1 percent has served, all-volunteer force for over 40 years. Population increases, that number never gets better.

The influencers, ladies and gentlemen, they're not there, certainly not in the numbers that there have been. So that manifests itself in a lot of ways. When we talk to the young men and women about the reasons they would join, they tell us certainly pay money, pay
for future education, travel, to help others, gain experience, serve their country. They're there. But those are reasons, quite frankly, they could go on social media and see. They could go on it. You can go on airforce.com, and we'll tell you what your starting pay will be. We'll tell you about all the great opportunities that exist.

But when we ask the people who decided not to join or were not propensed or who would not consider serving in our great military and positively changing their lives for the better, this is what they say. Number one reason: Possibility of injury of death, 58 percent. Leaving families or friends, 46 percent. Of course, they don't realize they're going to gain a much bigger family and a hell of a lot more friends by joining. (Applause)

Possibility of PTSD or others, 40 percent. When we ask, "What do you think when a veteran leaves military service, what percentage of them think is suffering certainly PTSD or whatever," the number that's most likely numbered is about 46 percent. The real number is less than 1 percent. Where do they get that from? Oh, I don't know, how about Hollyweird. Right? Every crime procedural drama, no matter what we have, there's always, oh, the guy took a hostage. He's a vet. We have to engage with people, ladies and gentlemen. The reasons to join are right there on a website.

But the reasons to diffuse people of their reasons why they wouldn't join, we must engage, you, I, all of us who know better, must look them in the eye and go: "That is not true." Should you be injured, we will take care of you for the rest of your lives to the best extent we can, and we'll continue to improve that. But your belief, your knowledge, your lack of knowledge of the United States military is severely hurting your chances to positively change your life for the better. You are missing opportunities. You are closing doors that haven't even been opened to you yet. We must, together, personally use the handshake, look the look in the eye and talk to the folks. Recruiting today cannot be left up to social media. It must be as it always was. A personal, where we inspire people, where we engage with them and we tell them about the incredible opportunities that await them as they serve the world's greatest nation in the world's greatest military. (Applause)

This is where I need you. You know, there are over 37,000 high schools in America, both private and public. 1,500 junior colleges. Out of those 37,000 high schools and 1,500 junior colleges, there are about 4,000 schools all around the America that either blatantly do not allow recruiters or in some way restrict them so severely that they are not in compliance with even this spirit of the law that says recruiters should have access to schools. 4,000 of them.

Now, some of them, a relatively small percentage of them, it's due to ideological concerns. And we have that in certain areas of the country. There's counter-recruiting going on, where one of our recruiters is allowed into the school but only if they're accompanied by an anti-war or anti-military group that hands out the most vile, disgusting and inaccurate information about what might happen as they actively try to do it. Now, thankfully that's in small areas of the country, but it is active and it is growing. The overwhelming majority of the schools don't do it, do without it for one simple reason: The members of that school board, that member of the high school, the faculty has no comprehension of the incredible opportunities that service in the United States military provides. That is unacceptable. We must re-engage and we must not allow it.

You can think whatever you want. It's a free country. If you want to feel that "I'm going to be ignorant about this and remain ignorant about the educational opportunities, about all the incredible benefits of service," fine. But you really, in my view, have no right to prevent your students from exploring the positive, life-changing experience of serving in our great military. (Applause)

So I challenge each and every one of you. My recruiters are all over, all over. I just talked to two of them in Reno here. Good news. Twenty-eight high schools they're
responsible for in this area, not one of them restricts. That's cool. That's great for Reno. It's not great for some of the areas where your posts are. Every single department in The American Legion has high schools that restrict access.

I'm asking you to engage. You are leaders of your communities. I'm asking you to make sure that those high schools in your post area, in your departments, are not doing that. And if they are, work to educate them, to give those young 17- to 21-year-olds the option to at least consider positively changing their lives for the better.

I'm asking each and every one of you. That's why I need you. We need your help. We don't have enough recruiters. None of the services do. And if they say, "Oh, we allow recruiters," how do you allow recruiters? Some schools like to allow only one day a recruiter can come for job fairs. Sometimes they allow only one day for a recruiter to come and they have to sit in the principal's office and only talk to people who come in. I don't know about you, but I always wanted to stay away from the principal's office. (*Laughter*)

Again, where does it all come from? It comes from a colossal misunderstanding and ignorance of the incredible value of service in the United States military. I could go on and on and on and tell you more stats. Tell you what the environment is out there. But I think you know, I think you know how difficult it is these days. There just aren't enough of us out there. So you do a lot. And for that, everyone in the United States Air Force thanks you, American Legion. You do a lot. Now we're going to ask you to do more.

Keep, keep working on that. Make sure that your high schools are allowing it. Reach out to your recruiters, not just of the Air Force, of all the services, and ask how your post might help them become more successful. The more successful they are, the more lives they're going to positively change. It's fun. All of our recruiters are amazing. You're going to love to get to know them. Many of you know your local recruiters. Please reach out to them. They need your help, specifically when it comes to getting access to our target market, which is the youth of our great nation. We no longer can take for granted that we in the United States military will get whomever we need whenever we need them. We can't do it. The facts are there. Every single day, every single day, all of the recruiting services struggle to meet their goals.

But let me tell you one thing: Those that we do get, those incredible airmen, those incredible soldiers, sailors in the Marine Corps and Coast Guardsmen, I live with them, I see them. I'll tell you, they are truly America's best. I can't tell you how thrilled I am as a 57-year-old man to still be able to put on this uniform and go serve with them each and every day. Those that do choose to join our great Air Force and our great military are the very best of this nation, make no mistake. Their values of integrity and service above self, their excellence in all they do, are as strong as ours ever was or may have ever been. They will never give up, they will never lose, and they will never let us down. I respectfully request you do what I do every day. Every day I wake up and I pray I never let them down.

God bless you all, God bless The American Legion, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Before I introduce our next guest, are there Gold Star family members in our audience? If so, would you please stand. Mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, daughters, sons, brothers and sisters of our fallen heroes, thank you is inadequate. Just know that you are loved and appreciated by your American Legion Family. Thank you. (*Applause*)

Our next speaker belongs to a club that nobody hopes to join. She is a Gold Star mother whose son, Sergeant Jeffrey D. Young, gave his life for his country during the terrorist bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, on October 23, 1983. She is the chairman of the Gold Star Mothers National Monument Foundation. Let's give a warm welcome to Judith C. Young. (*Applause*)
Good afternoon. I've been truly honored to be able to say a few words about my project. As you can see, I'm a past national president of the American Gold Star Mothers, and I have taken on the job of being the chairman of the Gold Star Mothers National Monument Foundation. I would really like to thank everyone who has been so helpful to me in the last few days, having some problems with, let's say, luggage getting here that never arrived, et cetera. So everyone has been just so kind and helpful to me. I really want to thank them for that.

Over the years we've heard veterans all say to us "You mean there isn't a national monument or memorial to Gold Star mothers?" And we have to say, "No, there really isn't." And they would say, "Wow, it's really long overdue."

So I'm going to give you a very brief history of how this all came about. So take notes. I'm going to have a test when I'm all finished, see if you're paying attention. I'm going to be very brief in this because it can get very long. In 2002, in New York, Putnam County, the veterans there decided they wanted to have a statue and they wanted to have a statue of a Gold Star mother.

So one of our past national presidents went and she, from the various bunch of some things that were submitted, selected this particular statue. I know you can't see it, but I call her Our Lady. She's a depiction of a mom during World War II, being that's the most kind of casualties we've had, the most Gold Star mothers. She's receiving what they did have at that particular time a telegram telling her that her son has just been lost. So she's our emblem at this particular point. She is now the prototype statue in Putnam County, and in 2006 she was unveiled. Since then we've actually have two more statues. One is in New Hampshire and one is in Connecticut.

In 2009, we decided we had to come out from under the umbrella of the American Gold Star Mothers because actually you cannot have a memorial or monument in Washington, D.C. for a particular organization. So we have become completely separate from my organization, the American Gold Star Mothers. So in 2009, in New Jersey, I know there's some of you out there, I incorporated and became the Gold Star Mothers National Monument Foundation. That is the foundation that is behind getting this recognition.

That is not necessarily the name of what it's going to be. It will be called the Gold Star Mothers Family Memorial because mom is the center of the family. She has been; she always will be. We will have depictions of the rest of the family, those who received the Gold Star lapel button from the government, which is mother, father, sister, brother, wife, children, et cetera. They will all be depicted in our memorial in other ways. But mom will be the center of the memorial.

We had to go through Congress, and that took, well, actually four years, which was pretty good. We had to go through the House and then the Senate, and then the president, of course, signed off on it. We were lucky because my congressman added it to the National Defense Authorization Bill, and of course that has to be signed. So we were ahead of the game then. But then here comes the next part. There's three things that people ask you: Where is it going to be, what's it going to look like, and how much is it going to cost?

Well, you can't answer number three, how much it's going to cost, because you don't know where it's going to be. And if you don't know where it's going to be, you don't know how much space you'll have for it to look at. So you really have to go in steps to get this whole thing together.

Now, the authorization was given in 2012, and we then proceeded at that particular point to get a spot. We had a lot of pro objectives to this. One, we wanted to have the expression of our nation's gratitude and teach that military service is a worthy endeavor,
and we wanted to commemorate the history of the Gold Star Mothers and the Gold Star Families on their benefits as to what they give back to the veterans. I mean, they all do work in many various ways. We also wanted to recognize the loss that a Gold Star Mother and her family does share.

We can now say that we are going to be at the gates of Arlington National Cemetery. We had the Women's Memorial Service surrounding us, we have the Fourth Infantry, and we have the United Spanish War Veterans Memorial. There are several niches that are along the boulevard there. We have been offered that one. They have a few left. But we wanted this particular spot. We are now going to be at Arlington National Cemetery. And we have the official, official word as of November that it is definitely our spot. And the National Park Service has been with us all along the way. I have to say, they have been very supportive. Now, the existing buildings, as you can see around there, are if you're coming out of the opening, visiting center there, then we are to the right, and that looks towards the Women's Memorial. And General Vaught, who is also one of our honorary members, was very helpful in us getting our site. I'm very grateful to her.

So now we go to the design stage. One thing we did promise the National Park Service is we would have no water because they do not like to get water because it's such high maintenance. And we did promise them that. But the other thing we promised them would be the fact that we're going to restore all the oak trees that have more or less died. They were planted in 1929, and they have since either come down or, because of construction, et cetera, have now died. We will replace all those. This is the concept of what our memorial would like to look like. It is in the stages right now. We again have to go through all the committees in D.C. We have to go through National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, etcetera. We've had to do that all along. However, at this particular point, the Commission of Fine Arts really doesn't like my lady. I don't know what they want, but as the secretary of Labor said to me yesterday, it's your memorial and it's what you want; what difference does it make whether they like it or not? So I totally agreed with him on that one. (Applause)

This is going to be the inside of the memorial. We're not having a lot of confusion in there. There will be the statue. There will also be the Gold Star lapel button symbol with the various service organizations surrounding it. But it's meant to be a place where people can gather. On the far wall there will be the reliefs depicting various aspects of the family life. One of the things that we have chosen for the reliefs would be the caisson in Arlington National Cemetery, and we wanted to do that in honor of Arlington National Cemetery.

We also had hundreds of photos of mothers, fathers, with their sons, their daughters, the wives, et cetera, of all nations, all nationalities depicting the background of the military service and who then have sent their children off to serve and have lost them.

So we're very proud of our organization and what we're trying to do. So we have some various things that we want to do with this. One of the things is we want to be independent from the other commemorative works. You know, you don't want to have to be interfering with them. We have a height limit. We don't want it to be too tall because we certainly don't want it to overshadow anything. We are going to avoid any light pollution, et cetera. Again, no water in there. And the spaces for walking, walkers, wheelchairs, et cetera, all these things have been taken into effect. There will be a path leading in, and then there will be a path leading out.

So we're very pleased with this, and we are hoping that maybe by next year we will be able to break ground with it. I'm just very happy that I was able to be able to share this project with you. It did start in 2002, so, you know, we are kind of into getting into the years. So I'm kind of hoping by next year, if we have the groundbreaking, that we can move a little bit faster towards this.
But we want to be able to recognize mom and her family as to her loss, what they have given, what they have shared. We know that the veterans that we have spoken to, they all have someone that they know that they lost either while they were in combat or as an illness to any one of the many things that have occurred while you're in the service. So everyone that we have talked to said, yes, they know a Gold Star mom, they know their family, and they are kind of hoping that we will get this thing accomplished soon.

So somebody had to do it. It's been long overdue. The Gold Star Mothers National Monument Foundation is the backbone behind this. I want to thank you very much for your time. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Soldier's Wish is an organization that is dedicated to meeting the needs for military personnel, veterans, and their families. By authority of our National Executive Committee, The American Legion has established an official relationship with this outstanding group. Please welcome the executive director of Soldier's Wish, Mark Ochsenbein. (Applause)

Presentation: Mark Ochsenbein
Soldier's Wish

Oh, my gosh. I'm trying to get these people, they're like: I don't want to get up there close to that podium. It's like it scares them. We got any Marines out there? Okay. Now that I know that, I'm going to start speaking a lot slower. (Laughter)

All right. All right. Good afternoon. As you know, I'm Mark Ochsenbein. I'm the volunteer executive director of Soldier's Wish. It's an honor for me to be here. I have board members back here that are part of it, they're part of The Legion. Ken Danilson, Dave Warnken, I want to thank them for being here today.

And we're going to give a wish today, but I want to talk a little bit about the recipient. I have the Nevada commander here, Yvette Weigold, and we're going to be giving this wish to a Nevada Legioneer. It's great. What I want to do is talk a little bit about that person as we get going here. Let's see here. How are we going to do this? First, the person, believe it or not, and that's why I'm talking a little slow, joined the Marines and was in the Marine Corps for a period of time, I think about five years. Then they realized they could speak a little faster so they went and jumped over into the Army. That's right. Did I hear that again? Oh, hooah. You know, you had that Air Force general up here cutting down on the Army, but you notice he had airborne wings on. Army. Just that's all I want to say.

All right. But we're going to give a great wish today. This recipient is a veteran, 27-year veteran, of the Marine Corps and U.S. Army. This individual puts thousands of hours into volunteer work to help the veteran, to help their families, and just continues on and on and on. This veteran has struggled with cancer and is now in remission. Thank God. (Applause)

Hooah. I was wondering what it is we're going to be able to do for this individual to give this individual a wish. I've been playing covert operations today. I'm a special operations operator, and I've been talking to that individual for quite a while. So sometimes you got to go to another source, so I went to another source. Her daughter's name is Rachel. Come on, Rachel. She didn't know she was coming. How great is that? Her daughter is not from here. We got her daughter in. She's taking classes. And our wish recipient, of course, is Yvette. (Applause)

That's right. Yvette gives 110 percent to The American Legion. She gives 110 percent to veterans. We wanted to help her out for all the work that she's done at Soldier's Wish. So had the great idea. As you know, she's going to be traveling around a lot in her job as a
commander throughout the state, so we're going to get her a new set of tires. But guess what? Rachel said, well, she just got a set. I was like, well, crap. (Laughter) So what we're going to do is we're going to reimburse her for those tires. We're going to do some help around her house to get things going. She's a single parent. Let me tell you, when you got two kids in college, it is not cheap. And we're going to help her out for all that she does. I just found out that she goes and is an ambassador for the women's military museum at Arlington. Is that correct? The women's museum. I said, "How are you going to get there?" She says, "I'm going to have to fly up there if I can get off work." I said, "Do you think you will be able to get off work?" She said, "I hope so. I think I can." I said, "Who pays for your plane fare?" She says, "I do." Guess what? We're going to take care of your plane fare. All right? (Applause)

Soldier's Wish helps all services, active duty, veterans, and their families. This is about taking care of one of your own, and we've got to do that. Come on out here, guys. Please come on out. Got the Nevada delegation here. She's the state commander, and that adds a lot more work on her with all the volunteer work. She does have a full-time job. She helps families that are a part of the National Guard, and she helps them. She's a very caring, wonderful woman. I had to keep this secret and classified because I know if I told her she was going to get a wish, she would have thrown a fit and said, "No, there's somebody else that's more deserving than me." That's what she's all about.

You know, we gave a wish yesterday to a young Marine. We gave one this morning to a Vietnam vet that's suffering from the effects of Agent Orange. We have a great Legionnaire here that deserves a wish and so much more for all the help that she does. At this time, friend, would you like to say a couple words? (Applause)

DELEGATE WEIGOLD (NV): A bunch of sneaky people I work with, apparently. I had no idea this was happening. I was actually shocked to be asked to come out here and help present a Soldier's Wish to someone in Nevada. I'm shocked. I'm overwhelmed, and I just want to say thank you to everyone who took part in sneaking my daughter here and everything. I want to know who's watching the dogs. (Laughter)

MARK OCHSENBEIN: Again, thanks. Thanks to Nevada for what they're doing, all they've done to help us out here. Thank you so much. Thank you so much for coming, Rachel, and our board members. Ladies and gentlemen, I salute you for all that you do. Let's keep it going. Hooah. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Chair recognizes James W. "Bill" Oxford of North Carolina, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Legislation, for the purpose of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Legislation**  
**James Oxford, North Carolina, Chairman**

The National Convention Committee on Legislation met on Sunday, August 20, 2017 at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, D6. There were 45 delegates to the Committee present and 12 guests in attendance.

Following the preliminary activities to officially organize the Committee, the Chairman and Secretary were duly elected. I, James Oxford, a delegate from the Department of North Carolina, was elect Chairman following a motion from Gary Force, a delegate from the Department of Colorado. Art Schwabe, a delegate from Florida, was elected Secretary following a motion from Darrell Hansel, a delegate from the Department of Indiana.

There was no new business to discuss. The Legislation Convention Committee received no resolutions for consideration.
A motion by Bill Babe, a delegate from the Department of Wisconsin, was initiated to allow the Chairman and Secretary to make technical corrections to the Committee Report, as necessary and appropriate, and to authorize the Chairman and Secretary to sign the report on behalf of the Convention Committee on Legislation. This motion was unanimously approved and adopted by the Legislative Convention Committee.

Commander, if I can deviate from the script just one moment. We have heard a lot about the Coin Act. The Senators with us, both Heller and Cruz, were both on part. If your representative is not, make the call. Make that bill pass. In closing, I thank all of you for your service to this great nation and I am privileged to share this stage with true patriots.

LEGISLATION COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN OXFORD: Commander Schmidt, as a duly authorized delegate to this Convention from the Department of North Carolina, I move for the adoption of this report. ... Second.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: We've heard the motion. And I believe we heard a second, did we not? Are there any discussions? All in favor say aye. Opposed? The report of Legislation is adopted.

Tomorrow we will receive donations for Operation Comfort Warriors following the National Security report. Legionnaires, today has been a great day. Today has been a historic day. Tomorrow will also be historic. As you leave the hall today, think about what you've heard, what you've seen. We are a great organization. We do a lot of things. And, again, be proud of what you've done and also be proud of what you're going to do.

Legionnaires, please join me in a salute to the flag of our United States. One!

... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Two! The time now is 3:15. The convention will stand in recess until 8:30 a.m. tomorrow.

... At 3:15 p.m., the Convention was recessed to reconvene the following day, August 24, 2017, at 8:30 a.m.
PROCEEDINGS
THIRD DAY

Thursday, August 24, 2017

... At 8:30 a.m., the delegates assembled for the third day of the 99th Annual National Convention, and the following proceedings were had.

Call to Order
Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon, National Commander

Fellow Legionnaires and ladies and gentlemen, as we begin our program today, please join me in a round of applause for Rick Pedro on the keyboard. (Applause) Thank you, Rick. Great job, as usual. The convention will now come to order. I call on the sergeant-at-arms.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: With the flag of our nation in place, hand salute. Two! ... At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: For the invocation, I call on National Chaplain Harvey Klee of Texas. Please uncover.

Invocation
Harvey H. Klee, Texas, National Chaplain

Divine Creator of all things good on this Earth and beyond, we thank You for the grace of another day and all that today may bring forth, a day of joy, excitement, anticipation, adventure and optimism. May Your beneficence abound as we continue in our service for God and country. You have given us this good land for our heritage. We humbly ask that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of Your favor and glad to do Your will. Bless our land with honorable endeavor, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord and confusion, from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way defend our liberties, and fashion into one people the multitude brought here out of many nations and tongues. Endow with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in Your name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that through obedience to Your law may we show forth Your praise among the nations on Earth. In time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, do not allow our trust in You to fail. This we pray in Your most sacred name, amen.

Pledge of Allegiance

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Chaplain Klee. I now call on the national sergeant-at-arms, Kevin J. Owens of Oregon, to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance to our flag. ... At this time, the delegation recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Cover. The 99th National Convention of The American Legion is now in session.

Presentation: The American Legion Fourth Estate Award
Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon, National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: We begin this morning by recognizing outstanding achievement in journalism that had a positive impact on a community. The American Legion Fourth Estate Award is difficult to earn. It is a testament to the
demanding nature of the competition and the quality of entries. Not only do the reports have to be informative and entertaining, they have to provide a tangible benefit to society.

Broadcast Category
KTVU 2 Investigates, Oakland, California

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Being honored in the broadcast category is KTVU-TV of Oakland, California. In its series "Mental Hospital Hell," the Fox affiliate exposed horrific conditions inside the John George Psychiatric Hospital in Alameda County, California. The station obtained hidden-video footage of patients sleeping and eating on the floor, with some of them moaning and crying for help, in a severely overcrowded facility. The stories triggered major policy and staffing changes at the hospital, including the hiring of more doctors and nurses and the resignation of the hospital's director. Please turn your attention to the video monitors.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Ladies and gentlemen, Investigative Executive Producer Simone Aponte and News Director Amber Eikel of KTVU/Channel 2. Welcome them. (Applause)

SIMONE APONTE: Good morning. I just want to say thank you. This is such an honor for us to be here and to receive this award. It's a great honor to serve our community as journalists and to shine a light on these types of stories.

The story you just saw about John George Hospital was, frankly, stunning when we saw the video and people started coming forward. We were really happy that we could get change done in Alameda County and San Leandro. I think that's the kind of work as journalists we strive for every day. It's not to do the wildfire or the car crash, but it's to really dedicate ourselves to our communities and the people in our communities and to hopefully shine a light on issues that need to be brought to attention of leadership in our communities.

I feel that it's great that mental illness is now being highlighted. I'd like to think that we're going in a positive direction. But there's still a lot more work to do. I know our team and the other talented journalists that are up here today being honored are going to continue to do dedicated work in our communities to hopefully make our communities better, especially when it comes to mental illness. Thank you very much. (Applause)

Online Category
The Clarion-Ledger, Jackson, Mississippi

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Fourth Estate Internet/New Media Award goes to the Clarion-Ledger of Jackson, Mississippi. For more than half a century, Mississippi native Felix Vail evaded justice with at least three apparent victims in his wake. But due to the tenacious reporting of Jerry Mitchell, a previous American Legion Fourth Estate Award winner, proof surfaced that Vail's first wife was a victim of homicide. Mr. Mitchell uncovered new witnesses and evidence, which helped lead to Mr. Vail's later conviction for the 1962 murder. It was the oldest conviction of a suspected serial killer in history. Here is a look at some of our award winner's reporting.

... At this time, the delegation viewed a video.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Ladies and gentlemen, Investigative Reporter Jerry Mitchell. (Applause)
JERRY MITCHELL: It's such an honor to be with you here today and receive this award. A lot of people did a lot of work, and I want to thank them by name real quickly. Debbie Skipper, my boss; Sam, our executive editor; and Steve Elfers, who did the video that you saw; and Shawn Sullivan, who did the excellent website.

But I really want to thank the families who basically came to me. I was approached by Annette, the last woman you saw pictured, I was approached by her mother. She called me out of the blue and she said, "Would you be interested in writing about a serial killer living in Mississippi?" And so I said, "Well, yeah."

She decided she would come down to Mississippi. She wanted to confront Felix Vail about her daughter who was missing and the other woman missing and the first wife and just basically tell him she felt like he killed all these women. She wanted to go confront him. I said, "I want to go with you." Because I knew it sounded like a good news story, obviously.

We went to this remote area in Mississippi. I mean, extremely rural. There was like a gate, and she hopped the gate. So I followed her, and we went down like this remote trail, and finally it cleared out. You could see these two trailers. One that was on the left was kind of a newer trailer, and she went and knocked on the door. We didn't answer. I'm just starting to take in my surroundings. This is a guy that's a suspected serial killer. Right? I'm just kind of taking this in and the woods all around us. I'm thinking: Is he around? Where is he?

Then she takes off to this other trailer, which you could tell had been storm damaged because there was like wood in the front window of the trailer. She made it over to the other trailer before I even got over there. The next thing I knew, the back window was missing on the trailer, so she crawled in. Then she opened the front door, so I could see in now, and she just started rummaging around.

The next thing I knew she threw out a machete, and it clanked on the floor. Then she threw out another machete and another machete and all these swords. I'm like: What have I gotten myself into? So it was an interesting journey.

I wrote about 9,000 words on Felix Vail. In fact, during the middle of my reporting, Felix Vail disappeared again. He had a habit of doing that. Didn't know where he went to, but I wrote this story about him. The next thing I know, I think within five months he was arrested. He went on trial this past August and was, in fact, convicted of his first wife's murder. (Applause)

It's worth applauding; it is. I talked this past Mother's Day to Annette's mother, Mary Rose, again, after this journey began, and what she said to me was, "This is the best Mother's Day I've had in 33 years." She said, "The sky just looks bluer. The plants just look greener. It's amazing how justice changes things."

May God bless you. Thank you so much. (Applause)

Print Category
Arizona Republic, Phoenix, Arizona

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Arizona Republic continued its outstanding coverage of the troubled VA Medical Center in Phoenix, which led to national outrage in 2014 and resulted in the resignation of the VA secretary and other top officials, as other VA scandals were exposed. Reporter Dennis Wagner examined the VA two years after the crisis on a nationwide quest to examine its progress. Over a six-month period in 2016, he visited hospitals and met with scores of patients, advocates, politicians, critics and administrators. It's clear that this newspaper believes it has a special obligation to covering this important issue. The impact of the series is already being seen through recent
legislation and future decisions made by VA, the White House, and Congress. Please turn your attention once again to the monitor. ... At this time, the delegation viewed a video.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Accepting the award is Investigative Reporter Dennis Wagner. (Applause)

DENNIS WAGNER: Good morning. I thank you guys very much for recognizing journalism in this day and age. As you probably know, newspapers and all the media have been shrinking, and it's really tough to devote resources to a big story. I am so grateful to my newspaper for putting in the time and the effort.

When some doctors at the Phoenix VA first came to me and started telling me about just horrible wait times, where patients were waiting for months and months to get tests for cancer or for treatment for any myriad of diseases and just the suffering that was going on, at first it was a story for me about bureaucracy gone mad or government corruption or something like that. But as soon as I started interviewing veterans who were trying to get that care and seeing the utter frustration and helplessness that they felt dealing with a system that would not respond, it transformed for me.

And partly because my father's a World War II veteran, and I started seeing my father's face in the men and women that I was interviewing. He wasn't getting VA care, but he was also ill at the time. Over the past three years I've kept that image in my face working on the stories. Last year, while I was traveling from VA hospital to VA hospital to try to see how much things had improved, my father died while I was doing that trip. And it drove it home all the more. I think there is some improvement in the VA. I'm hoping there will be a lot more. But what I would encourage is for each and every one of you to stand up and fight for your right to get good medical care. You earned it, and you deserve it.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Chair recognizes G. Michael Schlee of Maryland, chairman of the National Convention Committee on National Security, for the purpose of making a report. Mr. Chairman.

Report: Convention Committee on National Security
G. Michael Schlee, Maryland, Chairman

At 9:00 a.m., Sunday, August 20, 2017, 270 delegates and alternates assigned to the Convention Committee on National Security initially met in the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, Room A1 & A6. Mr. G. Michael Schlee (Maryland) was elected Chairman and Mr. E.C. Toppin (North Carolina) was appointed Secretary.

After the initial meeting, the following convention committees met, held elections and dealt with the resolutions assigned to them:

Aerospace
Rick Oertel (VA), Chairman
Charles Craynon (OH), Secretary

Conventional Armed Forces
Charles E. Kruger (MN), Chairman
Jake Cabuag (WA), Secretary

Foreign Relations
Bill Flanagan (IL), Chairman
John Mella (MI), Secretary

Law and Order & Homeland Security
George Wehrli (FL), Chairman
Richard Keiser (NY), Secretary
Proceedings of Thursday, August 24, 2017

Military Benefits & Quality of Life
Jerry Jordan (IN), Chairman
Roger Friend, (OH), Secretary

National Guard and Reserve Forces
William Goede (MN), Chairman
Ron Struble (IA), Secretary

Unconventional Forces and Intelligence
Doug Haggan (FR), Chairman
Douglas Frahm (NE), Secretary

At 10:15 am, Sunday, August 20, 2017, the delegates and alternates assigned to the Convention Committee on Security reconvened in the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, Room A1 & A6. Reports of all Convention Committees were read and their recommended actions on resolutions considered. A total of 15 resolutions were assigned to the Convention Committee on National Security or prepared by the Committee to meet issues which were held to be of concern to The American Legion and germane to its principles and objectives. The Convention Committee authorized the Chairman and Secretary to sign the report of the Convention Committee on National Security on behalf of its delegates and make technical and administrative corrections to the resolutions reported out of the Committee.

Conventional Armed Forces
Charles Kruger, Minnesota, Chairman

Approved Resolutions

Resolution No. 21: National Defense Budget
Origin: Maryland

 WHEREAS, The American Legion views a strong national defense as paramount to national security; and
 WHEREAS, The president has submitted a proposed $639 billion total defense budget for 2018; and
 WHEREAS, The proposed budget reverses sequestration and increases defense spending caps; and
 WHEREAS, The Air Force desperately needs to replace its aging aircraft and the proposed budget includes the purchase of 70 F-35s as well as $2 billion allocated for B-2 Bomber research and development; and
 WHEREAS, The proposed budget will increase the force end strength by nearly 50,000, it also increases service members pay and benefits, which prevents the loss of highly trained men and women; and
 WHEREAS, The United State of America’s major adversaries, Russia and China, along with rouge nations such as North Korea and Iran are ramping up their military stocks and capabilities; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion urge Congress to support budget increases in military spending to reverse the effects of sequestration; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That Congress not allow our military forces to reach a weakened state in these uncertain and perilous times.
Resolution No. 23: Prohibition on Wrongful Broadcast or Distribution of Intimate Visual Images  
Origin: Maryland  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security  
WHEREAS, In March 2017 an online message board titled Marines United was made public, where in members of the military shared nude photographs of servicemembers including some taken without the member’s knowledge; and  
WHEREAS, The investigation has led to 21 felony charges; and  
WHEREAS, As veterans who have honorably served our nation, we expect that all servicemembers be treated with respect; and  
WHEREAS, The American Legion calls upon all in the family of military veterans to stand up and speak out against bullying and harassment wherever it occurs; and  
WHEREAS, The American Legion fully supports the victims of harassment; and  
WHEREAS, The American Legion supports the actions of the commandant of the Marine Corps for taking these allegations seriously and looks forward to learning the results of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service so those in violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice be held accountable for their actions; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion urges Congress to amend Title 10, United States Code to make actions of wrongful broadcasting or distribution of intimate visual images an offense subject to court martial.

Resolution No. 70: Medal of Honor for E. Royce Williams  
Origin: California  
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security  
WHEREAS, On November 18, 1952, then LT E. Royce Williams, USN serving with Fighter Squadron Seven Hundred Eighty-One (VF-781) on the USS Oriskany participated in an early morning major strike against the Hoeryang industrial complex five miles from the North Korea-Russian border; and  
WHEREAS, Against later enemy retaliating bogeys LT Williams launched in treacherous winter weather as section lead of a four plane F9F-5 Combat Air Patrol (CAP) in defense of Carrier Task Force 77 (CTF-77); and  
WHEREAS, With complications amidst the other three CAP aircraft, LT Williams unhesitatingly and with no regard for personal safety or risk of life, climbed and singly engaged the seven superior MiG-15s; and  
WHEREAS, In a fierce 30-40 minute fight, LT Williams' superb pilot skills and gunnery accounted for three MiGs downed and a fourth confirmed years later, stopping the attack against CTF-77 in its tracks; and  
WHEREAS, Out of ammo and suffering a 37 mm hit which disabled all but elevator control and a little aileron control LT Williams successfully disengaged and returned to the task force using the weather for cover; and  
WHEREAS, LT Williams displayed outstanding airmanship in getting his badly damaged F9F-5 back on USS Oriskany with a minimum control speed of 170 knots (normal carrier approach speed 105 knots); and  
WHEREAS, LT Williams' singular courage, superb skill, call to duty over personal risk of life reflected great credit upon himself and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service; and  
WHEREAS, LT Williams' singular act of valor is unmatched either in the Korean War, the Vietnam War, or since then; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion petition the United
States Congress and the Department of Defense to consider CAPT E. Royce Williams USN (Ret.) to be awarded the Medal of Honor for his act of valor given in service to our country on Nov. 18, 1952; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion continues to exert the maximum effort for honoring our forgotten heroes that have given so much to ensure our freedom.

Resolution Referred to Standing Commission on National Security

Resolution No. 5 (MT): Strategic Nuclear Policy

Foreign Relations
Bill Flanagan, Illinois, Chairman

Resolution No. 22: POW/MIA Policies
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(As amended)

WHEREAS, American servicemembers and civilians remain missing or otherwise unaccounted for from America’s past wars and conflicts, and reports indicate that cases of Americans last known alive, information regarding their fates is still illusive; and

WHEREAS, The families of POW/MIAs suffer untold uncertainty due to the lack of information about and accounting for their missing loved one, often in spite of heroic efforts by U.S. specialists; and

WHEREAS, The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2010 called upon the secretary of defense to provide funds, personnel, and resources to significantly increase the capability and capacity of the Department of Defense (DOD) to account for missing persons so that, beginning with fiscal year 2015, at least 200 missing persons are accounted for annually under the program; and

WHEREAS, Improvements in foreign government cooperation have helped identify locations of incident sites that may enable remains of U.S. personnel to be recovered and identified by the U.S. Government; and

WHEREAS, Promising advances in scientific DNA capabilities and other identification techniques involving radiographic comparison and facial superimposition have dramatically increased the U.S. Government’s ability to identify remains of unaccounted for servicemen and civilians for whom identification had not earlier been possible; and

WHEREAS, Each member of the DOD POW/MIA accounting community plays a vital role in the mission to account for missing and unaccounted for U.S. servicemen and civilians from our nation’s past wars and conflicts; and

WHEREAS, The secretary of defense recently directed “complete reorganization” of the DOD POW/MIA accounting community, a consolidation encouraging to family members and veterans, though close scrutiny for viability will continue to be required; and

WHEREAS, The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency was formed as a result of the defense secretary’s directive for “complete reorganization” and is responsible for policy control and operational implementation to achieve the fullest possible accounting for missing U.S. personnel; and

WHEREAS, The POW/MIA accounting effort should continue to be a matter of highest national priority until all reasonable actions have been taken to achieve the fullest possible accounting for all U.S. personnel; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion fully supports and advocates for the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans, in every country, on every continent; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion believes U.S. Government POW/MIA operations, though currently still inadequate, are achieving substantial progress; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion remains steadfast in our commitment to the goal of achieving the fullest possible accounting for all U.S. military personnel and designated civilian personnel missing and unaccounted for from our nation’s past conflicts and current and present wars; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the president and members of Congress to speak out on every occasion on the need to expedite the return of U.S. personnel still missing and unaccounted for, regardless of location or era of loss; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urges the president and Congress to support legislation and policies that will sustain use of all necessary resources to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing American servicemembers and designated civilians regardless of location or era of loss; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon Congress to provide full funding for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency to meet requirements for personnel and operations to achieve accounting goals and to ensure these funds not be redirected by the Department of Defense for any other purpose; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon the president and Congress to continue to declassify all POW/MIA information (except that revealing intelligence sources or methods) in a form readily available to the affected families and for public review; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon Congress to establish a joint standing congressional committee on POW/MIA affairs to oversee plans and policies to ensure continued priority by the executive branch in addressing requirements to achieve the POW/MIA accounting goals; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon the president to strengthen the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIsAs, and to initiate similar such commissions with the People's Republic of China, and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to increase POW/MIA accounting and recovery efforts; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon the president and Congress to continue taking favorable steps with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as Hanoi increases efforts to provide the fullest possible accounting for U.S. personnel still missing in Vietnam or in areas of Laos and Cambodia controlled by Vietnam during the Vietnam War; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That "fullest possible accounting" is defined as releasing live prisoners, repatriating remains of those killed in action or who died in captivity, or providing convincing evidence as to why neither is possible.

Resolution No. 40: USS Liberty
Origin: Washington
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security
(As amended)

WHEREAS, On June 8, 1967, while operating in support of the National Security Agency (NSA) in international waters, properly marked as to her identity and nationality, and in calm, clear weather in the eastern Mediterranean, the USS Liberty (AGTR-5) was
the target of an unprovoked attack by Israeli military forces that killed 34 members of the Liberty's crew and wounded 173; and

WHEREAS, In recognition of their heroic efforts during and after the Israeli onslaught, Liberty crew members were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, 2 Navy Crosses, 12 Silver Stars, 20 Bronze Stars, more than 200 Purple Hearts, and the ship's captain, Navy Commander William L. McConagle, was awarded the Medal of Honor; and

WHEREAS, The June 28, 1967 public summary of proceedings of the Navy Court of Inquiry into the attack stated: "It was not the responsibility of the Court to rule on the culpability of the attackers and no evidence was heard from the attacking nation"; and

WHEREAS, According to Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) information reports from June and October, 1967, sources in Tel Aviv reported: "Israel's forces knew exactly what flag the LIBERTY was flying" and Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan "personally ordered the attack" on the Liberty over the objections of senior uniformed military personnel, one of whom characterized the attack as "pure murder"; and

WHEREAS, Richard Helms (Director of Central Intelligence, 1966-1973), stated in a 1984 CIA interview: "Everything possible was done to keep from the American public really the enormity of this attack on an American naval vessel" and, "since this is for the Agency's record, I don't think there can be any doubt that the Israelis knew exactly what they were doing ... any statement to the effect that they didn't know that it was an American ship ... is nonsense"; and

WHEREAS, Lieutenant General Marshall S. Carter, USA (ret.) (Director of the NSA, 1965-1969), recalled in a 1988 NSA interview that he stated at a Congressional hearing in 1967 that the attack on the Liberty: "Couldn't be anything else but deliberate. There's just no way you could have a series of circumstances that would justify it being an accident" and Carter indicated this remained his belief in 1988; and

WHEREAS, In a 2003 affidavit published in the Congressional Record, Captain Ward Boston, Jr., JAGC, USN (ret.), legal counsel for the 1967 Navy Court of Inquiry stated: "I know from personal conversations I had with Admiral Kidd [president of the Court of Inquiry] that President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara ordered him to conclude that the attack was a case of 'mistaken identity' despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary"; and

WHEREAS, According to findings, published in the Congressional Record, of the 2003 Independent Commission of Inquiry, chaired by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, USN (ret.): "There is compelling evidence that Israel's attack was a deliberate attempt to destroy an American ship and kill her entire crew" and, "the White House deliberately covered up the facts of this attack"; and

WHEREAS, In 2013, the Veterans of Foreign Wars adopted Resolution No. 423 calling "Upon Congress to immediately investigate the attack on the USS Liberty by the armed forces of Israel on June 8, 1967, in order to determine the truth behind the attack, and to bring closure to the families and crew"; and

WHEREAS, In August 1967, after the conclusion of the Navy Court of Inquiry, The American Legion adopted Resolution No. 508 (rescinded in 1984 without being first reviewed) declaring the published report of the Navy Court of Inquiry: "Fails to provide the American public with a satisfactory answer as to the reason for the attack" and stating that, "The American Legion denounces and condemns Israel's irresponsible attack" and demanding, "A complete and thorough investigation of the incident"; and

WHEREAS, According to Gurney Williams III, writing in The American Legion Magazine ("Death Strikes the Liberty", July 1997), Congress has never investigated the Israeli attack on the Liberty; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion calls upon the
Proceedings of Thursday, August 24, 2017

115th United States Congress to publicly, impartially, and thoroughly investigate the attack on the USS Liberty and its aftermath and to commence its investigation before the end of 2017, the 50th anniversary year of the attack.

Resolutions Received and Recorded

Resolution No. 1 (AK): Taiwan Straits Dialogue
Resolution No. 24 (MD): Taiwan Defense Arms Sales
Resolution No. 25 (MD): Taiwan Straits Dialogue

Law and Order & Homeland Security
George Wehrli, Florida, Chairman

Approved Resolutions

Resolution No. 17: Counter Transnational Organized Crime
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, Transnational organized crime refers to those self-perpetuating associations of individuals who operate transnationally for the purpose of obtaining power, influence, monetary and/or commercial gains, wholly or in part by illegal means, while protecting their activities through a pattern of corruption and/or violence, or while protecting their illegal activities through a transnational organizational structure and the exploitation of transnational commerce or communication mechanisms; and

WHEREAS, Transnational organized crime is a vastly understated threat to public health and safety, the rule of law, and both the national and homeland security of the United States; and

WHEREAS, The activities of organized criminal groups are highly varied, and include drug, weapons, and human trafficking (including prostitution and kidnapping), murder (including contract killings and assassinations), cyber-crime, copyright infringement, counterfeiting, identity theft, money laundering, extortion, illegal gambling, and terrorism; and

WHEREAS, The complexity and seriousness of the crimes committed by global criminal networks pose a threat not only to the citizenry of the United States, but to democracy and legitimate economic development around the world as well; and

WHEREAS, Federal, state, and municipal law enforcement and criminal justice resources have been strained or outmatched by sophisticated, fluid, and violent criminal groups; and

WHEREAS, Heroin trafficking, in particular, poses an insidious peril to local communities, as witnessed by the skyrocketing rates of non-prescription opioid deaths within the United States since 2000; and

WHEREAS, Transnational criminal organizations, and the international criminal conspiracies they are engaged in, require a comprehensive, fully-funded ‘whole-of-government’ and ‘whole-of-society’ response to diminish their destructive activities and ill-effects; and

WHEREAS, The United States must cooperate with and, where necessary, provide aid and support to partner nations in order to order to most effectively deal with the regional and international presence of transnational criminal organizations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion calls on the United
States government to renew its commitment to countering transnational organized crime in all its forms, both domestically and globally, by coordinating with and rendering aid and support to all municipal, state, and international efforts to do the same.

Resolution No. 19: Homeland Security and the Opioid Epidemic
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, In 2015 there were 52,000 American deaths from all drug overdoses, with 33,000, from opioids, compared to 16,000 in 2010 and 4,000 in 1999; and
WHEREAS, Nearly half of all opioid overdose deaths involve a prescription opioid; and
WHEREAS, The epidemic of opioid addiction and death began in the 1990s as pharmaceutical companies started marketing opioids as a treatment for chronic pain, where in the past opioids had been reserved for acute pain and palliative care because of their known addictive qualities and diminishing effects based on user tolerance; and
WHEREAS, Federal and state governments began to crack down on the over-prescription of opioids in 2010, which while effective at diminishing the supply of prescription opioids in circulation had the unintended consequence of driving users toward cheaper and more readily available heroin and other synthetic opioids like fentanyl; and
WHEREAS, The opioid epidemic is exacerbated by transnational criminal organizations trafficking heroin and other opioids into the United States; and
WHEREAS, It is essential to coordinate a regional strategy between the governments of United States, Mexico, and other Central and South American nations to reduce supply through interdiction, as well as nations like China who export chemical precursors; and
WHEREAS, Federal and state law enforcement and public health responses to combatting the opioid epidemic are constrained by high demand, lack of funding, geography, and poor or incomplete data collection; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That the United States government develop comprehensive and robust drug use surveillance and monitoring programs in collaboration with state and municipal authorities to provide targeted law enforcement and public health interventions into communities, that the White House and Congress support all evidence-based efforts at supply, demand, and harm reduction, and that the White House and Congress pursue wide-ranging efforts to increase regional security and counter transnational organized crime.

Resolution No. 27: Sanctuary Cities
Origin: Ohio
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The safety and security of all Americans depends on a civil and law-abiding society; and
WHEREAS, Immigration to the United States can be categorized either legal or illegal; and
WHEREAS, There are at least 165 cities and counties in the United States that harbor illegal immigrants by virtue of local policies that restrict law enforcement authorities from alerting federal authorities about an immigrants legal status; and
WHEREAS, These “sanctuary cities” receive a total of twenty-seven billion dollars annually from the federal government while not complying with federal immigration policies; and
WHEREAS, The American Legion Preamble states, “To maintain law and order”; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion take a firm stand in opposition of American citizens taxpayer dollars funding “sanctuary cities” that do not cooperate with the federal authorities on reporting the immigration status of those who violate federal, state, and local laws.

Rejected Resolution

Resolution No. 89 (Convention Committee on National Security): Healthcare Opportunities for Patriots in Exile

Military Benefits and Quality of Life
Jerry Jordan, Indiana, Chairman

Resolved to Standing Commission

Resolution No. 9 (NC): Support Walkway in Arlington National Cemetery on Chaplains Hill

Rejected Resolution

Resolution No. 73 (NJ): Sandy Hook Bay Pier

Unconventional Forces & Intelligence
Doug Haggan, France, Chairman

Approved Resolution

Resolution No. 20: National Cybersecurity Strategy
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security (As amended)

WHEREAS, Cybersecurity is broadly defined as a set of activities and other measures intended to protect—from attack, disruption, or other threats—computers, computer networks, related hardware and devices software and the information they contain and communicate, including software and data; and

WHEREAS, Digital capabilities today underpin financial, economic, transportation, energy, and defense infrastructure, and the economy, society and governments now rely on the cyber domain for many essential functions; and

WHEREAS, Cyber threats have been increasing and evolving at a fast pace; and

WHEREAS, Satisfactory solutions will require building partnerships among public and private organizations, establishing mechanisms and incentives to foster routine information sharing and collective defense, and educating users about their role in thwarting increasingly sophisticated attacks; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion calls on the United States government to continue to develop and refine processes and policies that will enhance interagency cybersecurity, to develop programs, initiatives, and other
activities that educate citizens and grow the U.S. cybersecurity workforce across all levels of government, to support state and municipal government and private sector actors in building resilient networks through information sharing and promulgation of best practices and standards, and to ensure the protection of critical infrastructure from cyber and other electronic attack.

Mr. Commander, National Officers, and Fellow Delegates. I am particularly pleased to announce the winners of the National Blood Donor Awards for this past year.

Category I - Departments with 100,000 or more members
Post & Individual Participation: No submission

Category II - 70,000 to 99,999 members
Post & Individual Participation: Minnesota

Category III - 40,000 to 69,999 members
Post & Individual Participation: Maryland

Category IV - 25,000 to 39,999 members
Post & Individual Participation: No submission

Category V - 10,000 to 24,999 members
Post & Individual Participation: Montana

Category VI - less than 10,000 members
Post & Individual Participation: No submission

Many of our Departments participated in the ROTC Awards Program this year. Close to 4,500 medals were awarded to deserving cadets in Senior ROTC and Junior ROTC Units. The winning Departments for 2016-2017 are the Departments of Alaska, Connecticut, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, and North Dakota. This speaks well for these Departments and The American Legion in their recognition of the youth of America enrolled in ROTC programs.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN SCHLEE: Mr. Commander, as a delegate to this Convention from the Department of Maryland, I move for the adoption of this report.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: You heard the motion. Is there a second? ... Second. Is there any discussion? Hearing none, all in favor say aye. Opposed? The ayes have it. Therefore, the report of National Security is adopted. I'll now accept donations for Operation Comfort Warriors.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Martel assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER MARTEL: If there are any donations, please come forward.

Donations to Operation Comfort Warriors

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER COMER: Thank you, commander. I'm proud to represent the state of Massachusetts as we present this check on behalf of Middleborough Post 64. With me is my department commander, Mike Davis, and also Judy Hall, who is a member of that unit, a past department president. On behalf of Bob Burke of Middleborough post, they did a fundraiser and did a great job on Comfort Warriors in almost one day, and I'm proud to present this check on their behalf for $9,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PA): From the great state of Pennsylvania, home of Past National Commanders Dominic DiFrancesco and Ronald Conley, we present a check for $22,055.50 for Operation Comfort Warriors.
DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SAMPSON (NY): Good morning, commander. John Sampson, chairman of the delegation from the great state of New York. Mr. Commander, I would like to present to you in support of Operation Comfort Warriors two checks totaling $13,048.

DELEGATE FARLEY (NY): Good morning. Jennifer Farley from the Department of New York proudly donating $6,200 for Operation Comfort Warriors on behalf of Broad Channel Unit 1404 in New York.

DELEGATE HAGGAN (FR): Good morning. FODPAL, Foreign and Outlying Departments and Posts of The American Legion, proudly presents $500 to Operation Comfort Warriors.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): Good morning. Paris Post 1 is honored to present a check for $250 for Operation Comfort Warriors, and the Department of France matching that with another $250 for Operation Comfort Warriors. Thank you.

DELEGATE GIMPEL (ID): NEC Art Gimpel from the Department of Idaho, $530.75.

DELEGATE FARRELL (TN): Former Commander Bobby Farrell, Membership Chairman Steve Wiseman of Department of Tennessee donate $450 to Operation Comfort Warriors.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CHAPMAN (OH): Good morning. Ron Chapman, delegation chairman from the Department of Ohio. I have a check for $700 from Post 557 in Wintersville, Ohio. And from the great Department of Ohio American Legion Family, I have two checks totaling $27,894.53, for a total of $28,594.53.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN MILTON (MN): Good morning. Delegate Chair Denise Milton from the great Department of Minnesota donates $1,000 to Operation Comfort Warriors. Shout-out to our veterans service officer, Jeremy Wolfstellar, who does an excellent job on utilizing the program. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): On behalf of the Department of New Jersey, we'd like to donate $1,000, Operation Comfort Warriors. And also we have a check for $500 from New Jersey Post 232.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MI): The Department of Michigan proudly presents $2,000 to Operation Comfort Warriors.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): Good morning. From the Department of Arizona, Post 58 in Fountain Hills, I have another check for $500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NM): From the great state of New Mexico, from the Western Division, Vice Commander Paul Espinoza, $859 was raised for Operation Comfort Warriors.

DELEGATE KILE (WV): The Southern caucus, the best caucus in The American Legion, proudly donates $9,240 to the NEF Fund.

DELEGATE ELSTON (WA): Wayne Elston, Department of Washington commander, we have a check from Chewela Chapter 54 for $1,000.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER KOUTZ: Good morning. First let me say thank you for all that you departments that are in The American Legion Family does for Operation Comfort Warriors. Thank you. Keep up the great work. From the Department of Indiana, we have some donations. The first one is the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility Post 398, $579; Hoosier Boys State, $1,109.47; Post 200, Booneville, my home post, $500; Ron and Brenda Barley, $100; Newburgh Post 44, $500; Plainfield Correctional Facility Post 198, another $499; and the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility, $372.12. The American Legion Family of Post 42, Floyds Knobs, Indiana, $3,500; American Legion Family, Post 42 again, $1,002.18; Richard and Andrea Wookey, Logansport, Indiana, $50. I received $20 cash from Jerry Flores from Colorado. For a total $8,431.77. Thank you
very much. I missed the most important one here. Our department commander, Marty Dzieglowicz, and his wife, $200 cash. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OR): Hi. Department of Oregon, from our District 10 commander, gives $250, Operation Comfort Warriors.

...National Commander Schmidt resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Let's give them all a hand for their contributions. (Applause)

Our Operation Comfort Warriors program does so much good work for those men and women who have represented us, you and I, on the global war on terror in their recovery and their rehabilitations. That's what we do, The American Legion Family. The Chair recognizes Ralph Bozella of Colorado, chairman of the National Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, for the purpose of report. Mr. Chairman.

Report: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Ralph P. Bozella, Colorado, Chairman

127 members of your Committee on Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation met at 9:00 a.m. on August 20, 2017, in Reno-Sparks Convention Center, Rooms D4-5, First Floor, Reno, Nevada which is respectfully submitted for your consideration.

The Committee was called to order by Louis Celli (MA), Liaison Representative appointed by the National Adjutant to act as temporary chairman. Melvin Brown (VA), Assistant Director for Health Policy, VA&R Division, acted as temporary secretary and called the roll. A quorum being present, nominations were received for permanent chairman. Ralph P. Bozella (CO), Chairman of the Standing National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, was unanimously elected Chairman of the Convention Committee.

Exercising the authority granted to him, the Chairman accepted nominations for secretary to the Convention Committee. Kelly Ackerman (MT), was voted as Committee Secretary. During their breakout sessions the subcommittees elected William J. Smith (PA), Chairman of the Claims and Rating Subcommittee and, Patrick Rourk (NY), as Secretary; Phil Youngblood (GA), Chairman of the Health Administration Committee, and James Stanko (CO), as Secretary; Richard Neville (NC), Chairman of the National Cemetery Committee, and Daniel Seehafer (WI), Secretary.

Subcommittee liaison assignments were as follows: Louis Celli Jr. (MA), Director, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division and Zachary Hearn (PA), Deputy Director for Claims to Benefits Administration and Roscoe Butler (MD), Deputy Director for Health Policy to Health Administration and Alex Zhang (NJ), Assistant Director for DoD Boards to National Cemetery.

A screening committee comprised of Department Service Officers in a preconvention meeting, screened and grouped the resolutions. A report of their action, with recommendations, was presented to the Convention Committee for consideration.

The Screening Committee conserved the time of the Convention Committee substantially. It was chaired by Ralph P. Bozella, Chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission and was composed of the following Department Service Officers:

REGION 1 – Ronald Laevasseur (RI)
REGION 2 – Scott D. Tafoya (OK)
REGION 3 – Adrian G. Gamboa (MD)
REGION 4 – Gary D. Easterling (MI)
REGION 5 – Mike Mader (NV)
The 29 Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation resolutions presented for the consideration of this Convention were referred by the Resolutions Assignment Committee. The following action on the resolutions was taken by the Convention Committee:

Approved or Approved w/Amendment.........................13
Consolidated with Resolutions Approved.........................0
Referred to the Standing Commission.................................3
Received and Recorded ......................................................7
Rejected ...........................................................................6

A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Chairman and Secretary to sign and deliver the report on the Convention Committee’s behalf.

A report of action taken on the (3) resolutions referred to the Standing National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission will be made to the National Executive Committee and to the Adjutant of the Department concerned.

Approved Resolutions or Approved with Amendment

Resolution No. 3: WWII Veterans Hospital and Medical Eligibility
Origin: Kentucky
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Through working with World War II veterans throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the department service director has discovered a disservice to the veterans who served during that war; and
WHEREAS, Of the sixteen million Americans serving in World War II, less than one million survive today; and
WHEREAS, Those World War II veterans served honorably and continue to serve us today; and
WHEREAS, Many of those veterans were in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system prior to activation of a means test or the setting up of the priority groups and some have subsequently been dropped from the VA system or are now being subjected to a means test; and
WHEREAS, HR 3118, Veterans Health Care Eligibility 1996, was passed exempting all Spanish American War and World War I veterans from the means test required by the VA; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion shall support legislation to amend HR 3118, Veterans Health Care Eligibility 1996, to extend the exemption from a means test to World War II veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Department of Veteran Affairs be urged to place all World War II veterans in Category 5.

Resolution No. 8: Expand the Presumptive Period for Veterans Who Served in South Korea
Origin: Maine
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(As amended)

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has determined the presumptive end date for Agent Orange in Vietnam is based on one fact only; there were no U.S. forces in the Republic of Vietnam on the end date of May 1975; and
WHEREAS, The end date in Vietnam was not based on the half-life of Agent Orange or soil or water concentrations or any real scientific data; and
WHEREAS, Vietnam Operation Ranch Hand ended in January 1971 but the end date was extended to May 1975 is not based on scientific data; and
WHEREAS, More than 21,000 gallons of toxic defoliants were spread by American troops along the Korean DMZ in 1968 and 1969; and
WHEREAS, The half-life of Agent Orange (dioxin) in the environment varies depending on soil type, how deep it lies, when in bodies of water and can be more than 100 years; and
WHEREAS, Currently VA will presume herbicide exposure for any veteran who served in Korea between April 1, 1968 and August 31, 1971, in a unit determined by VA and the Department of Defense to have operated in an area in or near the Korean DMZ in which herbicides were applied; and
WHEREAS, U.S. Military forces were sent to Korea in the numbers ranging from 30 to 40 thousand in the 1970's until now and it is estimated a minimum of 4 thousand are stationed on the DMZ at any one time; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion urges the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct a scientific study to determine the environmental exposure to herbicides for all Department of Defense personnel serving in South Korea from September 1, 1971 to current date; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That based on study results, Congress enact and approve a veterans benefit act to expand the eligibility of the presumptive period for those who have served in South Korea.

Resolution No. 13: Improve VA Communication with Service Officers
Origin: Minnesota
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
WHEREAS, Prior to 2012 the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was efficient in communicating with power of attorney (POA) and veterans service offices (VSO) while adjudicating veteran benefits; and
WHEREAS, VA correspondence including, yet not limited to, notices to the claimant, rating decisions and appeals notices were in paper form and a copy was delivered in every case to the POA or VSO of original regional office jurisdiction; and
WHEREAS, In 2012 VA announced, “VA Transformation” and VA’s intention to digitize all information including claims folders and information submitted on behalf of claims and appeals; and
WHEREAS, Scanning of information post 2012 was mandatory for all cases being initiated or considered; and
WHEREAS, Since, VA has established an information system in where work is digitized and issue to a National Work Que (NWQ), delivering work to regional offices not of original jurisdiction; and
WHEREAS, In M-21-1MR1, I.3.B.1.b, "Notices that must be provided to the Representative: Unless representation is limited by the claimant, power of attorney (POA) representatives are entitled to notice of any VA decisions affecting the payment of benefits or relief sought by the claimants whom they represent. Representative also must receive other forms of correspondence sent to claimants. These include, decision notices, statements of the case and supplemental statements of the case, notice of certification and transfer of appeals to the board of veteran appeals (BVA), intent to file a claim notice and
requests for information and evidence needed to substantiate a claim (e.g. development letters); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion hereby endorse efforts to establish provisions in law enforcing the mandatory issuance of all correspondence, both electronic or in paper form, to the original Power Of Attorney (POA) of submittal; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That correspondence from the Department of Veterans Affairs to the claimant be copied to the original regional office of jurisdiction and to the applicable POA authorized to represent the claimant.

Resolution No. 14: Extend Allotted Time for Claims Review by Service Officers
Origin: Minnesota
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Prior to 2012 the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was efficient in communicating with power of attorney and veterans service offices while adjudicating veteran benefits; and

WHEREAS, VA correspondence including, yet not limited to, rating decisions in paper form in where a copy was delivered in every case to the power of attorney or veterans service office of original regional office jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS, In 2012 VA announced, “VA Transformation” and VA’s intention to digitize all information including rating decisions; and

WHEREAS, Scanning of information post 2012 was mandatory for all cases being initiated or considered; and

WHEREAS, Since, VA has established an information system in which work is digitized and issued to a National Work Queue (NWQ), delivering work to regional offices not of original jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS, Rating decisions are issued to the NWQ for a period of forty eight hours for power of attorney review; and

WHEREAS, In M-21-1MR1, I.3.B.1.d. Providing notice to Power Of Attorneys: VA must use Veterans Benefit Management System (VBMS) to provide adequate notice that correspondence is available for review; and

WHEREAS, In M-21-1MR1, I.3.B.3.b. Establishing time limits for Veterans Service Officer review: Veteran Service Center Managers (VCSMs) will provide Veterans Service Officers 48 hours, from the time the VA activates the Veterans Service Officer Review Status work que, to review a rating decision prior to promulgation. If the Veterans Service Officer does not review and approve the decision within 48 hours the decision is automatically expired and the decision is promulgated by VA; and

WHEREAS, In M -21-1 MR1 I.3.B.3.c. Veterans Service Officer Review at Redistributed-Work Sites, if no authorized Veterans Service Officer is available at the redistributed-work site, the completed rating decision is promulgated without Veterans Service Officer review and the case is then returned to the station of origination (SOO); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion hereby endorse efforts to establish provisions in law allowing for rating decision review to be defined as 48 “Business Hours” before any rating may be automatically expired and then subsequently adjudicated by the Department of Veterans Affairs without review of the power of attorney or veteran service officer of original jurisdiction; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That in M-21-1 MR1 I.3.B.3.c. Veterans Service Officer Review at Redistributed-Work Sites, if no authorized Veterans Service Officer is available at the redistributed-work site, the completed rating decision is promulgated without Veterans Service Officer review and the case is then returned to the station of origination (SOO) to be reevaluated and rewritten to state the information must be returned to the work queue or mailbox of the Power Of Attorney or Veterans Service Officer of original submittal or jurisdiction.

Resolution No. 15: Department of Veterans Affairs Pharmacy Medication Dispensing Requirements
Origin: Pennsylvania
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(As amended)
WHEREAS, Veterans enrolled in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care are eligible for prescribed medication in their assigned VISN; and
WHEREAS, In today’s society, many veterans travel many miles from their home and away from their VISN; and
WHEREAS, Although outside the jurisdiction of veteran’s respective VISN, a veteran enrolled in the VA health-care system is eligible for treatment, and
WHEREAS, While the VA enrolled eligible veteran receives treatment at a VA facility, the veteran is not eligible to receive medication while outside the veteran’s VISN; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) enrolled eligible veteran receiving treatment must also receive medication to resolve health issues; and, be it further
RESOLVED, That The American Legion petition the Department of Veteran Affairs to authorize, without delay, medication to veterans enrolled in the VA health-care system no matter what the location is of the VA health-care facility; and, be it finally
RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the secretary of the VA.

Resolution No. 16: Department of Veterans Affairs Automobile Allowance Program
Origin: Pennsylvania
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(As amended)
WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides an automobile allowance for servicemembers and veterans for a one-time payment, in accordance with 38 USC §3903, toward the purchase of an automobile or other conveyance for those suffering from certain service-connected disabilities; and
WHEREAS, Eligibility requirements to receive the grant are the result of service-connected conditions to include loss, or permanent loss of use of one or more extremities, severe burn injuries, or Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis; and
WHEREAS, A 2012 CNBC reports the average American purchases a vehicle every six to eight years; and
WHEREAS, The Center for Disease Control reports the average American’s life expectancy is 78.8 years; and
WHEREAS, Innovations in technology may improve the veteran’s ability to operate or ride in a vehicle since the original awarding of the automobile allowance grant; and
WHEREAS, A veteran’s service-connected conditions may increase in severity requiring additional adaptations to vehicles; and

WHEREAS, A veteran may live in excess of a half century beyond the initial receipt of the automobile allowance grant and would be likely required to purchase numerous vehicles during the veteran’s lifetime; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That the U.S. Congress is urged to pass legislation to permit veterans to receive automobile allowance grants every 10 years from the original application for the benefit or when a medical professional provides documentation indicating certain adaptations or improvements in current adaptations are required; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be sent to the U.S. Congress for their action.

Resolution No. 28: Permit VA Providers to Discuss the Use of Medical Marijuana in Those States that have Legalized Marijuana
Origin: Ohio
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(As amended)

WHEREAS, Dr. William Woodward, representing the American Medical Association (AMA) testified as an opponent of the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act, due to the use of cannabis in medicine; and

WHEREAS, Congress authorized a study of marijuana that culminated in a report by the Pennsylvania Republican Governor Shafer that was titled, “Marijuana: A Signal of Misunderstanding”; and

WHEREAS, The United States government has been shipping tins containing 300 marijuana cigarettes per month to Federal Investigational New Drug Program patients for decades starting in the 1980s; and

WHEREAS, Medical studies from Israel have revealed positive use of marijuana in medical applications specifically in adult patients sustaining Traumatic Brain Injury type injuries; and

WHEREAS, The United States government, in October of 2003, issued U.S. Patent #6630507 for marijuana’s medical use, specifically claiming that cannabinoids are found to have application as neuroprotectants; and

WHEREAS, The National Academy of Medicine and Science report in January 2017 shows conclusive evidence that cannabis or cannabinoids are effective for treatment of chronic pain in adults, as anti-emetics in treatment of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, and for improving patient reported multiple sclerosis spasticity symptoms; and

WHEREAS, At the 98th American Legion National Convention resolution No. 11 was passed to support the growth of marijuana at more locations, to remove it as a Schedule I controlled substance and to conduct more medical studies; and

WHEREAS, More than half of the states in the union have passed medical marijuana laws to date; and

WHEREAS, VHA Policy 2011-004 Item 3, prohibits Department of Veterans Affairs providers from completing forms seeking recommendations or opinions regarding a veterans participation in a state marijuana program; and

WHEREAS, In 2016 Ohio passed HB523 the Medical Marijuana Control Program that includes a program for military veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion urge the United States government to permit Department of Veterans Affairs medical providers to be
able to discuss with veterans the use of marijuana for medical purposes and recommend it in those states where medical marijuana laws exist.

Resolution No. 41: Radiation-Exposed Veterans
Origin: Washington
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Servicemembers who cleaned up various nuclear testing sites, including the Marshall Islands, during the 1970s and 1980s and received a significant radiation exposure from their duties deserve the same benefits that U.S. law guarantees to other servicemembers who were exposed to dangerous radiation and nuclear waste; and

WHEREAS, Servicemembers who participated in cleaning up these nuclear testing sites suffer from high rates of cancers due to their exposure to radiation and nuclear waste, but are currently unable to receive the same treatments and service-related disability presumptions that other “radiation-exposed veterans” receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs should be responsible for the care of these atomic cleanup veterans; and

WHEREAS, The Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act was introduced in February 2017 to designate veterans who participated in the cleanup of these various nuclear testing sites as “radiation-exposed veterans,” and make them eligible to receive the same health-care benefits given to other servicemembers who were involved in active nuclear tests; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion believes the Department of Veterans Affairs should acknowledge the high levels of radiation and nuclear waste exposure of these atomic cleanup veterans as service connected and should be responsible for their care and treatment; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion urge the president of the United States and the U.S. Congress to designate these atomic cleanup veterans as “radiation-exposed veterans” and ensure that they are eligible for the same health care and other benefits as other servicemembers who were involved in active nuclear tests; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion continues to exert maximum effort to ensure that these atomic cleanup veterans receive the proper and necessary care, treatment, and benefits that they deserve and have earned.

Resolution No. 47: Research into Hearing Loss Due to Loud or Constant Noise Exposure in the Military
Origin: Illinois
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(As amended)

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of the community, state and nation; and

WHEREAS, The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Chicago American Legion office and other Legion offices nationwide have seen a substantial increase in service-connected compensation claims for bilateral hearing loss coming from our older veterans of the Korean and Vietnam era; and

WHEREAS, The majority of these veterans did not develop bilateral hearing loss until much later in their lifetime; and

WHEREAS, All of these veterans were exposed to loud or constant noise exposure in the military; and
WHEREAS, The most recent study done by the Institute of Medicine in 2005 did not find sufficient evidence of noise-induced hearing loss developing later in life; and

WHEREAS, Since there are no good and current studies showing such a link the Department of Veterans Affairs is consistently denying these claims; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion strongly supports funding by Congress or the Department of Veterans Affairs to support more detailed research into this area of delayed hearing loss due to loud or constant noise exposure in the military.

Resolution No. 58: Expansion of Presumptive Conditions Associated with Camp Lejeune Contaminated Drinking Water

Origin: New York
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, Military personnel and their families were exposed to contaminated water supply at Camp Lejeune, N.C. from August 1, 1953 to December 31, 1987; and

WHEREAS, The Honoring America’s Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012 established fifteen different conditions where the exposed military personnel and their families were eligible to seek treatment at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health facilities at no cost; and

WHEREAS, The conditions identified for cost-free health care were listed as: esophageal cancer, lung cancer, breast cancer, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, leukemia, multiple myeloma, myelodysplastic syndromes, renal toxicity, hepatic steatosis, female infertility, miscarriage, scleroderma, neurobehavioral effects, and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma; and

WHEREAS, The secretary of the VA established the presumptive list for service connection for diseases associated with said water supply exposure as of January 2017 included only eight conditions to include; adult leukemia, aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, liver cancer, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and Parkinson’s disease; and

WHEREAS, The secretary will continue to review relevant information to support the creation of additional presumptive conditions, as it become available; and

WHEREAS, An estimated 900,000 servicemembers were potentially exposed to the tainted water; now, therefore, it be

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That the secretary consider expanding the presumptive list to include all conditions set in the 2012 act for health care that were not previously included.

Resolution No. 74: Air Carrier Access

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The Air Carrier Access Act was signed into law by President Reagan in 1986, to prohibit commercial airlines from discrimination based on disability in air travel; and

WHEREAS, Since the signing of the law significant progress has occurred, however, many disabled travelers, including veterans and servicemembers, still encounter significant barriers while traveling using air transportation, such as, damaged assistive devices (e.g., wheelchairs), inaccessible aircraft, lavatories, and communication media (e.g., websites and kiosks), delayed assistance, inequitable treatment of service animals, inadequate disability cultural competency, and a lack of suitable seating accommodations; and
WHEREAS, Disabled air travelers have experienced damaged equipment, poor customer relations with airline personnel, inaccessible aircraft, missed flights, injuries and delays in travelling; and

WHEREAS, People with disabilities should enjoy the same opportunities for travel as all United States citizens, including the opportunity to travel for business or pleasure without issue; and

WHEREAS, Access for all travelers, including disabled veterans and servicemembers must be modernized to meet 21st century needs; and

WHEREAS, Modernizing travel for people with disabilities meets the standard of reasonable accommodation, which will not pose any undue hardship on the commercial airline industry; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion urge Congress to pass legislation that better protects the rights of passengers with disabilities in air transportation, which includes a significant number of veterans and servicemembers.

Resolution No. 75: Department of Veterans Affairs Rural Health Care Program

Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, One out of every three veterans treated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) lives in rural communities; and

WHEREAS, Rural veterans have been underserved due to a lack of access to health care, which can be attributed to greater travel barriers and a lack of public transportation; and

WHEREAS, Under current law, VA physicians can only provide telehealth treatment across state lines if the veteran and the physician are located in federal facilities; and

WHEREAS, This limits the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) from contracting with non-VA health care providers for telemedicine in states outside of where the veteran lives; and

WHEREAS, Although VA has established access standards, the standards and definition of rural and highly rural veterans do not take into account the distance and driving time it takes for veterans to be provided with VA care; and

WHEREAS, Rural Health Consultants (RHCs) are located and fall under the Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), which leads to additional collateral duties, inconsistent with the schedules, ultimately distracting RHCs from needed outreach to facilities within their VISN; and

WHEREAS, The Rural Health Resource Center is advisory in nature and primarily conducts research without providing direct resources to rural veterans or outreach; and

WHEREAS, VA Medical Centers in rural areas have concerns in recruiting and retaining qualified medical and clinical providers, in many cases rural areas do not have attractive resources for medical providers; and

WHEREAS, The development of Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) have increased access to health care for veterans in rural areas, communication between the CBOCs and medical centers has decreased, creating communication and managerial difficulties; and

WHEREAS, Telehealth services have more than doubled in the last four years, creating more access to health care for rural veterans, however, space and bandwidth limit the level of service and number of veterans the VA can serve; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion urge Congress to allow Department of Veterans Affairs health professionals to practice telemedicine
across state lines if they are qualified and practice within the scope of their authorized federal duties regardless of where the covered health-care professional or patient is located; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Office of Rural Health (ORH) to centralize and consolidate the Rural Health Consultants (RHC) under the ORH; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge ORH to ensure Rural Health Resource Centers provide service to rural veterans from surveys, national hotline and connecting veterans living in rural communities with providers; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to develop a recruitment and retention strategy to incentivize medical providers to practice in rural communities; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to ensure each Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) has adequate staff and direct communication between the CBOC’s and medical center’s RHC; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the ORH to search for opportunities to expand telehealth services by collaborating with local offices in rural areas that can share space.

Resolution No. 76: Veterans Emergency Room or Urgent Care Facility Relief
Origin: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, On occasion, a veteran may need emergency care for an injury or illness due to a threat to life or health; and

WHEREAS, The cost for an emergency room visit can vary depending on whether the patient has a health insurance plan or is uninsured and the severity of the injury or illness being treated; and

WHEREAS, The cost for an emergency room visit can run into the thousands of dollars; and

WHEREAS, At other times the need for a visit to an emergency room is unnecessary due to the condition of the injury or illness being less severe; and

WHEREAS, In those instances of less severe conditions, a veteran patient may visit an urgent care center and receive treatment without excessive waiting or high cost; and

WHEREAS, As health-care systems in the United States deal with issues of access to care, increasing patient needs, growing demands on primary and emergency care and increasing costs, urgent care centers provide another option for veterans to use; and

WHEREAS, Veterans should have the option to use either emergency room or urgent care when traveling to a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facility would not be practical; and

WHEREAS, Veterans should not expect to suffer financial hardship due to a visit to either an emergency room or urgent care center; and

WHEREAS, It is reasonable to expect the VA to assist in sharing the burden of paying either some or all of the cost for emergency room or urgent care in either a VA or non-VA facility for certain veterans as defined by Title 38 U.S. Code; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Reno, Nevada, August 22, 23, 24, 2017, That The American Legion support legislation to amend Title 38, United States Code, to require the secretary of veterans affairs to pay the reasonable costs of urgent care provided to certain veterans; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Department of Veterans Affairs establish cost-sharing amounts for veterans receiving care at an emergency room of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
Referred Resolutions

Resolution No. 51 (NY): Department of Veteran Affairs Numerical Rating System
Resolution No. 57 (NY): Increase Oversight Department of Veteran Affairs Contracted
Compensation and Pension Examinations
Resolution No. 72 (CA): Department of Veteran Affairs Drug Pricing Policy

Received and Recorded Resolutions

Resolution No. 2 (NE): Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2017
Resolution No. 7 (ME): Research the Potential Soil Contamination at Camp Edwards
Resolution No. 52 (NY): Expand Department of Veteran Affairs Caregivers to All
Eras
Resolution No. 53 (NY): Expand Department of Veteran Affairs Extended Care Service
for Women Veterans
Resolution No. 62 (NY): Authorize Child Care Service for All Veterans Receiving VA
Health Care
Resolution No. 64 (NY): Oppose Any Budget Proposal that Would Take Funding
from Other VA Programs to Support the Budget
Resolution No. 65 (NY): Call on Congress to Pass the Covers Act

Rejected Resolutions

Resolution No. 39 (WA): In-State Licensure for VA Health-Care Providers
Resolution No. 49 (IL): Elimination of the Nation Work Queue
Resolution No. 54 (NY): Call on the Department of Veteran Affairs to Eliminate
Third Party Administrators to Serve as Choice Contractor
Resolution No. 55 (NY): Improve Use of Disability Benefits Questionnaires
Resolution No. 56 (NY): Increase Transparency and Improve Efficiencies in
Department of Veteran Affairs Appeals Process
Resolution No. 59 (NY): Full Staffing of Compensation and Pension Examiner
Positions

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN BOZELLA: Mr. Commander, I, Ralph P. Bozella,
Colorado, as a duly elected and registered delegate to this Convention, move for the
adoption of this report respectfully submitted. ...Second.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I heard the motion and I also heard the
seconds. Is there any discussion? All in favor say aye. Opposed? The report of Veterans
Affairs & Rehabilitation is adopted. (Applause)

Presentation: William F. Lenker National Service Trophy

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: With the adoption of the Veterans Affairs
& Rehabilitation report, it is time to announce the winner of the William F. Lenker National
Service Trophy. William F. Lenker was the chairman of The American Legion National
VA&R Commission from 1967 until 1988. He was a true champion for America's veterans.
This trophy is awarded annually to the department that best supports and implements
programs to benefit veterans, their families and their survivors. For the 2016-2017 program
year, the trophy is awarded to the Department of Montana. (Cheers and Applause)

I'm sure Montana will leave room on the wall for next year as well.
NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Our Operation Comfort Warriors donations today total $81,614.55. Which brings our year's total to $546,527.18. Fantastic! This year, you, The American Legion Family, has been so generous, so compassionate of supporting our charities, our programs so that we may help others. Our total donations this year: $8,225,108.59. (Applause)

Special Presentations

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I've always said The American Legion Family is amazing. I'm proud to be one of your relatives. And speaking of family, I would now like to call my family to the stage. (Applause)

You know, in the words of Lou Gehrig: I'm the luckiest man in the world. I have a huge family, you out there. You are awesome, as I just said, and I can't thank all of you enough. You have made this year great. You have left your footprints, and together we're carrying the legacy forward.

However, our job is not done when we leave this hall. When we leave this hall, we still have veterans who need our help, who need our assistance, who need our voice on Capitol Hill. Yesterday we saw the results of our voice. But our voices still need to be heard, a strong voice. We're going to do it. We're going to keep this legacy going because the next generation is right behind us, and we want to pass a great legacy, a strong legacy, to them. I'm confident we're going to do it in the time we all have left on this Earth. So, my Legion Family, I can't thank you enough. You've been so hospitable. As we came to your departments, and, yes, we came to every one of your departments, such wonderful hospitality. (Applause)

You showed us what you're doing. We went from the small posts to the large posts. I'll never forget the post in Pinedale, Wyoming: "Mr. Commander, why did you come to our post?" "Well, you're not in trouble. I'm here on behalf of over 2 million Legionnaires to say thank you, thank you for what you've been doing." "But, Commander, we've never had a national commander here." "Again, well, first of all, you cannot say that again. Second of all, as far as I know, you're not in trouble. I don't make the agenda, I just follow the agenda, and somebody has thought within your department you have been doing great things, just like all the posts in this great organization have been doing good things and will continue to do things."

I am proud and honored again to be an American Legion relative to you, my American Legion Family. God bless each and every one of you. I have been blessed to be in this position, honored and humbled. After all, if you look at our history, I think it is about only 107 or so individuals that got to serve in this position. It's a position that I have didn't put on my bucket list to do, but it just happened. I am so honored. I thank you for your support. I thank you for the support of our great American Legion staff at our national headquarters in Indianapolis and also in Washington, D.C. (Applause)

Yes. They work very, very, very hard for you and me in both offices. I tell you what, all of us are lucky to have a staff that we do have, because when either you or I walk into any of those offices, they know who they're there to support: you, us, Legionnaires. It starts in the front office with National Adjutant Dan Wheeler; the executive directors, Verna Jones and Jeff Brown; and it goes on down to the directors, the committees, the commissions; also the past national commanders and also our national vice commanders.

But there's a group of individuals that has, I think, had the toughest job of all, and that has been taking care of me. The ladies in the front offices, Patti, Jennifer, Mary, Mary Kay. And my executive assistant, Debbie. And in the meeting and convention office, Bridget, Andrea, Ellen, and Marti. I think all of them have done an exceptional job, especially Debbie. Debbie has kept me on the road about 330 days or so, thanks to Marti's scheduling
that I know gave her headaches at times. But they've all done an excellent job, and I couldn't be more honored to have worked with them, and they are a part of our American Legion Family. Also our commission chairmen and committee chairmen, and also all of you that have served on those groups to ensure that we take care of veterans and take care of families and take care of America. To all of you, I thank you.

Of course, the other part of my family, I haven't got to see them too much lately, but they're here today. On my right is my baby brother, David, and his wife, Gloria, from the Department of Missouri. You know, David is the current commander of Story-Hardin Post 164, which was my first post back in Missouri when my big brother, who was also the post commander at that time, signed me up into The American Legion. If it wasn't for Alfred, I probably would not be talking to you here right now. So David is continuing on the legacy in our little town in Craig, Missouri, in northwest Missouri. So, brother, keep it up. (Applause)

Also a couple daughters that Linda and I are so blessed to have. Of course, Cori, she's the youngest here. Cori continued her military service to the United States Air Force recently by enlisting in the Georgia Air National Guard to continue to serve. (Applause)

Her husband, Tony, Senior Master Sergeant Tony, is back home still working still on active duty. I suspect one of the three boys there might have some Air Force opportunities to either enlist or I'm hoping maybe one of them possibly be the first one in our family to go to the United States Air Force Academy. You never know. (Applause)

If you recall in Cincinnati, Cori gave my nomination speech. I tell you what, as I said then and I'll say it now, she could not have made this dad any more proud than she did on that day. (Applause)

Our other daughter here from San Antonio, Andria. And Andria, she, as I said before, in Cincinnati, she married an Air Force fellow, Peter. Peter served his time and got out and is now working for AT&T and is going to be relocated to Georgia. So I suspect, Texas, you're probably going to lose her and Georgia is probably going to gain her. But Andria's oldest, Alex, is serving in the United States Air Force at Ramstein, Germany. He is our first grandson to serve our country. (Applause)

The next family member is my love, my wife, Linda. She has supported me from day one. And she said, "Well, I might as well because it's in your DNA." But she has supported me and been by my side for 27½ years in the United States Air Force. And getting here today at this job, you know, the national commander serves one year, but the preparation is two years in advance. She has held the fires burning at home, and particularly this last year when Oregon had more than it really wanted of snow, she shoveled more snow than she ever wanted to shovel, and also all the outside chores in addition to the inside chores of the home. She was there at those various organizations' activities whereas the first lady she performed excellently. (Applause)

While she was doing all of those things, she was also serving Harney County Unit 63, District 10, and also the Department of Oregon with The American Legion Auxiliary. So, my dear, I applaud you. I love you. (Applause)

Now I hope you understand why I say I'm the luckiest man in the world. I cannot help but thank my own department, Department of Oregon. In 2011, we had a vision, and I happened to be a part of that vision. Oregon, wherever you're at, I hear you but I can't see you, but that's equally important, I thank you much for your support and confidence in me to represent you and to carry The American Legion legacy forward. I'm also honored in remembering my mentor, T. Les Galloway. Thank you, American Legion Family; thank you, Schmidt family; and thank you, Oregon family. May God bless each and every one of you. I am so honored. And, again, I'm the luckiest man in the world. Thank you. (Applause)
Would my national vice commanders please come forward. Fae, Doug, Paul, Paul, and Jim. All of our national vice commanders have represented us well. You can go ahead and clap. (Applause)

From the time we started out with our orientation at our national headquarters in Indianapolis and also in Washington, D.C., this group that you gave me to serve with went at it with heart, with compassion, and with a mission on their minds: To take care of veterans and take care of families and representing in the highest standards, the highest manners our American Legion. And that they did. You could not have given me a better group of five than these right here, your national vice commanders. (Applause)

I appreciate their devotion and sacrifice to this great organization and also the sacrifice of their spouses. Because they, too, were on the road. They were on the road a lot. In fact, they have done something that hasn't been done for a long, long time. We dispatched them to our overseas departments to help those departments. I am so proud that they represented us, again, in the highest of standards. As my token of appreciation and our appreciation, I would like to present them each with a little gift. (Applause)

Let's give our national vice commanders a hand! (Applause)

I now call on National Historian Paul Bennett of Missouri; National Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin Owens from Oregon; and National Chaplain Harvey Klee of Texas; and the national commander's aide, Don Weber of Oregon. This is another part of our team, your team, and, of course, Historian Paul has been documenting our history, all the good things that we've done as we saw since this convention, the fruits of our labors. Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin has always been there Johnny-on-the-spot. (Applause)

Chaplain Harvey, as I said, his words have inspired us, have given us hope and remind us that there's someone greater than all of us. To my aide, Don Weber, Don stepped up when Dirk had to take leave. I called Don up, and I said, "Don, what are you doing?" He said, "What do you want?" I said, "Don, I've got a deal for you, if Carol approves." And I said, "I would like for you to help me carry the legacy forward of The American Legion." Don met me about three days later in Georgia, and there we commenced to carry on the legacy of The American Legion for the last three months of this year. I've been honored to serve with him, and he's done an excellent job of taking care of me. Prior to Don, Dirk also did an outstanding job of, again, taking care of me, pointing me in the right direction, keeping me on time. I have been so blessed and so honored, once again, and I would like to show my appreciation to these gentlemen for their service to you and I. (Applause)

All right. Let's give our national historian, sergeant-at-arms, chaplain and aide a great hand. (Applause)

And now the Chair recognizes National Vice Commander Paul Espinoza.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER ESPINOZA: It's my honor this year, this fiscal year, as national vice commander and our, your, national vice commanders, five of us, but first of all, before I commence with this, I would like to bring up our national commander up here, along with his wife, Linda Schmidt, please, and his aide, Don. Would you please come up here.

First of all, all of us national vices got together a year ago. Hardly knew each other. And now we're like brothers and sisters, along with all of you brothers and sisters out there. We did as best as we could and as much as we can, and I believe us five, we tried 110 percent. I believe in our eyes that we put a stop to the slide and now all we're going to do is move up forward from here on out. Anyways, we put together a little bit of something for our national commander and his wife and his aide.

First of all, to the national commander's wife, we thank her for lending the national commander to us for a whole year. Very great man to work with. We thank her very much. We got her a little gift, a jewelry box from the southwest. (Applause)
Now, for the very hard work Dirk Levy and Don Weber have done for our national commander, now they could take a little break, and we got them a gift from the five national vice commanders, two fishing poles. Let's give the national commander's aides, Dirk Levy and Don Weber, a big hand, please. Thank you. (Applause)

All right. To the one we all looked up to as us five, followed him and very proud to serve under him and represent him everywhere we went, our national commander, Charlie Schmidt. We got him three gifts. Let me start off with one. We talked to his wife. We talked to Dirk Levy. He's a bow hunter. He's had that bow for many, many years. It's already starting to go to the wayside, so we decided together and got him a compound bow for hunting with our national vice commanders' names on it as well as his name on it as well with The American Legion. (Applause)

National Commander, it's not over yet. We also put together two deep-sea fishing trips. They're both out of Oregon. Two deep-sea fishing trips for you and your spouse or whoever you want to go with you. Captains Reel Deep Sea Fishing and the other is the Yaquina Bay Charters. (Applause)

Again, national commander, from all of us national vice commanders, it's been an honor and a pleasure. I think we're the lucky ones to work under you. Thank you very much for everything you've done. God bless you, and thank all of you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: How do they know next week archery season opens? Thank you, all. Really, you had a great corps of national vice commanders, worked very hard for all of us. (Applause)

I now recognize National Historian Paul Bennett of the Department of Missouri. Paul.

NATIONAL HISTORIAN BENNETT: Sir, it's a pleasure having served with you, and it's been a distinct honor this past year. I remember your little trip up to Craig, your homecoming. It was quite a trip you got there. You know, we tried for the last couple of months to find you something that you could use. Unfortunately, every time we figured something out, we were told "We already got that." So we have tried and tried and tried, and finally we have decided one thing that you could probably use is something where you could go to Cabela's and get what you want to get.

So I present to you, sir, this card to go get what you want at Cabela's.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Whoa! It's a $500 Cabela's gift card! I thank you, Paul, our national historian; also Chaplain Harvey; Sergeant-at-Arms Kevin; and Dirk and Don, the aides. Wow, this is going to be like a kid in the candy store. Thank you so much. It's been an honor and pleasure to serve with you all. Thank you, all. (Applause)

I would like to take a moment, maybe I didn't do it properly, but I would like to recognize the national commander's aide's wife, Carol, who gave Don the green light on a moment's notice to continue helping me carry the legacy forward. Carol, would you stand up, please? Thank you so much. Thank you so much. (Applause)

On the Reno Gazette-Journal, there's a picture of what took place on this stage yesterday, and it says: "Bonds of loyalty." That's our American Legion, our commander-in-chief signing the Appeals Modernization Bill. (Applause)

How about that? It is amazing what we as a family, when we collectively rally together, to be strong, we can take care of many, many veterans. That's what we've been doing, that's what we're doing now, and that's what we're going to do in the future. That's what The American Legion Family does. There's proof right there. (Applause)

Next we have a few words from National Adjutant Dan Wheeler.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, it's been an absolute pleasure for your staff and me to serve with you this year. We have all felt privileged to work with you and to be taught how to carry the legacy forward. There were great times, and there were not so great, but what's notable is that through them all, we could count on
you being calm, thoughtful, polite, and kind. We have never seen any leader who so manifested grace under pressure as you have, and your staff loves you for that. So I want to thank you for a great year. Now it's time for a little R&R. So, ladies and gentlemen, don your caps.

... At this time, National Adjutant Wheeler handed out orange earflap hunting hats; "Sharp Dressed Man" performed by the musical group ZZ Top was played.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, we understand you're an All-American sportsman. But first you're an American.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Yes, I am.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: So, for the part of you that is All-American, we have this gift for you. This is a replica of the telescoping flagpole that will be installed in front of your house with the American flag, the Air Force flag, and the POW flag. I think it's about 30 feet tall.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Wow. Wonderful. Wonderful. (Applause) Evidently hunting is the theme here. This looks like a binocular harness. This must be the binoculars. Wow. Oh, this is a camera that you hang on a tree and see who passes by. A pair of ultra-light hunting boots. Wow. Thinsulated gloves, and a camo suit and a camo blanket.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: That's not all. You get these silly hats. (Laughter)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Hey, we may have to auction these off for one of our charities. (Applause)

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Good idea. Mr. Commander, on behalf of all of your staff who contributed to these gifts for you, they're very small compared to the affection that we've grown to feel for you. I want to tell you it's been a wonderful year serving as your national officers and your executive directors. I just thank you so much for a job well done.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you. (Applause)

... At this time, National Vice Commander Casper assumed the Chair.

Presentation: Plaque and Colors to Outgoing National Commander
John P. 'Jake' Comer, Massachusetts, Past National Commander (Colors)
Joseph J. Frank, Missouri, Past National Commander (Plaque)

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER CASPER: Before our next presentation, please turn your attention to the video monitor as we reflect on our national commander's year in office. ... At this time the delegation viewed a video.

After serving this past year as your national vice commander, I am honored to represent all members of The American Legion in presiding over our next order of business. This is the time when we present to our national commander, Charles E. Schmidt, the Colors of his year in office and a plaque. At this time I call on Past National Commander John P. "Jake" Comer to present the Colors. (Applause)

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER COMER: Thank you very much. I'm singularly honored to make these presentations. Will the audience please rise at this National Convention. I ask for the National Champion Color Guard from Newport Harbor Post 291, Department of California to bring the Colors of the national commander to center stage. Hand salute! ... At this time, the delegation rendered a salute to the Colors.

Two! Commander Schmidt, on Tuesday you asked: "Who's gonna fill our shoes?" Well, commander, you are going to leave some big shoes to fill yourself. Membership is not as high as we want it to be, but that is not because you haven't worked tirelessly to remind us of how membership is our lifeblood.
You have had an impressive career in the Air Force. That makes me real proud, being an Air Force man myself, having served in Vietnam and risen from an enlisted airman to a field grade officer. You and I stood on the field together at the legendary Fenway Park, home of my Boston Red Sox, as 37,000 fans cheered and told you and 1,400 other Vietnam War veterans: "Welcome home!" Well, commander, The American Legion welcomes you home, and we also welcome your lovely wife, Linda.

We are a better organization because of everything that you have contributed to it. You visited 55 departments, 235 posts, and 10 countries. You have never allowed your high office to affect your humility and approachability. You have the same persona after you have been national commander as you did before you were even a candidate. It's been a pleasure to call you a commander and a friend, and let these Colors always remind you of the class and dignity that you brought to the office.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Commander Jake Comer. You have been a mentor and a close friend. You and so many other past national commanders have been so helpful to me, simply by providing classic examples on how to represent The American Legion as a national commander.

I only hope to be able to provide the same wise counsel and advice to my successors as my predecessors have provided me. I will always cherish your friendship. To all Legionnaires, my fellow Legionnaires, as we prepare to elect our new national commander, I ask each and every one of you to recruit just one new member and retain one new member to keep our American Legion strong. ... Retirement of Colors.

... At this time, National Vice Commander Espinoza assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER ESPINOZA: I now call on Past National Commander Joseph J. Frank to present the plaque to our outgoing national commander. (Applause)

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER FRANK: Commander, you have been a great advocate for our veterans, their families and The American Legion. You have led our organization through important legislative victories in terms of veterans affairs, reforming the outdated appeals process and improving the GI Bill. These victories and other important veterans legislation have been delivered at a time when the public is increasingly dissatisfied with government inaction in other areas. Under your tenure, The American Legion has had one of its best legislative years. You have carried a great legacy forward.

Commander, I am happy to present you a plaque which attests to your election to the high office of national commander of The American Legion for the year 2016-2017. It is given in appreciation of your dedication and your dedicated leadership and in recognition of your devoted service to God and country, and in token of the high esteem of your fellow Legionnaires. It is presented this 24th day of August, before the delegates assembled here at the National Convention in Reno, Nevada. Congratulations, Commander. God bless you.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Commander Frank. Your counsel has been truly valued by me. Oregon is my home now, but, like you, my first American Legion home was in the Show-Me State, Missour-ah, as we say out West. Actually, where I was raised it's "Missouri." While our American Legion is not full of showy people, there is an awful lot to showcase in our great American Legion Family. The devotion, hard work and extraordinary accomplishments of blue-cappers, Auxiliary members and our Sons is something to truly marvel over. If I hadn't witnessed it firsthand, my Missouri roots would insist that these people "show me" the proof that so many good volunteers exist. Commander Joe, your service and sacrifice in Vietnam coupled with your post-war career and accomplishments are nothing short of inspirational. The American Legion is about to make some more history today, but it is the legacy left by leaders like you, Commander Joe, that we shall all try to carry forward. Thank you so much. I am honored. Thank you. (Applause)
NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: My fellow Legionnaires, we have now come to a special order of business, the election of our national officers. National Judge Advocate Phillip Onderdonk, Jr., will read the Rules of Convention governing the nomination and election of officers.

NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE ONDERDONK: The Rules for Election of National Officers of The American Legion.

Rule 15: Last sentence, Election of National Officers shall be by roll call.

Rule 17: Prior to the election of National Officers, the National Commander shall appoint, subject to the approval of the convention, a Judge of Election and such number of Tellers as he deems necessary, provided that the total Tellers so appointed shall be an odd number.

In a contested election, each candidate going to the ballot shall be entitled to one Teller of his choice.

Rule 18: Nominations for National Officers shall be from the floor on roll call of the departments alphabetically arranged. Each department may present as many candidates as it chooses.

Rule 19: Nominating speeches for National Officers shall be limited to five minutes each. Not more than two seconding speeches shall be made for any candidate, and said speeches shall be limited to three minutes.

Rule 20: When more than two candidates are nominated for any office, balloting shall continue until one candidate receives a majority of the votes of the convention, except in the election of National Vice Commanders.

Rule 21: In a contested election for National Vice Commanders, balloting shall continue until (a) majorities and (b) pluralities are established for one or more candidates under the following provisions:

If, on any ballot taken, less than five candidates receive the necessary majority to elect, the candidate or candidates receiving a majority vote shall be declared elected and a new ballot shall be taken for the remaining number of places to be filled, the candidate receiving the lowest number of votes on the preceding ballot shall be disqualified; except should two candidates remain to fill one place, a new ballot shall be taken.

Rule 22: The convention will nominate and elect a National Commander, and five National Vice Commanders, in this sequence.

Rule 23: At the conclusion of balloting on National Vice Commanders, each Department Delegation Chairman shall deliver a written ballot to the Tellers. Such ballots shall be in the hands of the Tellers before communication is made to the National Commander for announcement of the results.

Mr. Commander, that concludes the reading of the rules pertaining to the Election of National Officers.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, judge. As chairman of this convention, I now appoint as judge of election Jared R. Dyer, adjutant of the Department of Oregon, and as tellers of the election: David A. Kurtz, adjutant, Department of Wisconsin; Dale Chapman, adjutant, Department of Virginia; and Randy Cash, adjutant, Department of North Carolina. Will the judge and tellers of the election please come forward. National Adjutant Daniel S. Wheeler will now call the roll of the departments. The purpose of the roll call is to receive nominations for national commander of The American Legion. As national commander, I deem that two tellers are sufficient for this election.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: I will now call the roll for the purpose of nominations for national commander. [The national adjutant call each department in turn.]
DELEGATION CHAIRMAN STACEY (AL): Mr. Commander, I'm Donna Stacey, chairman of the delegation from Alabama. Mr. Commander, Alabama, the Heart of Dixie, yields to Wisconsin, home of many of our snowbird friends.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CLEWELL (WI): Mr. Commander, Laurel Clewell, the chairman of the delegation from Wisconsin. Mr. Commander, I request that the Chair recognize James Michael Rohan for the purpose of a nomination for the high office of national commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Chair recognizes James Michael Rohan of the Department of Wisconsin.

DELEGATE ROHAN (WI): National Commander Schmidt, National Adjutant Wheeler, national officers, past national commanders, delegates, alternates, members of the American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, and the American Legion Riders and guests. We have come to a very special time in our history, a time our forefathers carefully planned for and anticipated, a time where the words "A veteran is a veteran, no matter their race, no matter their religion, no matter their gender," is no longer a slogan, but today a reality. So, my American Legion Family, I stand before you today a very proud Legionnaire and husband to tell you about our candidate for national commander of The American Legion, Denise Helen Rohan of the great state of Wisconsin.

As a young soldier in the United States Army, Denise lived by the seven Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. She didn't just memorize those words. She lived those values every day. Her military service shows a soldier excelling in every single assignment. It recognizes her leadership starting as early as basic training and advanced individual training where she graduated in the top of her class. She was tested and showed that through hard work and teamwork you can achieve anything. In every single training opportunity, she came out on top. In every assignment, she was selected as the leader.

Denise has and continues to be a role model for our men and women in uniform and the veterans here today. These Army values weren't foreign to her. Her parents, Joe and Dorothy Hulbert, lived those same values in a little town in Elkader, Iowa. They were trusted pillars in their community who served as leaders in their church. Her father, a quiet and humble man, served as fire chief and emergency medical technician. Her mother unselfishly served as an emergency medical technician and as our church secretary. These two hard-working parents raised three wonderful daughters who shared those same values.

Those of you who know Denise Rohan and her two sisters know that you won't find anyone more loyal, more selfless and have more integrity than Denise and her two sisters, Bonnie and Terry. In her visits to your departments Denise has talked to you about putting our families first and what that means to her. It's not just a theme or words on a poster. It's how she was raised. Her parents moved to Iowa early in their marriage to start a family and a life in a small town. They chose to put their new and growing family first. They chose to focus on the values of community and God and how it would teach their children about right and wrong.

Denise continues her relationship with God as an adult. As a high schooler, Denise taught Sunday school while being very active in her church. She continued that commitment to her church into adulthood while she led her church's strategic planning, then council on ministry and worship committee. As she grew in her church, she led the parish staff relations committee and church counsel and finally served as a lay leader of the United Methodist Church. Her parents and her sisters and her childhood pastor, Reverend Marks, are all very proud of the Christian woman she has become.

As a wife and a mother and grandmother, she's been tested recently in her relationship with God and her family, first with her accident that put her in a wheelchair for three and a half months and a cane for another month. She didn't waver. She used her time in the
wheelchair to learn about the obstacles our disabled veterans face every day doing basic
tasks like bathing and traveling and getting in and out of a building. When flying became
an obstacle to visiting a department, she got in the car and had someone drive her so that
she didn't miss an opportunity to visit and share her message. While others might quit,
Denise stayed the course, taking one visit at a time until every single invitation was
fulfilled.

While still in a wheelchair she was tested in mid-February, in mid-February when we
almost lost our son to complications from a simple surgery that had gone wrong. Nick spent
the last four months in the hospital enduring multiple surgeries and procedures. I'm here to
tell you today that by the grace of God, the loving care of his wife, Angie, and your prayers,
he's here with us today. (Applause)

Nick is here with our daughter-in-law, Angie, and our grandson, Sawyer, and our
granddaughter, Isla. Most people pronounce it "Is-la," but it's "Eye-la." Yes, it's "Eye-la."

Denise's leadership continued into her professional career at the University of
Wisconsin-Madison as the assistant bursar of student loans. She managed the University
of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, and the University of
Wisconsin Colleges' $120 million loan portfolio made up of approximately 200 different
federal, institutional, and state loan programs in compliance with all laws and regulations.

She was responsible for the efficiency and design of the computerized student loan
accounts receivable system, taking the university from a manual loan-repayment system to
an automated system, making the process user friendly for both users and staff. In her 29
years of service to the University of Wisconsin, Denise and the university maintained one
of the lowest default rates in the country, ensuring students who graduated found
employment in their field and made enough money to repay what they borrowed. This
allowed the university to re-loan the money to other students who may not have had the
opportunity to go to college without the ability to borrow money.

Denise is a graduate of Mount Senario College with an emphasis in accounting and
the Collegiate Management Institute with an emphasis in college management. Denise is a
veteran who stands for family, both yours and mine. I can assure you that her family is in
full support of this opportunity for her to be the leader of the nation's greatest and largest
veterans service organization.

Commander Schmidt and delegates to this 99th National Convention of The American
Legion, as a duly registered delegate from the Department of Wisconsin, it's my distinct
honor and privilege to place into nomination for the high office of national commander of
The American Legion a United States Army veteran, a great Legionnaire, and my best
friend, Wisconsin's own Denise Helen Rohan. (Applause)

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN WALDHAUS (AK): Mr. Commander, Kirk
Waldhaus, chairman of the delegation of Alaska. Mr. Commander, Alaska yields to North
Carolina.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SHORE (NC): Mr. Commander, David Shore,
chairman of the delegation from North Carolina. Mr. Commander, I request that the Chair
recognize Patricia Harris for the purpose of seconding the nomination for the high office
of national commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Chair recognizes Patricia Harris.

DELEGATE HARRIS (NC): National Commander Schmidt, National Adjutant
Wheeler, national officers, past national commanders, delegates and guests, I am Patricia
Harris, delegate from North Carolina, and it is my privilege to second the nomination of
Denise Helen Rohan of Wisconsin to the high office of national commander of The
American Legion.

Make no mistake about it, Denise Rohan is a dedicated wife and mother. Family first.
It is more than a phrase or slogan for Denise; it is a way of life. You are aware of the many
challenges she's faced in the past year, and despite these trials and, fellow Legionnaires, they were trials, she maintained her professional deportment as well as her love and devotion to family. That in and of itself is a sign or indication of true leadership, a leader who is also a servant to all, to her faith, her family and her country.

Denise loves nothing more than spending time with her grandchildren, whether it's at the kitchen sink with Isla wearing their special aprons, creating potions out of Kool-Aid, lemonade or tea, or having snowball fights with Sawyer. And then, of course, there's the dancing and watching movies. And I understand that their favorite is Beauty and the Beast.

All of these activities demonstrate what she really stands for and who she really is, a wife, mother, grandmother. Family first. What is true for her own family is equally true with her American Legion Family: She is a mentor and leader and has inspired others to give of themselves in service.

I am but one example. She has truly inspired me to become more involved in service to my community, to reach out to those who are not as privileged as ourselves and share our talents with those around us in order to make a positive change to our community and our world. Is that or not what The American Legion is all about?

Again, I am merely one of the many lives she has influenced throughout her time in our American Legion. Whether it's her emphasis on training of Legionnaires or service to the community and nation, Denise Rohan is the leader The American Legion needs today, skilled listener, devoted wife and mother, leadership by example. Denise Rohan is all of these. She is the leader we need today. As a duly registered delegate, I proudly second the nomination of Denise Rohan for national commander of The American Legion. (Applause)

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BUGH (AZ): Mr. Commander, Charles Bugh, delegate and chairman, Arizona. Mr. Commander, Arizona yields to Connecticut.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN ROBINSON (CT): Mr. Commander, Louie Robinson, chairman of the delegation of Connecticut. Mr. Commander, I request that the Chair recognize Jim LaCoursiere for the purpose of seconding the nomination for the high office of national commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Chair recognizes Jim LaCoursiere.

DELEGATE LACOURSIERE (CT): National Commander Schmidt, National Adjutant Wheeler, national officers, past national commanders, delegates, alternates, members of the American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, American Legion Riders and guests. It is with great honor and pride which I stand before you today to give you a little insight into the career which has led to the great journey for Denise Rohan as a candidate for the high office of national commander of The American Legion.

A Vietnam-era veteran, Denise joined the United States Army in 1974, attended basic training. She was an honor graduate of the Repair Parts Specialist Course, a distinguished graduate of Stock Control and Accounting Course, Instructor Training Course, where she finished in the top of her class and was chosen as an instructor in the Quartermaster Corps in Fort Lee, Virginia, separating at the rank of specialist in 1976. This alone shows her true commitment and integrity, considering there were only a few women going into the military back then, compared to what there is today.

After separating from the military, Denise and Mike struggled a little bit financially due to his low military pay and minimum wage income from Denise working at a cheese factory. So Mike jokingly came across and told Denise, "You need to get a real job," as they also had their baby son, Nicholas, to care for. She took that commitment to heart, as the lady she is, got out of the factory, and she got a position as a lower-level clerk at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. There is where she also continued to push herself hard and excel in every way possible studying and learning. She earned the highest respect of others through her character and achieved the position as assistant bursar of student loans until her retirement in 2012.
Denise and her husband, Mike, have both served as Family Readiness Group volunteers for the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard as well as providing their services for the United States Marine Corps and the Naval Reserve. Denise is a 2006 graduate of the National American Legion College and has either been a member of or chaired numerous national committees and commissions.

As you can see, and you know Denise, she’s a true leader in every aspect. Some say she's a little soft spoken or quiet, but that is not true; for I myself, I am the same way. As a true leader, she listens first and wants to hear and know what you have to say. She's all about putting family first, her family and The American Legion Family.

National Commander Schmidt and delegates to this 99th National Convention of The American Legion, as a duly registered delegate from the Department of Connecticut, it is with my personal great pride and honor that I, too, second the nomination for the high office of national commander of The American Legion for the years 2017-2018 a true leader, a true lady, a true friend and a true American hero from the Department of Wisconsin, Denise Helen Rohan. (Cheers and applause)

... At this time, a demonstration of support ensued.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The convention will come to order. The adjutant will continue the roll call.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER CASTRO (CA): My name is Art Castro. I'm the state commander for the Department of California, home of Past National Commander Bruce Thiesen, and I'm a delegate to this Convention. We cast all our votes for Denise Rohan and for all uncontested offices.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BOWEN (CO): Mr. Commander, Jay Bowen, delegation chairman for the Rocky Mountain State of Colorado, home of Past National Commander Tom Bock and the Denver Broncos. On behalf of the Department of Colorado, it gives me great pleasure to second the nomination of Denise Rohan for national commander.


DELEGATE MALONEY (FR): Mr. Adjutant, I, Nola Maloney, a duly elected delegate from the Department of France, birthplace of The American Legion and to the 99th American Legion National Convention support and second the nomination of national commander and proudly cast its nine delegate votes for Denise Rohan of Wisconsin for national commander 2017-2018. Thank you.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN PIZZO (GA): John Pizzo, duly elected delegation chairman, casts all its votes for Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SIEGFRIED (HI): Marvin Siegfried, the delegation chairman from the great state of Aloha Hawaii. I have the honor and pleasure to second the nomination of Denise Rohan for national commander.


DELEGATION CHAIRMAN STANTON (IL): Cheri Stanton, chairman of the delegation for Illinois. The proud state of Illinois that has the only state of The American Legion that has a past national commander and a past national president, the Conatser, proudly seconds the nomination for Denise.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN DZIEGLOWICZ (IN): Marty Dzieglowicz, delegate chairman, great state of Indiana, the home of Past National Commander Jim Koutz, home of the Indiana Hoosiers, the Purdue Boilermakers, the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame, casts all its 90 votes for the first female national commander, Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN ROCHHOLZ (IA): Ken Rochholz, delegation chairman, cast all of its votes for Denise Rohan.
UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (KS): Kansas casts all its delegation votes for Denise Rohan.

DELEGATE FISHER (KY): Kentucky, Commonwealth of Kentucky, Randall Fisher, seconds the motion for Denise Rohan for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BOURG (LA): Rudy Bourg, department delegation chairman for the state of Louisiana seconds and casts all its delegation votes to Denise Rohan.

DELEGATE HARGREAVES (ME): John Hargreaves, NEC from the Department of Maine, proudly casts 26 votes for the first female national commander for The American Legion, Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN MARCHINKE (MD): Mr. Chairman, Department of Maryland Commander Marchinke, chairman of our delegation, Maryland, home of nationally recognized veterans homeless program MCVET, the Baltimore Ravens, the Baltimore Orioles, and the Maryland Terrapins sports teams. Maryland seconds the nomination to cast our 62 delegates to Wisconsin’s own Denise Rohan for the high office of national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN DAVIS (MA): Good morning. Mike Davis, department commander, Convention delegation chairman for the Department of Massachusetts, home of Past National Commanders Jake Comer and Paul Morin, home of the reigning Super Bowl champion New England Patriots, and the Boston Red Sox. We cast our entire delegate strength of 45 votes for Denise Rohan of Wisconsin for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN WOOD (MX): Mike Wood, Mexico. We cast all of our delegates for Denise Rohan.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MI): Mr. Chairman, Michigan, home of Past National Commander Tom Cadmus, birthplace of the American Legion Riders, casts all of its votes for Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN MILTON (MN): Denise Milton, delegate chair from the great state of Minnesota, home of the first National Convention, and we proudly welcome you all to the 100th, seconds the nomination of Denise Rohan for the office of national commander.

DELEGATE GOSA (MS): Robert Gosa, the NEC from Mississippi, the Hospitality State, casts all 20 votes for Denise Rohan for the national commander for 2017-2018.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN GONZALES (MO): Betty Gonzales, the delegate chairman for the great state of Missouri, the Show-Me State, birthplace of Harry S. Truman, the first president Legionnaire, we cast all of our votes unanimously for Denise H. Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN RICE (MT): Hal Rice, delegate chairman from the great Big Sky Country of Montana, proudly casts all our votes for Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN LINN (NE): Mr. Commander, I am Beth Linn, delegation chair for the Department of Nebraska, home of Past National Commander Mike Helm and the current SAL National Commander Danny Smith, the Cornhusker State, your favorite military home, proudly seconds the nomination of Denise Rohan for national commander of The American Legion.

DELEGATE MICHALSKI (NV): Ron Michalski, NEC for the Department of Nevada, host of your 99th Convention and also the home of the World Series champs for American Legion Baseball. We cast all of our votes for new female commander of The American Legion, Denise Rohan.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER MEANEY (NH): Dave Meaney, department commander. New Hampshire, the Granite State, proudly casts its 23 delegate votes for Denise Rohan of Wisconsin for national commander.
DELEGATION CHAIRMAN GENGARO (NJ): Roger Gengaro, delegation chairman, New Jersey, seconds the motion.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NM): New Mexico, the land of enchantment, the home of red and green chili, casts all its votes for Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SAMPSON (NY): Mr. Commander, John Sampson, chairman of the delegation from the great state of New York, casts its 120 votes for Denise Rohan for national commander 2017-2018.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN KILEN (ND): Orletta Kilen, delegate chairman from North Dakota, casts 20 votes for Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CHAPMAN (OH): Mr. Commander, Ron Chapman, delegation chairman from the Department of Ohio, proudly seconds the nomination of Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BLOXOM (OK): John Bloxom, delegation chairman, Department of Oklahoma, casts all 25 votes for Denise Rohan.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER HELLICKSON (OR): Gene Hellickson, department commander of the great state of Oregon, casts all of its votes for Denise Rohan.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (PA): The great state of Pennsylvania, home of the Past National Commander Dominic DiFrancesco and Past National Commander Ron Conley proudly seconds the nomination with 167 delegates for Denise Helen Rohan for the high office of national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN WADE (PI): Lawrence Wade, delegate chairman for the Department of Philippines. We cast our seven votes for Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN RODRIGUEZ (PR): Isaac Rodriguez, delegation chairman. Mr. Chairman, the delegation of the Department of Puerto Rico casts all our votes to Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN TACK (RI): Neil Tack, delegate chairman for the Department of Rhode Island, the Ocean State, proudly casts all its votes for Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SCHERER (SC): Bob Scherer, chairman of the delegation for the greatest little state of South Carolina, home of the Clemson Tiger National Champions, 2015 national champion for American Legion Baseball, casts all of its 29 votes for Denise Rohan for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN STEPHENSON (UT): Mr. Chairman, Chuck Stephenson, delegation chairman of the great state of Utah, is proud to cast its 14 votes for our next national commander, Denise H. Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN STEWART (VT): Huzon "Jerry" Stewart, delegate chairman for the great state of Vermont, the home of the best maple syrup in the world, casts all votes for Denise Rohan.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER LEE (VA): Mr. Adjutant, I'm Tommy Lee, department commander, Virginia, duly elected delegate to this Convention. I proudly cast all our votes to Denise Rohan of the Department of Wisconsin.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN ELSTON (WA): Wayne Elston, delegation chairman, Department of Washington, seconds the nomination for Denise Rohan.
DEPARTMENT COMMANDER COOLEY (WV): Frank Cooley, department commander for the state of West Virginia, the home of the Mountaineers, casts the unanimous vote for Denise Rohan.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (WY): The Equality State, the Department of Wyoming, seconds the nomination of Denise H. Rohan.

DELEGATE WESTERGREN (AR): Mr. Chairman, Michael Westergren, commander of the Department of Arkansas, the Natural State, we proudly cast our 20 delegate votes for Denise Rohan.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CROUSER (DE): Jeffrey Crouser, delegation chairman for the Department of Delaware. Delaware seconds the nomination of Denise Rohan from the Department of Wisconsin for national commander of The American Legion.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: I did not hear a response from District of Columbia. District of Columbia? Mr. Commander, that completes the roll call.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: At this time, I recognize from the floor microphone one.

DELEGATE FLORES (CO): Mr. Commander, Tom Flores, delegate from Colorado. Mr. Commander, in view of the fact that there is but one candidate for national commander, I move that we suspend the rules of this Convention, close nominations and that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote for the entire delegate strength of this Convention and that Denise H. Rohan be elected national commander by acclamation.

I will now make the first motion. Mr. Commander, I move that we suspend the rules of this Convention pertaining to the election of the national commander and the nomination and election of the national vice commanders, which rules shall be reinstated at the conclusion of the election for national vice commanders. Thank you, sir.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: There is a motion before us to suspend the rules of this Convention pertaining to the election of the national commander and the nomination and election of national vice commanders, which rules shall be automatically reinstated at the conclusion of the election of national vice commanders. Is there a second? ...Second. Hearing a second, this motion is non-debatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All in favor of this motion signify by saying aye. Opposed. The ayes have it. I now recognize from the floor, microphone two.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CHAPMAN (OH): Mr. Commander, Ron Chapman, delegation chairman from the Department of Ohio. As a duly elected delegate to this Convention, I move that the nominations for the high office of national commander be closed.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: We a motion that nominations for the office of national commander be closed. Is there a second? ...Second. Hearing a second, the motion to close nominations is a non-debatable motion and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor signify by saying aye. All opposed? The ayes have it. I now recognize from the floor microphone one.

DELEGATE PAJAK (MA): Mr. Commander, Jodie Pajak, delegate from Massachusetts. Mr. Commander, with great pride and honor, I move that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of this Convention and that Denise H. Rohan be elected national commander by acclamation.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Is there a second? ...Second. Hearing a second, this is motion before us that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of this Convention and Denise H. Rohan be elected national commander by acclamation. All those in favor of the motion signifying by saying aye. Those opposed? The ayes have it. I now call on the national adjutant.
NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: As national adjutant, I cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of this Convention for the election of Denise H. Rohan as national commander of The American Legion. (Cheers and applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I declare Denise H. Rohan elected national commander of The American Legion! (Cheers and applause)

Will the sergeant-at-arms assist the new commander of The American Legion to the platform. She will be escorted to the stage by her husband, Mike Rohan, members of her family, and NEC member from the Department of Wisconsin, Ken Rynes.

... "Count On Me" performed by Bruno Mars was played. (Cheers and applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Chair recognizes Past National Commander Fang Wong of New York for the purpose of administering the oath of office to the new national commander of The American Legion. Commander Wong.

Administering the Oath of Office to the National Commander

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER WONG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Denise, first I would like to thank you for the honor and privilege for me to take part in this historical event. Second, as you wish, I will try to do it best I can in the official language of English. (Laughter) She asked me that. Now, please raise your right hand and repeat after me.

I, Denise H. Rohan, do solemnly pledge myself to perform faithfully and impartially the duties of the Office of National Commander of The American Legion. I further pledge that I will support and defend the Constitution of The United States of America and the National Constitution and Bylaws of The American Legion. I do not subscribe to the principles of any group opposed to our form of government, so help me God. (Applause)

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER WONG: Congratulations!

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Ladies and gentlemen, the 2017-2018 national commander of The American Legion, Denise H. Rohan. (Cheers and applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER ROHAN (via video): I have two older sisters. Both of my sisters knew exactly what they wanted to do when they got out of high school and what their careers were going to be. When I was in high school, I was a junior in high school thinking: I don't have a clue what I want to do.

I knew that my parents didn't have a lot of money. We weren't rich. One of my really good friends decided she was going to go in the Army, but she didn't want to go to Des Moines, which is where you had your physical and stuff. She didn't want to go to Des Moines by herself. So she convinced me and another person that we should go with her for this adventure to Des Moines. So the three of us went with the Army recruiter down to Des Moines, and we did our physicals. She failed, and the two of us passed. Went in, joined the military on the buddy system. So we went to basic training together, just to give me the time to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. And then I met the love of my life.

My theme for my year is Family First. When I look back at my military career, I had my relationship with God, but then I had my family, my sisters and my mom and my dad. I have my extended family, my cousins and my aunts and uncles. You start realizing that you have another family, and that family are all the women that I was in basic training with. They had my back, and they made sure I was taken care of. We became sisters.

Every place you go in the military, you get that new family. Then you get out, and you just get that feeling like, okay, I'm out, and I'm not part of the community, but you still have that pull of: I need to be part of something. You said you were going to defend the country for the rest of your life, and so you need to be part of something.

Then I found The American Legion Family, and it really is a family. My son's grandparents were in different states. So with The American Legion, he had like 20 grandmas and grandpas. We would take him down to The Legion, and it was a family. We
did things together. We took care of each other. If there was a problem, we took care of it. We started getting more active with the National Guard and reserve, and as we see that, and families were being deployed, it's just one extended family. Really, when you look at The American Legion and what we all do and we look at our Children & Youth programs and our Americanism programs, The Legion is all about taking care of families across the globe.

As I've traveled for the two years' worth of campaigning, I've met so many fantastic people. It just makes you appreciate everything and everybody you meet, because every person has a place in history and every person touches somebody somehow, and I get to meet so many of those people. (Cheers and applause)

Acceptance Speech: Newly Elected National Commander
Denise H. Rohan, Wisconsin

Thank you. Past Commander Schmidt, officers, guests, my American Legion Family, thank you for this amazing opportunity to serve as your national commander. I am honored and humbled to have all of your support and your trust.

Commander Schmidt, thank you for your year of dedication and service to our great organization. As you pass the torch on to me to carry the legacy forward, I will do my best to fill your shoes. President Duscheck, Commander Danny Smith, I look forward to working with both of you in the coming year.

Let me start by introducing my family first. Most of you already know my husband, Mike. He was my campaign manager. He is a past department adjutant. (Applause)

Our son Nick; our daughter-in-law Angie; and our grandchildren, Sawyer and Isla. (Applause) My two sisters, Bonnie Nuss and Terry Larson. (Applause)

And my brothers and sisters-in-laws Steve and Jeanie Rohan and Kelly and Tracy Rohan. I love and cherish each of you, and I appreciate your support in giving me this opportunity to travel in the coming year knowing that you will be waiting for me with open arms when I return after I have completed my mission as national commander.

To the entire Department of Wisconsin, thank you for your faith in me and your many years of hard work and dedication to get me here today. Thank you, Past National Commanders Fang Wong and Dan Ludwig, for your assistance in today's ceremony and to Patricia and Jim for your seconding speeches. As I look around the room, there are so many of you who have had some type of influence on my life. So thank you all for making me the person that I am today.

Now, as I've walked around the convention center this past week, almost everyone I passed has asked me: "Are you ready?" As I contemplate the answer to that question, I reflect on the 51 departments that I visited in the last two years and I remember all of the fantastic American Legion Family members that I met during those visits. I thank you all for your hospitality while I was in your departments. You really did make me feel like part of the family.

During my travels, I learned about some wonderful programs that are unique to your own departments. I recall the history lessons that I've gotten from veterans who have survived major battles and the tragic stories of those who are still suffering internal battles. I continue to learn as much about this organization as I possibly can and how our American Legion Family and how we are leaving a footprint on this great nation.

Now, during my visits, I told you about my theme of Family First. We all know that The American Legion is at its best when we worked together as an American Legion Family, it's The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary, the Sons of The American Legion, and the American Legion Riders. I also talked about how my theme is based on The American Legion's foundation for God and country. Because, you see, I
believe that we were put here, where you are today and in the positions that you are in currently, for the greater good. We're not here to judge one another. We are here to nurture and take care of one another.

Families grow through love and support for one another. As an American Legion Family, we need to treat each other in that same spirit, like part of our larger extended family. I chose purple this year for the membership shirt to show that we are joining forces as an American Legion Family. Just like all branches of the military started working together and joined forces, they purpled up years ago, and it is time for The American Legion Family to also purple up as we work together for the common good. Because as long as this nation continues to have veterans and continues to have military personnel deployed across this globe, The American Legion Family will stand tall next to our heroes and next to their families.

There are National Guard and reserve families living in your hometowns who are feeling alone and afraid. Please, continue to step up and make connections with those families. Whenever possible, make that connection before the unit is deployed. Get to the yellow ribbon events that are taking place in your communities prior to deployments, get to know the Family Readiness Group leaders for your units, and let the families know what we do, who we are, and what assistance we can offer on a daily basis. Make sure to embrace the Family Readiness Group leader because chances are they, too, have a loved one deployed and they are carrying an extra burden on their shoulders.

Now, a few years ago I was at a Veterans Day event at a community center. The middle school band and the middle school choir took part of that program. The main speaker that day was a Gold Star father, and he was sharing the story of his son being killed in Afghanistan. While he was speaking, there was a little girl in the choir who started to cry. As her friends started to console her, she cried even harder. Pretty soon her teacher came and got her and took her to the back of the room where her mother was. I sat there wondering what the connection was between this little girl and the man who was speaking about his son.

When the program was over, the mother, who I had never met, sought me out in the crowd. She wanted to say thank you to The American Legion on behalf of her family. Because, you see, one of the times that her husband was deployed, there was a fire in her home, and they also had a broken water heater. The local American Legion post stepped up, helped her apply for Temporary Financial Assistance, and then came to her home and helped make repairs. The mom said that she's confident that had it not been for The American Legion Family and our Temporary Financial Assistance program and The American Legion Family members who helped repair their home that her husband may not have returned safely. When things were taken care of in her home, she knew that she did not need to trouble her husband with those issues and that he could concentrate on his mission overseas and that he could have one less worry on the battlefield, thanks to The American Legion Family, because that's what we do and that is who we are. (Applause)

Taking care of families here at home is what gets our heroes back home safely. Now this little girl, she was crying because during her father's several deployments over the years, she was asked to be resilient and she needed to step up into a more mature family role. She was being strong for her mom and her siblings. But that day, as she listened to the story of a soldier that did not make it home, a flood of fears and emotions came pushing and bubbling its way to the surface. She had all those fears about her father, but she had stuffed them down way deep in her soul to be strong for the family. Her dad is now home and he is retired. But this little girl, she needed some help that even her family didn't realize was needed. We helped get her connected with counseling, and they helped her realize that it was okay for her to have those feelings. Now she's living life as a normal kid, and she's also helping to support other military children as their parents are being deployed.
Across this nation, we have families who need a hand up during a difficult situation. The American Legion Family is there with their Temporary Financial Assistance funds. But as the war on terrorism continues, there are more and more families that need that extra help, which is why one of my charities this coming year will be the Temporary Financial Assistance fund. There's more need than our TFA Fund alone can cover, and we need to continue to be there. We need to continue to build our TFA so that we can continue to care for families who need us. As our veterans are returning home with injuries and they need help to continue their lives back here at home, they also need trained service officers to help them through the process of getting their benefits that they earned, the benefits that they deserve, which is why the second part of my charity will be to make sure that service officers get the training that they need to help our veterans.

We witnessed history here yesterday as President Trump signed the VA Appeals Modernization Act of 2017 into law right here on our stage. This will help claims and appeals be processed faster, but we need trained service officers to assist to get those claims properly submitted. The faster we can get veterans the benefits they earned, the faster they can go on to leading happy, productive lives. It doesn't just help veterans. It helps the entire family because that's what we do and that is who we are.

Now, I could be here for hours talking about all of the wonderful, wonderful things that we do. But you've been here this week and you had the opportunity to see our Youth Champions, hear and see all of our award winners, and to help pass resolutions. You know what we do, and you know who we are. I hope you always remember why we are.

Now, let me share one more story with you. It actually took place at our home about 37 years ago when an American Legion recruiter came to recruit my husband, Mike, into the organization. I identified myself as an eligible war-era veteran, and I was told that women joined the Auxiliary. Now, it became very obvious that I didn't have much control over my husband at the time because he joined The Legion and left me behind. (Laughter)

A few years later we moved to Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, and I was asked to join Elmer Peterson Post 333 where the newly elected commander was also looking for a post adjutant. After holding several leadership positions in that post, and the district, and the department, we moved over to Mason-Lindsay Post 385 in Verona, Wisconsin. And here I am today the newly elected national commander of the largest veterans service organization in this nation. (Cheers and applause)

Oh, and I need to tell you about that original post, the post that denied me membership 37 years ago. Well, they have a picture of me up in their post with a sign underneath it that says: She could have been a member of this post. (Laughter)

Remember, women are veterans too. (Cheers and applause)

It's a great reminder that since the birth of The American Legion back in 1919, our leadership knew that a veteran was a veteran regardless of race, religion, or gender. Women could vote for national commander before they could vote for president of the United States. (Applause)

I know that women have been and continue to lead this great organization across this nation. So you ask me if I'm ready? Well, I want to ask you: Are you ready? (Applause)

Are you ready to continue to join forces as part of the nation's largest veterans service organization family? Are you ready to purple up and show the nation that we are a family that not just takes care of our own members, we stand ready to take care of our active-duty military and their families; we take care of our veterans and their families. In reality, when you look at our Four Pillars and all of the programs that we have in The American Legion, are you ready to continue to take care of our entire nation's families? (Applause)

Now, for the last two years, Commander Barnett and Commander Schmidt have been doing awareness walks out in the communities, and they have been wonderful awareness walks across this nation. Well, I think it's time for us to start inviting our community into
our post homes to show our communities just what we are all about. I ask you to please start planning your Veterans Day events now. As you plan those Veterans Day meals and celebrations, make sure to include current and expired members, members from your holding post, Blue Star and Gold Star mothers, student veterans, military recruiters, members of the National Guard and reserve along with their families, veterans in local care facilities or hospitals that are able to get out and their families. Let’s light up social media with the world’s largest Veterans Day celebration this nation has ever seen. Let’s feed our communities, because putting on community meals is another great part of what we do and who we are.

To make a difference in someone's life, you don't have to be brilliant, rich, beautiful, or perfect. You just have to care enough to be there. Now, each one of you have something very special in your heart that keeps you coming back. I thank God for the person who planted that spark in your heart, and I hope, I hope that you are passing your knowledge and that spark on to someone else. Continue to nurture and mentor those people along. As you watch those members flourish, you are also helping The American Legion Family become stronger and to continue to grow. Every moment that you spend on American Legion Family activities is a statement of faith. It's a statement that you believe in what our organization stands for and what we do. Together we can all stand proud, knowing that we are the ones, the veterans and our families, who are keeping this country strong as we continue to lay the foundation for our future leaders.

God bless each and every one of you. I pray you have safe travels home. God bless this great nation. I thank you all for always putting our families first. (Applause)

First Gentleman Presentation

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Ladies and gentlemen, as a point of personal privilege, I would like to call on Mary Ludwig, wife of Past National Commander Daniel Ludwig of Minnesota, for a presentation by the First Ladies to the very first First Gentleman of The American Legion! (Cheers and applause)

MARY LUDWIG: Mike, I, along with all of these lovely ladies, also known as Former First Ladies, are proud to invite you to join us, not as a First Lady, but the very, very first First Gentleman. (Applause)... At this time, a musical interlude was played.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Wow. What a historic convention we are having! (Cheers and applause) Thank you, Mary. I now recognize microphone two.

DELEGATE JACOB HELM (NE): Mr. Commander, Jacob Helm, delegate from Nebraska. Mr. Commander, since the rules of the Convention have been suspended, I move that nominations for the office of national vice commander be made from the floor of this Convention.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: There is a motion before us that nominations for the office of national vice commander be made from the floor. ...Second. Hearing a second, the motion is non-debatable and requires a two thirds vote. All those in favor signify by saying aye. Those opposed? The ayes have it. We will now entertain nominations for the offices of national vice commander from the floor. I now recognize microphone one.

Election of National Vice Commanders

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CROUSER (DE): Mr. Commander, Jeff Crouser, chairman of the delegation from Delaware. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Past National Commander Rick Santos for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.
NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The chair recognizes Past National Commander Rick Santos of Maryland for the purpose of a nomination.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER SANTOS: Mr. Chairman, delegates, alternates, and guests to the 99th National Convention, my presentation this afternoon is a nomination of Larry J. Marcouillier from the Department of Delaware for national vice commander of The American Legion.

My first encounter with Larry was in 2007. At a department convention and department executive committee meetings, I heard legionnaires refer to him as "Larry Larry." Eventually I found out that this name of endearment was due to the members' lack of correctly pronouncing or spelling his last name, Marcouillier. So Larry Larry was recorded in the minutes of those meetings.

Larry was born in Groton, Massachusetts, and raised, schooled, and entered military life in Forge Village, Massachusetts. He joined the United States Air Force in 1970. Larry served honorably for 20 years in the United States Air Force as a munitions systems technician. In 1987 with 17 years of honorable military service, he joined The American Legion through James F. Draper Post 255 in Newport News, Virginia.

He attended the United States Air Force Community College and Weber State University. He retired from the Air Force in 1990 with the rank of master sergeant. Following his honorable discharge in 1990, he relocated to Harrington, Delaware, where he transferred his Legion membership to Calloway, Kemp, Raughley, Tee Post 7. In 2011 he retired from International Latex, also known as ILC, in Frederica, Delaware.

As a 31-year member of The American Legion, Larry has served our organization in a committed and dedicated manner. He has served in all capacities, including vice commander, commander of his post, Kent District, and the Department of Delaware. At the national level, he served as department's Alternate National Executive Committeeman and National Executive Committeeman. He has served on the Foreign Relations Council, Foreign Relations Commission, and Media & Communications Commission.

Larry is a man of few words, he's a straight shooter, for what you see and hear are what you get. No mumbo, no jumbo. He is a quiet man, but do not be misled by this demeanor. He is persistent, he's tedious, he's tough. Larry is not short and willpower to say what is right and just for The American Legion. Larry is a commander's dream. When asked, he responds in an affirmative manner. When given a task, he completes his assignment in a timely and thorough fashion.

Larry and I were born and raised in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, but at times we speak different dialects. Examples: He would use a "water fountain"; I drink at a "scuttlebutt." He would say "ice cream"; I would say "geedunk." He eats "candy bars," and I had "pogey bait." Larry ate in a dining facility with chandeliers; I dined on steel-plated mess stacks. As you can hear, at times we converse using language foreign to each other; however, we hear and we say in the same language on promoting The American Legion and its purposes and mission. Larry is a veterans' veteran. As I noted prior, he is not afraid to speak up on behalf of our American Legion, our country, or our veterans. He shall serve The American Legion well. Therefore, as a delegate to this Convention, I place in nomination Larry J. Marcouillier, Larry Larry, from the Department of Delaware for national vice commander of The American Legion for 2017-2018. Thank you.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The chair recognizes microphone two.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN HENDERSON (IL): Mr. Commander, Bob Henderson, chairman of the delegation from Illinois. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize PNC Marty Conatser for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The chair recognizes Past National Commander Marty Conatser of Illinois for the purpose of nomination.
PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER CONASTER: Commander, delegates, guests, it gives me great pleasure to come before the 99th National Convention of The American Legion to place the name of an Illinois Legionnaire for the high office of national vice commander. Illinois last had a national vice commander in 1936.

William "Bill" Flanagan is a 52-year member of Post 321 in New Baden, Illinois. Bill has long served his post and the veterans of Clinton County, serving as a post commander for three years and several years on the Clinton County Veterans Council.

Bill has displayed strong leadership skills at all levels of The American Legion. He has served his commander at the post, county, district, division, and state levels. Bill served on the department Safety Law & Order Committee that oversees our Youth Police School for 20 years and chaired that committee for 15.

Bill is a solid Legionnaire that has taken on many jobs in the organization: department sergeant-at-arms for two years, SAL Liaison Committee, Convention Committee for Distinguished Guests and Department Finance, just to name a few.

On the national level, Bill has served as the National Executive Committeeman for Illinois in 2003 and 2004, serving several years on the National Foreign Relations Committee and serving as its chairman in 2017. One of Bill's greatest challenges was serving as the aide to the national commander in 2007-2008. Believe me, keeping me straight was a major task. And he handled it well.

After 35 years of service to the phone company, he retired in 2003. Bill has been married to his wife, Ann, for 47 years, and they have three grown children and six grandchildren. They are a true American Legion family.

It gives me great pleasure to place into nomination the name of William "Bill" Flanagan for the high office of national vice commander for the membership year of 2017-2018, a great legionnaire, but an even better friend. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The chair recognizes microphone one.

CHAIRMAN DELEGATION BLOXOM (OK): Mr. Commander, John Bloxom, chairman of the delegation from Oklahoma. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Past National Vice Commander Paul Sanford for the purpose of a nomination for the office of vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Past National Vice Commander Paul Sanford of Kansas for the purpose of nomination.

PAST NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER SANFORD: Good afternoon now. My name is Paul Sanford, past national vice commander, past department commander, and a duly elected delegate from the Department of Kansas. It is my distinct honor and privilege for me to place in nomination for national vice commander the name of Bobby D. Bryant from the Department of Oklahoma.

Bobby D. Bryant served as a U.S. Navy Seabee, both CONUS and combat, deployed twice to Vietnam during the period of 1965 to 1969 and was honorably discharged as an E-5.

Bobby is an eight-year member of Donaldson/Walker Post 108 in Cushing, Oklahoma, where he served as post adjutant, post service officer and post commander. He served District 5 commander during which time the efforts were key elements in the initial phases of department recovery and revitalization. Bobby served as Department of Oklahoma vice commander West and then Department of Oklahoma commander. He is currently serving or has served at 2016-2017 as National Executive Committeeman.

Bobby served at the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission as a local Veteran Employment Representative and was recognized and honored as 2011 Department of Oklahoma American Legion Employment Officer of the Year, and also again in 2012. In 2013, he was the National American Legion Local Veterans Employment Representative of the Year.
He continues to serve on several American Legion and veterans service committees at the local, state, and national levels, including The American Legion national Membership Committee, and served as The American Legion representative to Oklahoma Veterans Council and as director of the Payne County, Oklahoma, Forgotten Warriors Program.

Bobby D. Bryant is married to his wife, Linda, for 53 years. He has two grown daughters, Deidra and Destiny, both of Oklahoma, and a son, John, of Port Richard, Washington, who is also a veteran. They have seven grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

Therefore, it is my distinct honor to place the name of Bobby D. Bryant from the Department of Oklahoma in nomination for national vice commander for the year 2017-2018. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Chair recognizes microphone two.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN DUNHAM (SD): Mr. Commander, Charemon Dunham, chairman of the delegation from South Dakota. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize NEC Paul Evenson for the purpose of the nomination of the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The chair recognizes National Executive Committeeman Paul Evenson of South Dakota for the purpose of a nomination.

DELEGATE EVENSON (SD): Mr. Commander, past national commanders, fellow delegates and guests, I am National Executive Committeeman Paul Evenson, a delegate to this Convention from the Department of South Dakota. It is my honor and privilege to come before you today to place into nomination for the office of national vice commander a person who is highly qualified for this position, Byron I. Callies.

Byron was born on July 30, 1948, in Madison, South Dakota, and earned his membership eligibility by serving for over 41 years in the South Dakota National Guard. Joining at the age of 17 in 1965 and retiring in 2006 at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, director of personnel.

His American Legion career extends over 45 years. During that time, he held many offices, including post commander, district commander, department Americanism chairman, department chaplain, department vice commander, and department commander in 2013, currently as the chairman of the Internal Affairs Committee for the Department of South Dakota. He attended Legion College in 2009. On the national level, he serves as a consultant on the Children & Youth Committee. He's also a legislative liaison to U.S. Congresswoman Kristi Noem of South Dakota.

If there is a tough job that needs to be done, Byron is the go-to person in South Dakota to get it done. Byron has shown time and time again that he has the expertise to work with people, solve problems, and get the results that are in the best interest of The American Legion. Byron graduated from Howard High School in 1966 and went on later to earn a bachelor's degree in applied management and a master's degree in business administration. His civilian career consisted of over 46 years in the energy industry, culminating in the last 16 years with the U.S. Department of Energy.

He is married to Kalyn, and they have three grown children, Melissa, Byron Jr., and Brad, all members of The American Legion Family. He is currently the state director of the U.S. Selective Service System for South Dakota.

As a national vice commander, Byron will be a team player who will do an outstanding job furthering the programs of The American Legion. As a duly elected delegate to this Convention, I place in nomination for national vice commander a great veteran and Legionnaire from South Dakota, Byron I. Callies. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The Chair recognizes microphone one.
DELEGATION CHAIRMAN STEPHENSON (UT): Mr. Commander, Chuck Stephenson, chairman of the delegation from Utah. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize National Executive Committeeman Terry Schow for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The chair recognizes National Executive Committeeman Terry Schow from Utah for the purpose of a nomination.

DELEGATE SCHOW (UT): National Commander and national officers, one of the great orators of our time said, "Nothing is worse than doing well that which need not be done at all." Past National Commander Paul Morin has asked us to keep this short, and I know I'm last, and I know you folks have got lots to do.

We place in nomination, proudly, the name of Paula Stephenson, a 30-year member of the United States Army, retired, a more than 25-year member of The American Legion, a past post and department commander, active in veterans military and other civic activities within the state of Utah. We proudly place in nomination the name of Paula Stephenson for national vice commander for the Western Region. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I now recognize microphone two.

DELEGATE CHIN (NY): Mr. Commander, Arvin Chin, delegate from New York. Mr. Commander, I move that nominations for the office of national vice commander be closed.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: We have a motion that nominations for office of the national vice commander be closed. Is there a second? ...Second. Hearing a second, the motion is non-debatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor signify by saying aye. Opposed? The ayes have it. The Chair recognizes microphone one.

DELEGATE COATS (MO): Mr. Commander, Darlene Coats, delegate from the state of Missouri. Mr. Commander, I move that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote for the entire delegate strength of this Convention and that Larry Marcouillier, William Flanagan, Bobby Bryant, Byron Callies, and Paula Stephenson be elected national vice commanders by acclamation.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: We have a motion that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote for the entire delegate strength of this Convention and that Larry Marcouillier of Delaware, Bill Flanagan of Illinois, Bobby Bryant of Oklahoma, Byron Callies of South Dakota, and Paula Stephenson of Utah be elected national vice commanders by acclamation. ...Second. Hearing a second, the motion is non-debatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All in favor signify by saying aye. Opposed? The ayes have it. I now call on the national adjutant.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, as national adjutant for The American Legion, I cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of this Convention for Larry Marcouillier, William Flanagan, Bobby B. Bryant, Byron Callies, and Paula Stephenson for the offices of national vice commander of The American Legion.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: I declare Larry Marcouillier, William Flanagan, Bobby D. Bryant, Byron Callies, and Paula Stephenson for the offices of national vice commander of The American Legion. (Applause)

Will the new national vice commanders come to the platform to be introduced and sworn in ... At this time, a musical interlude was played.

Installation of National Vice Commanders

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Our national vice commanders. At this time, I am honored to swear you into your newly elected office as a national vice commander. I know you will uphold the trust that has been placed in you by the comrades who nominated and supported you and the Convention delegates that elected you.
I trust you will fulfill every obligation required of you. I challenge you to familiarize yourselves with the duties of your office and carry them out with the same spirit from which The American Legion was founded. The welfare, success, and integrity of this great organization depends on you, as you travel in the departments and throughout this country promoting the mandates of The American Legion as approved by the National Convention and the National Executive Committee. It is your duty to protect the good name of The American Legion with the people of our great nation that you meet as you travel. Help them to know The Legion's purposes and policies. Remember the Four Pillars that motivate us as members to serve this nation. As you serve, always remember there is no rank, for which we all serve as equals. We are all aiming for the same goals, the ideals of justice, freedom, democracy, and loyalty. This means you should always employ the cardinal principles of The American Legion to all of those that we serve: The rehabilitation of all disabled veterans and the care of those who are now suffering from wounds, disease and want, to include the care of their family members; the education of our youth; educating citizens on the ideal of true Americanism; maintaining a strong national defense. In your travels representing The American Legion, always practice these Four Pillars in your promotion of service to the community, state, and nation.

Please raise your right hand and repeat after me: I, do solemnly pledge myself to perform faithfully and impartially the duties of the office of The American Legion I am about to assume. And I further pledge I will uphold the principles outlined in the National Constitution and the Preamble of The American Legion in service to our veterans and their families, their communities, state and nation. Congratulations, national vice commanders!

Ladies and gentlemen, Let's have a big round of applause for our newly elected national vice commanders. (Cheers and applause)

I now call on Past National Commander Daniel Ludwig of Minnesota to present the Colors to our incoming national commander.

Presentation of Colors to Newly Elected National Commander

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER LUDWIG: Thank you, Mr. Commander, Legionnaires and distinguished guests, please rise for the presentation of our National Colors by National Champion Color Guard Post 291 of Newport Beach, California, to our new national commander, Denise Rohan. Color Guard, present the colors. Hand Salute.

... At this time the delegation rendered a salute to the Colors.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER LUDWIG: Two! National Commander Rohan, please join me here at the lectern. Commander, woven in the fabric of the crimson banner of The American Legion are 98 years of Legion accomplishments, from our doughboy founders in 1919 to this very moment, from the care of widows, orphans and the disabled after World War I, to the creation of what would eventually become the Department of Veterans Affairs and later the drafting of the GI Bill. More recently our efforts led to the signing into law the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, otherwise known as the Forever GI Bill. Every day The American Legion provides countless contributions from its thousands of posts in cities, towns across America.

You will now lead us as we weave the newest threads in our Legion flag, service to community, state, and nation. And then woven in the fabric of the red, white and blue, the beloved banner of our nation, is the history of we the people, the history of our nation. Woven in our flag are the hopes and dreams of all freedom-loving peoples everywhere. That flag has led and inspired our warriors in battle, and it has been the silent witness to America's finest hours. And now it has witnessed another of America's finest moments, your election to the high office of national commander of The American Legion. I know these colors will always be a source of pride for you and they will be a source of inspiration...
for you in difficult and challenging times as we continue our service to God and country. Congratulations, Commander Rohan, and God bless you and your family now and always. Commander, your Colors. (Applause)

Color guard, return the colors of the national commander to post. Hand salute.

... At this time the delegation rendered a salute to the Colors.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER LUDWIG: Two! (Applause)

Presentation: Newly Elected National President
American Legion Auxiliary

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: This is an exciting time for any National Convention. We have elected a new national commander and look forward to an exciting and historic time of growth and community involvement. This is also the time when the American Legion Auxiliary elects a new president, as this important part of our Legion Family is also poised to meet the needs of veterans and their loved ones.

The woman chosen to lead the American Legion Auxiliary has worked many years for veterans and their families. She served as the organization's national vice president and has been a member of the American Legion Auxiliary since 1958, eligible for Auxiliary membership through her late father, World War II veteran Roland Duscheck, she has also served as Wisconsin department president in 1994-1995. This is an exciting year for Wisconsin, is it not? (Cheers and applause)

A retired schoolteacher, she is ready to assume the top leadership position of the nation's largest patriotic women's organization. Please give a warm welcome to National President of The American Legion Auxiliary Diane E. Duscheck. (Applause)

NATIONAL PRESIDENT DUSCHECK: Good afternoon. It's very impressive this year to see the installation of the Sons of The Legion commander and now to see the installation of your new commander. We're looking forward to a great year. The thing that I've noticed over and over is how we're hearing about the servant leadership among the people that we're looking at here to serve first, to listen for understanding, to build trust, and to add value to others. I think it's going to be a great year for The American Legion Family, and I'm looking forward to working with your commander very much. Thank you so much. (Applause)

Presentation: Newly Elected National Commander
Sons of The American Legion

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: The man chosen to lead the Sons of The American Legion was a charter member of Ralston Squadron 27 and is now a member of Papillion Squadron 32, Detachment of Nebraska. He is eligible from his father, Danny L. Smith, an Air Force veteran who served during the Korean War. Our guest has served in numerous capacities at the squadron, detachment, and national levels. He has worked in the construction industry for over 45 years. He and his wife, Donna, have two married children and two grandchildren. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome National Commander of the Sons of The American Legion Danny Smith. (Applause)

SAL NATIONAL COMMANDER SMITH: Good afternoon. Commander Schmidt, National Commander Rohan, national officers and staff, past national officers, delegates, alternates, guests and distinguished individuals to this 99th Annual Convention of The American Legion, American Legion Families, members one and all, I want to thank you for that warm welcome. But to be honest with you, I should stand and applaud you for what you do for this organization, day in and day out, year after year. Your efforts and your service are truly appreciated.
National Commander Schmidt and members of The American Legion, congratulations on another exceptional year. Your service to the veterans of this country, our children and youth and our communities is second-to-none. I hope you all understand and know that your service is appreciated. I know that because I've seen the smiles on the faces of those that you serve, and there is nothing more gratifying than those smiles that you receive for your service. To me that is the truest measure of success and appreciation. Our theme for this coming year is "Following their footsteps, making history." That history has already begun today by electing the first-ever female national commander of The American Legion. (Applause)

Congratulations, Commander Rohan. We are going to continue to make history throughout this year, assisting you, The American Legion, putting family first and concentrating our efforts, supporting the Endowment Fund, the National Emergency Fund, and, of course, the Child Welfare Foundation. I want to thank all of you for providing such an outstanding Legionnaire to work with this coming year, and I do look forward to serving with Commander Rohan and the dedicated and the enthusiastic American Legion Auxiliary National President Diane Duscheck. Let us all work together this coming year to improve the lives of our comrades, our children, and our communities.

I want you to know that the 368,000-plus members of the Sons of The American Legion are here to assist you. So, please, count on us to help you fulfill the ideals and principles on which The American Legion was founded. You know, together we can and together we will make a difference.

I know it's been a long week, and I know you have much business to attend to. So this is going to be brief and I'm going to get straight to the point. I'd like you all to take a quick look around the room. You know, even at first glance, it's easy to see that we are all unique. We all come from all over the country, and even the world, with different individual backgrounds, talents, cultures, political and religious beliefs. But what makes us truly unique are those common bonds that we all share, the belief and dedication in the ideals and principles of The American Legion; love of our country and our flag; and our passion to serve.

I leave you with this thought: Alone we are but one voice. Together, however, we create the thunder of the world's largest veterans organization, The American Legion Family. I thank every one of you for what you do and what you have already done for this country. Thank you so very much. God bless you and welcome home. God bless all of you, God bless the United States of America, and God bless The American Legion Family. Thank you. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Thank you, Commander Smith. Please remain with us for a few minutes. Also, National Commander Rohan and National President Duscheck, please join us to the front here, if you would. Ladies and gentlemen, National Commander Rohan, National President Duscheck, and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Smith, our dynamic team for the upcoming year. That's Denise, Diane and Danny. Our American Legion Family in 3-D! (Cheers and applause) ... At this time, "We Are Family" performed by Sister Sledge was played.

Announcement

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Just a reminder that the Post-Convention NEC meeting will occur in the Convention Center, Rooms D, two and three, immediately following adjournment. All the new national officers are to attend. Is there any further business to come before this convention? There being none, please uncover as National Chaplain Klee offers the benediction.
Benediction
Harvey H. Klee, Texas, National Chaplain

Almighty God, all good things must come to an end to make way for better things to happen, because the best is yet to come. And so we part from one another, but not Your presence. And as we express our gratitude to You, may we never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them.

As we continue in our fight for veterans benefits and their rehabilitation, may we be a rainbow in someone's cloud. As our concerns center on security, help us to educate and inform the whole mass of people, for they are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty. Lord, help us to expand Americanism across this great land, perpetuate our heritage and ideals, our code and standards, the things we live by and teach our children. May our focus ever remain on our children and youth. As you have stated many years ago: Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. Now go in peace, serve the Lord, and carry out the mission of The American Legion. May God's protective care see you safely home to your family and to your friends.

In this we pray in the name of all that is holy. Amen.

Retirement of Colors

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Sergeant-at-Arms, retire the POW/MIA Flag. ... At this time, the POW/MIA flag was retired.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Cover. The color guard will retire the flag of the United States of America. Please stand. The delegates will stand and hand salute on my command. Hand Salute!

... At this time, the delegation rendered a salute to the Colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER SCHMIDT: Two! The time is 12:43. I now declare this 99th Annual National Convention of The American Legion adjourned. Sine die.

... At 12:43 p.m., the 99th Annual National Convention of The American Legion was adjourned.
2017 OFFICIAL AWARDS
ANNOUNCEMENT OF ANNUAL RECIPIENT(S)

The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal Award: Awarded annually to an individual(s) or organization for their outstanding service to the nation and to the programs of The American Legion by nomination by department action or by the National Commander.

RECIPIENT: Dr. Apostolos P. Georgopoulos

American Legion Baseball Graduate of The Year Award: Presented to the major league baseball player who played American Legion Baseball as a teenager and best exemplifies the principles and purposes of the program in sportsmanship, citizenship, general good conduct, integrity and playing ability.

RECIPIENT: Brian Dozier, Minnesota Twins

Bob Feller American Legion Pitching Award: Awarded annually to that American Legion Baseball player recording the greatest number of strikeouts during the regional tournaments and World Series of American Legion Baseball.

RECIPIENT: Jordan Patty, Post 165, Midland, MI (19 strikeouts)

Commissioner of Baseball Trophy: Awarded annually at the Major League World Series to that baseball team which becomes the National Champion as a result of playing in The American Legion World Series.

RECIPIENT: Henderson Post 40, Henderson, NV

Dr. Irvin L. “Click” Cowger Memorial R.B.I. Award: Awarded annually to The American Legion Baseball player who is credited with the most runs batted in by the official score keepers of the respective regional tournaments and World Series of American Legion Baseball.

RECIPIENT: Zach Luckey, Post 1, Omaha, NE

Ford C. Frick Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department having within its jurisdiction the runner-up team in the National Finals of The American Legion Baseball program.

RECIPIENT: Omaha Post 1, Omaha, NE

The Frank N. Belgrano, Jr. Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department which has rendered the most outstanding service during the year to the program of the Boy Scouts of America.

RECIPIENT: Department of Missouri

George W. Rulon Baseball Player of the Year: A Plaque is presented to recipient by appropriate official upon conclusion of The American Legion Baseball World Series. Citation is presented to recipient at a special Hall of Fame ceremony at Cooperstown, NY, the following summer.

RECIPIENT: Shane Spencer, Post 40, Henderson, NV

The Howard P. Savage, Jr. Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department having the baseball team which becomes the Champion as a result of playing in The American Legion World Series.

RECIPIENT: Henderson, Post 40, Henderson, NV
Jack Williams Memorial Leadership Award: Awarded annually to the manager and coach of the national championship team, as representative of the adult leadership Jack Williams stressed during his lifetime.

RECIPIENT(s):  Manager: Scott Baker, Post 40, Henderson, NV
                Coaches: Tyler Baker, Essex Burton, Shawn Dickson & Roberto Persona

James F. Daniel, Jr. Memorial Sportsmanship Award: Awarded to The American Legion Baseball player participating in the World Series that represents the principle of good sportsmanship emphasized by the program.

RECIPIENT: Will Hanafan, Post 1, Omaha, NE

American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Trophy: Awarded annually in four categories to the top performing Individual and Team in the Sporter and Precision categories competing in the annual USA Shooting National Junior Olympic Air Rifle Championship who are members of clubs and teams affiliated with The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program.

RECIPIENT(s):  Precision Team: Arlington Optimist Acorns CJRC - Gold (Virginia) Post 177, The American Legion of Virginia Rebecca Lamb, Amity Ermarth, Elena Kim, Niya Burney
                Precision Individual: Sarah Osborn Patriot Shooting Club of Virginia (Virginia)
                Sporter Team: Nation Ford H.S MCJROTC (South Carolina) Post 31, The American Legion of South Carolina Marcus Stallings, Levi Carlson, Preston Jaeger, Donte Hayes

The American Legion Baseball “Slugger” Trophy: Plaque is presented to recipient, or designated representative, by appropriate official upon the conclusion of The American Legion Baseball World Series.

RECIPIENT: Jordan Patty, Post 165, Midland, MI (.529 batting average)

Ralph T. O’Neil Education Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department within the continental limits in the United States showing the greatest Americanism activity in use of The American Legion School Medal Awards.

RECIPIENT: Department of Delaware

The American Legion Baseball “Big Stick” Award: Awarded annually to that American Legion Baseball player having the highest total number of bases as determined by the official score keepers of the respective regional tournaments and World Series of American Legion Baseball.

RECIPIENT: Jack Thomas Wold, Post 40, Henderson, NV (29 total bases)
**Spafford National Trophy:** Awarded annually to that Department of The American Legion having within its jurisdiction the winner of the National High School Oratorical Contest.

**RECIPIENT:** Department of Massachusetts

**Francis M. Redington Sportsmanship Award:** Awarded annually to the athlete competing in The American Legion Junior Air Rifle National Championship who best exemplifies good sportsmanship and fair play.

**RECIPIENT:** Grace Taschuk, Post 334, American Legion Post 334 Junior Rifle Club, Andover, Maryland

**Daniel J. O’Connor Award:** Awarded annually to that Department attaining the greatest number of percentage points compiled from information contained in the Consolidated Post Reports and supporting Department narrative. (Originally named the William Randolph Hearst Trophy)

**RECIPIENT:** Department of Virginia

**The American Legion and Scouting “Square Knot” Award:** This award is designed to recognize American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion members who are actively involved in the Scouting program. This award is not meant to be a selective or limited award, but one that is available to any American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion member who completes the requirements for the award. The Award is meant to recognize dedication and work required by an American Legion, American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion member to assist in furthering the Scouting program in The American Legion.


**The American Legion National Education Award:** Awarded annually to an individual, group or organization that has promoted the education programs of The American Legion, including the promotion of “Need A Lift?”, correspond to the goals of The American Legion or has promoted or advanced education programs at the national level.

**RECIPIENT:** Mr. David Azerrad, The Heritage Foundation

**The American Legion Canadian Friendship Award:** Awarded by the National Commander with the advice and consent of the National Executive Committee at such times and places as may be consistent and appropriate. It shall be awarded to specific individuals who shall be war veterans within the accepted meaning of the term and members of authentic veterans' organization in Canada. It shall be awarded to such individuals in recognition of outstanding service in the field of veterans' affairs and in the development and perpetuation of the spirit of international good will and comradeship between the United States and Canada and between their veterans' organization and The American Legion.

**RECIPIENT(S):** ANAVICUS – None Awarded.

**INDIVIDUAL** - None Awarded
Department Award for 100% Post Children & Youth Reporting: Awarded annually to those Departments which achieve 100% of Posts indicating Children & Youth activity on Consolidated Post Reports.

**RECIPIENT:** Departments of Delaware, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Virginia and Wisconsin

National Employer of Veterans Award Recipient(s): Awarded to an employer in recognition of outstanding achievement in the employment and retraining of veterans.

**RECIPIENT(s):**
- **Category I** 2016: Precision Moulding & Woodworks, Inc., New Bern, NC
- **Category II** 2016: Lowe’s Home Improvement Center, Inc., Rapid City, SD
- **Category III** Winners: Sansone Auto Mall, Avenel, NJ

*Note: The 2017 National Employer of Veterans Award Recipient(s) will not be announced until 2018 National Convention.*

National Employment Service Award Recipient(s): Awarded in three categories: Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) of the Year; Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) of the Year; Employment Service (ES) Office of the Year.

**RECIPIENT(s):**
- **LVER of the Year** 2016: Reginald Parker, Houston, TX
- **DVOP of the Year** 2016: Bradley J. Aune, Fargo, ND
- **ES Office of the Year** Winners: Eau Claire Job Center, Eau Claire, WI

*Note: The 2017 National Employment Service Award Recipient(s) will not be announced until 2018 National Convention.*

Enhance the Lives of Disabled Persons Award Recipient: The program is a joint project between the National Organization & the AETNA Company, to award those Posts that enhance the lives of disable persons by providing opportunities for their participation in community activities.

**RECIPIENT(s):** Lone Survivor Foundation, Houston, TX

2016 Winner

*Note: The 2017 Enhance the Lives of Disabled Persons Award Recipient will not be announced until 2018 National Convention.*

National Employer of Older Worker Award Recipient: The program provides an Employer of Older Worker Award for a company that consistently hires older workers, especially veterans and serves as an inspirational recognition of a company with a record of support and commitment to the hiring of America’s older workers.

**RECIPIENT(s):** Ken’s Super Fair Foods & Shell Express, Aberdeen, SD

2016 Winner

*Note: The 2017 National Employer of Older Worker Award Recipient will not be announced until 2018 National Convention.*

National Department History Contest Awards: Awarded annually at the Fall Meeting of the National Executive Committee to those contestants entered in the National Department History Contest having submitted the One-Year History Narrative or Yearbook of the Department which best meets the standards established for that particular competition.

**RECIPIENT(s):**
- Department of North Carolina: (One-Year Narrative History)
- Department of Nebraska: (One-Year Yearbook History)
National Post History Contest Awards: Awarded annually to those contestants entered in the National Post History Contest deemed by a duly authorized panel of judges to have submitted the One-Year History of the Post which best meets the standards established for the competitions.

RECIPIENT(s): 
- Pony Express Post 359
  Saint Joseph, MO
- Mukwonago Community Post 375, Mukwonago, WI

International Amity Award: Awarded by the National Commander with the advice and consent of the National Executive Committee at such times and places as may be consistent and appropriate. It shall be awarded to specific individuals who shall be war veterans within the accepted meaning of the term and members of an authentic veteran organization established in the territory of any of the nations associated as war-time allies of the United States of America. It shall be awarded to such individuals in recognition of outstanding service in the field of veterans affairs and for service and contributions made in the development of international good will and comradeship between their organization and The American Legion.

RECIPIENT(s): 
None awarded for 2017

Distinguished Public Service Award: Awarded annually by the National Commander with the advice and consent of the Commander’s Advisory Committee at the time of the annual Washington Conference. It may be awarded to one or more person(s) of the United States Congress.

RECIPIENT(s): 
Senator John McCain, Arizona

The Arthur D. Houghton Sons of The American Legion Trophy: Awarded annually to that Detachment of Sons of The American Legion in each of five membership categories (I – 200-1,000 members; II - 1,001-3,000 members; III - 3,001-6000 members; IV – 6001-12,000 members; V – 12,001 or more), each of said Detachments attaining the greatest percentage of increase over previous year’s membership when compared with all Detachments in its category.

RECIPIENT(s): 
2017 Winners
- Category I: Detachment of Nevada
- Category II: Detachment of North Carolina
- Category III: Detachment of Missouri
- Category IV: Detachment of New Jersey
- Category V: Detachment of Michigan

General Henri Gouraud Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department in each of six categories established by the National Membership and Post Activities Committee, each of said Department having been the first in its respective category to attain or exceed its nationally assigned membership quota (effective 1986).

RECIPIENT(s): 
- Category I: None qualified
- Category II: None qualified
- Category III: None qualified
- Category IV: None qualified
- Category V: None qualified
- Category VI: Department of Idaho
General John J. Pershing Honor Award: Awarded annually to that Department having the greatest percentage of its posts receiving the Honor Ribbon for having 100 percent or more, of the post’s previous year’s membership enrolled for the coming year by December 31, and having reported such achievement to National Headquarters by not later than January 31.

RECIPIENT: Department of Kentucky

Henry D. Lindsley Trophy: Awarded annually to the Department attaining the highest percentage of membership over its preceding year's membership by March 31.

RECIPIENT: None awarded for 2017

The American Legion National Recruiter of the Year: Awarded annually to the individual certified with the highest number of new members recruited from among all of the departments.

RECIPIENT: Patricia E. Liddell, Department of Georgia

Jerry L. Hedrick Membership Award: Awarded annually to the Department, not included among the several state Departments or the Department of the District of Columbia, attaining the highest percentage of membership as of March 31, over its preceding year’s membership.

RECIPIENT: None awarded for 2017

O. L. Bodenhamer Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department designated to lead the parade at the time of the ensuing National Convention.

RECIPIENT: Department of Montana

The American Legion Air Force Academy Award: Awarded annually to that cadet of the graduating class at the Air Force Academy who demonstrates the highest proficiency in all academic subjects.

RECIPIENT: Cadet Young Wu

The American Legion Coast Guard Academy Award: Awarded annually to that cadet of the graduating class of the United States Coast Guard Academy who is considered to have personally excelled in athletics.

RECIPIENT: Ensign Nikole Bareuther Barnes

The American Legion Merchant Marine Academy Award: Awarded annually to that graduating midshipman of the Merchant Marine Academy, enrolled in the Pre-Commissioning Seminar Course, and selected by the Academy Faculty, as achieving the highest grade pertaining to a 1,000-word composition dealing with the subject of National Security.

RECIPIENT: Midshipman Zachary Charles Dy

The American Legion Military Academy Award: Awarded annually to cadet of the graduating class at the United States Military Academy with the highest standing in Chemistry.

RECIPIENT: Cadet Edmund P. Mullins, III
The American Legion Naval Academy Award: Awarded annually to that graduating midshipman of the United States Naval Academy who stands highest in those English, History and Government courses taken to complete a Foreign Affairs major.

RECIPIENT: Ensign Jacob Wirz

National Commander’s Blood Donor Awards: Presented to departments in different sized categories for participating in The American Legion’s Blood Donor Program.

RECIPIENT(s):

Category I - Departments with 100,000 or more members:
Post Participation: No Submission
Individual Participation: No Submission

Category II - Departments with 70,000 to 99,999 members:
Post Participation: Department of Minnesota
Individual Participation: Department of Minnesota

Category III - Departments with 40,000 to 69,999 members:
Post Participation: Department of Maryland
Individual Participation: Department of Maryland

Category IV - Departments with 25,000 to 39,999 members:
Post Participation: No Submission
Individual Participation: No Submission

Category V - Departments with 10,000 to 24,999 members:
Post Participation: Department of Montana
Individual Participation: Department of Montana

Category VI - Departments with less than 10,000 members:
Post Participation: No Submission
Individual Participation: No Submission

The American Legion National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award: To recognize an outstanding law enforcement officer as selected from Department law enforcement officer winners for distinguished on-and off-duty service. The accomplishments for which the award is presented shall have been in accordance with, or in furtherance of, established American Legion policies or programs and it shall have contributed to the preservation of law and order as well as the American way of life.

RECIPIENT: Sgt. Joe Rowley, Michigan State Police Tri-City Post, Gladwin, MI

The American Legion National Firefighter of the Year Award: To recognize an outstanding firefighter as selected from Department for distinguished on-and off-duty service. The accomplishments for which the award is presented shall have been in accordance with, or in furtherance of, established American Legion policies or programs and it shall have contributed to the preservation of law and order as well as the American way of life.

RECIPIENT: Asst. Fire Chief Darren O. Ware, Prince George’s Fire/EMS Department, Waldorf, MD

Paul H. Griffith ROTC Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department giving the highest degree of support to the ROTC program within its jurisdiction, based on criteria drawn up by the National Security Commission.

RECIPIENT(s): Departments of Alaska, Connecticut, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana and North Dakota
The American Legion Fourth Estate Award: Awarded to press, radio, TV, or other communications media; to associations of same, to owners, executive heads or staff members; such award to be in recognition of outstanding service to community, state, or nation, which service shall have been in accordance with or the furtherance of established American Legion policies and programs.

RECIPIENT: 2017 – Dennis Wagner, The Arizona Republic, Phoenix AZ (print); Simone Aponte, KTVU FOX2, Oakland CA (broadcast); Jerry Mitchell, The Clarion-Ledger, Jackson MS (online)

The American Legion National Commander’s Media and Communications Award: Awarded to an outstanding individual and/or organization for distinguished public service in the field of communications.

RECIPIENT: Mike Rowe, New York, NY

The American Legion Patriot Award: Awarded to an outstanding citizen who has demonstrated a profound and exceptional commitment to military personnel and their families.

RECIPIENT(s): Honorable Robert Gates

The American Legion Spirit of Service Award: Awarded annually by the Department of Defense and the six military departments that have identified the most outstanding men and women that have received press coverage in Armed Service News dispatches, the Pentagon Channel, their military base newspapers and their hometown publications.

RECIPIENT(s): Army: Virginia Constable
Navy: Robin Stephens
Marine Corps: Justin Ahasteen
Air Force: Kalynn Mitchell
Coast Guard: Jordan Suchon
Air National Guard: Allanesha Smith

Arch M. Cantrall Trophy: Awarded annually to that American Legion Band winning first prize in competition with all other American Legion bands during the annual National Convention of The American Legion.

RECIPIENT: N/A

Glen R. Hillis Trophy: Awarded annually to that Color Guard winning first prize in competition with all other Color Guards during the annual National Convention of The American Legion.

RECIPIENT: Newport Beach Harbor, Post 291, Newport Beach, CA

The Lemuel Bolles Trophy: Awarded annually to that band winning first prize in competition with all other bands during the annual National Convention.

RECIPIENT: N/A

William F. Lenker National Service Trophy: Awarded annually to that State Department of The American Legion excelling in welfare work for war veterans, providing the membership of that Department shall be no less than 80% of the membership of the preceding year.

RECIPIENT: Department of Montana
INDEPENDENT AUDITOR’S REPORT

Members of the National Finance Commission
The American Legion National Headquarters
Indianapolis, Indiana

Report on Financial Statements
We have audited the accompanying consolidated financial statements of The American Legion National Headquarters ("Legion"), which comprise the consolidated statements of financial position as of December 31, 2016 and 2015, and the related consolidated statements of activities and cash flows for the years then ended, and the related notes to the financial statements.

Management’s Responsibility for the Financial Statements
Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these consolidated financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America; this includes the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of consolidated financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Auditor’s Responsibility
Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these consolidated financial statements based on our audits. We conducted our audits in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the consolidated financial statements are free of material misstatement.

An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the consolidated financial statements. The procedures selected depend on the auditor’s judgment, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the consolidated financial statements, whether due to fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, the auditor considers internal control relevant to the entity’s preparation and fair presentation of the consolidated financial statements in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the entity’s internal control. Accordingly, we express no such opinion. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the consolidated financial statements.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Opinion
In our opinion, the consolidated financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the consolidated financial position of The American Legion National Headquarters as of December 31, 2016 and 2015, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

Other Matter
Our audits were conducted for the purpose of forming an opinion on the consolidated financial statements as a whole. The consolidating statements of financial position and activities are presented for purposes of additional analysis of the consolidated financial statements rather than to present the financial position and results of operations of the individual companies, and are not a required part of the consolidated financial statements. Such information is the responsibility of management and was derived from and relates directly to the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the consolidated financial statements. The information has been subjected to the auditing procedures applied in the audits of the consolidated financial statements and certain additional procedures, including comparing and reconciling such information directly to the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the consolidated financial statements or to the consolidated financial statements themselves, and other additional procedures in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. In our opinion, the information is fairly stated in all material respects in relation to the consolidated financial statements as a whole.

Crowe Horwath LLP
Indianapolis, Indiana
April 28, 2017
### The American Legion National Headquarters
### Consolidated Statements of Financial Position
### December 31, 2016 and 2015

#### ASSETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and cash equivalents</td>
<td>$1,256,591</td>
<td>$1,221,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts receivable</td>
<td>5,285,909</td>
<td>5,662,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest receivable</td>
<td>838,861</td>
<td>832,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses and deposits</td>
<td>1,911,233</td>
<td>3,020,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred membership expense</td>
<td>4,950,405</td>
<td>4,004,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventory</td>
<td>2,847,503</td>
<td>2,818,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in affiliate (CFA)</td>
<td>13,575</td>
<td>14,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>191,994</td>
<td>185,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Assets</strong></td>
<td>17,256,071</td>
<td>17,760,123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Investments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>15,421,583</td>
<td>10,760,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segregated for Restricted and Reserved Funds</td>
<td>34,066,122</td>
<td>33,246,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid-Up-For-Life Membership fund</td>
<td>29,615,976</td>
<td>31,395,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung scholarship fund</td>
<td>7,609,593</td>
<td>7,779,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building funds</td>
<td>5,938,455</td>
<td>5,778,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 11 Memorial scholarship fund</td>
<td>12,065,719</td>
<td>10,419,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special account – Endowment Fund</td>
<td>2,252,939</td>
<td>2,263,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General account – Endowment Fund</td>
<td>7,463,980</td>
<td>7,508,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Emergency Fund</td>
<td>4,841,986</td>
<td>4,445,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Charities</td>
<td>3,791,850</td>
<td>3,234,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,839,637</td>
<td>3,702,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Investments</strong></td>
<td>126,907,840</td>
<td>120,534,271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Property, plant and equipment, net**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4,679,174</td>
<td>5,272,164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Assets</strong></td>
<td>$148,843,085</td>
<td>$143,566,558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### LIABILITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts payable</td>
<td>$3,405,248</td>
<td>$3,639,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships payable</td>
<td>1,091,879</td>
<td>1,020,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposits on emblem merchandise sales</td>
<td>290,318</td>
<td>394,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred income</td>
<td>1,394,884</td>
<td>816,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues income</td>
<td>27,449,484</td>
<td>21,236,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred income – direct membership solicitation</td>
<td>3,696,407</td>
<td>3,840,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued vacation benefits</td>
<td>1,002,001</td>
<td>997,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued pension expense</td>
<td>12,058,718</td>
<td>13,141,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other liabilities</td>
<td>1,528,684</td>
<td>1,945,295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes payable</td>
<td>831,449</td>
<td>1,025,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues income – Paid-Up-For-Life membership</td>
<td>23,532,607</td>
<td>22,915,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life memberships due to state and local posts</td>
<td>26,093,304</td>
<td>24,682,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Liabilities</strong></td>
<td>102,374,983</td>
<td>95,935,914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### NET ASSETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
<td>8,742,165</td>
<td>12,636,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporarily restricted</td>
<td>24,729,158</td>
<td>21,934,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently restricted</td>
<td>12,996,779</td>
<td>13,060,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total net assets</strong></td>
<td>46,468,102</td>
<td>47,630,644</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Net Assets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$148,843,085</td>
<td>$143,566,558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
The American Legion National Headquarters  
Consolidated Statement of Activities  
Year ended December 31, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue, gains and other support</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporary Restricted</th>
<th>Permanently Restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National member dues</td>
<td>$ 25,782,809</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct membership solicitations</td>
<td>6,165,333</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member service fees income</td>
<td>631,106</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity income</td>
<td>2,506,181</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of emblem items</td>
<td>13,020,287</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>9,563,462</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>12,410,731</td>
<td>3,282,236</td>
<td>55,232</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label and printing fees</td>
<td>1,566,817</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and dividends, net of</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee fees of $348,294</td>
<td>1,762,993</td>
<td>1,007,686</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net realized gains (losses)</td>
<td>174,520</td>
<td>30,590</td>
<td>(38,142)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,762,247</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets released from</td>
<td>76,346,486</td>
<td>4,330,512</td>
<td>17,090</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support</td>
<td>1,284,235</td>
<td>(1,284,235)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total revenues, gains, and other</td>
<td>77,630,721</td>
<td>3,046,277</td>
<td>17,090</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>16,198,035</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16,198,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee benefits</td>
<td>4,207,101</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,207,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of sales – Legion</td>
<td>7,036,004</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,036,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department and magazine costs</td>
<td>2,943,026</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,943,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct publications</td>
<td>10,863,367</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,863,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive, staff and program travel</td>
<td>3,633,261</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,633,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission and committee</td>
<td>1,758,486</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,758,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and postage</td>
<td>12,910,600</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12,910,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships, grants and awards</td>
<td>1,989,396</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,989,396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and other operating</td>
<td>13,345,446</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,345,446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupancy and usage</td>
<td>2,049,531</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,049,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special projects and programs</td>
<td>2,794,203</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,794,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79,728,456</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>79,728,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets from operations</td>
<td>(2,097,735)</td>
<td>3,046,277</td>
<td>17,090</td>
<td>965,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net unrealized loss – investments</td>
<td>(318,591)</td>
<td>(251,612)</td>
<td>(80,411)</td>
<td>(650,614)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net change in PUFL</td>
<td>(1,886,814)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(1,886,814)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amortization of pension loss</td>
<td>(2,506,774)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,506,774)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost</td>
<td>2,916,028</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,916,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets</td>
<td>(3,893,886)</td>
<td>2,794,665</td>
<td>(63,321)</td>
<td>(1,162,542)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, beginning of year</td>
<td>12,636,051</td>
<td>21,934,493</td>
<td>13,060,100</td>
<td>47,630,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, end of year</td>
<td>$ 8,742,165</td>
<td>$ 24,729,158</td>
<td>$ 12,996,779</td>
<td>$ 46,468,102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
The American Legion National Headquarters  
Consolidated Statement of Activities  
Year ended December 31, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue, gains and other support</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporary Restricted</th>
<th>Permanently Restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National member dues</td>
<td>$25,741,665</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$25,741,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct membership solicitations</td>
<td>6,996,057</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,996,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member service fees income</td>
<td>703,326</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>703,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity income</td>
<td>2,830,783</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,830,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of emblem items</td>
<td>13,142,697</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,142,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>10,132,570</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,132,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>11,239,150</td>
<td>3,263,091</td>
<td>137,774</td>
<td>14,640,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label and printing fees</td>
<td>2,297,959</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,297,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and dividends, net of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee fees of $380,485</td>
<td>1,719,980</td>
<td>872,859</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,592,839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net realized gains (losses)</td>
<td>277,286</td>
<td>(8,336)</td>
<td>1,837</td>
<td>270,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,731,630</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,773,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77,813,103</td>
<td>4,169,614</td>
<td>139,611</td>
<td>82,122,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets released from restriction</td>
<td>1,296,836</td>
<td>(1,296,836)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total revenues, gains, and other support</td>
<td>79,109,939</td>
<td>2,872,778</td>
<td>139,611</td>
<td>82,122,328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>15,857,984</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15,857,984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee benefits</td>
<td>3,970,750</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,970,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of sales – Legion</td>
<td>7,126,612</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,126,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department and magazine costs</td>
<td>3,068,596</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,068,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct publications</td>
<td>11,373,424</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,373,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive, staff and program travel</td>
<td>3,860,681</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,860,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission and committee</td>
<td>1,555,462</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,555,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and postage</td>
<td>13,091,362</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,091,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships, grants and awards</td>
<td>1,897,428</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,897,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and other operating</td>
<td>15,205,040</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15,205,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupancy and usage</td>
<td>1,966,184</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,966,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special projects and programs</td>
<td>2,042,405</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,042,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81,015,928</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>81,015,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets from operations</td>
<td>(1,905,989)</td>
<td>2,872,778</td>
<td>139,611</td>
<td>1,106,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net unrealized gains - investments</td>
<td>(989,751)</td>
<td>(328,989)</td>
<td>(67,346)</td>
<td>(1,386,086)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net change in PUFL</td>
<td>751,375</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>751,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amortization of pension loss</td>
<td>(2,470,872)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,470,872)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost</td>
<td>956,164</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>956,164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Change in net assets              | (3,659,073) | 2,543,789 | 72,265 | (1,043,019) |
| Net assets, beginning of year     | 16,295,124  | 19,390,704 | 12,987,835 | 48,673,663 |
| Net assets, end of year           | $12,636,051 | $21,934,493 | $13,060,100 | $47,630,644 |

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
The American Legion National Headquarters
Consolidated Statements of Cash Flows
Years ended December 31, 2016 and 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cash flows from operating activities</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets</td>
<td>(1,162,542)</td>
<td>(1,043,019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustments to reconcile change in net assets to net</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cash from operating activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depreciation expense</td>
<td>795,306</td>
<td>829,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss on disposal of property and equipment</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realized gain on sale of investments</td>
<td>(166,968)</td>
<td>(270,787)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrealized loss on investments</td>
<td>650,614</td>
<td>1,386,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net change in Paid-Up-For-Life annuity</td>
<td>1,886,814</td>
<td>(751,375)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amortization of pension loss</td>
<td>2,506,774</td>
<td>2,470,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension-related changes other than net periodic</td>
<td>(2,916,028)</td>
<td>(956,164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pension cost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions restricted for long-term purposes</td>
<td>(55,232)</td>
<td>(137,774)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in assets and liabilities:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts receivable</td>
<td>376,622</td>
<td>(274,483)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest receivable</td>
<td>(6,531)</td>
<td>(131,093)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses and deposits</td>
<td>1,109,503</td>
<td>(1,440,418)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred membership expense</td>
<td>(945,856)</td>
<td>1,615,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventories</td>
<td>(28,878)</td>
<td>(114,288)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>33,749</td>
<td>32,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts and scholarships payable</td>
<td>(163,071)</td>
<td>2,234,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred income</td>
<td>6,404,112</td>
<td>4,392,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued pension expense</td>
<td>(673,495)</td>
<td>(1,017,532)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other accrued liabilities</td>
<td>(412,337)</td>
<td>721,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net cash from operating activities</td>
<td>7,232,556</td>
<td>7,545,173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Cash flows from investing activities                   |              |              |
| Purchase of property and equipment                     | (202,316)    | (438,840)    |
| Purchase of investments                                | (66,209,480) | (60,419,613) |
| Sales and maturities of investments                    | 59,352,265   | 52,309,666   |
| Investments in affiliate (CFA)                         | 659          | 2,356        |
| Net cash from investing activities                     | (7,058,872)  | (8,546,431)  |

| Cash flows from financing activities                   |              |              |
| Contributions restricted for long-term purposes        | 55,232       | 137,774      |
| Repayment on notes payable                             | (193,700)    | (186,800)    |
| Net cash from financing activities                     | (138,468)    | (49,026)     |

| Net increase (decrease) in cash and cash equivalents   | 35,216       | (1,050,284)  |
| Cash and cash equivalents, beginning of year           | 1,221,375    | 2,271,659    |
| **Cash and cash equivalents, end of year**             | **1,256,591**| **1,221,375**|
| Supplemental cash flows information                    |              |              |
| Interest paid                                          | 25,424       | 34,495       |

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.
NOTE 1 – NATURE OF OPERATIONS AND SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Nature of Organization: The American Legion National Headquarters ("Legion") is a national veterans organization which was declared to be a corporate body by an Act of the United States Congress on September 16, 1919. According to the Original Act and Subsequent Amendments, the purpose of the Legion is "to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to promote peace and goodwill among the peoples of the United States and all the nations of the earth; to preserve the memories and incidents of the two World Wars and the other great hostilities fought to uphold democracy; to cement the ties and comradeship born of service; and to conciliate the efforts of its members to mutual helpfulness and service to their country."

Nearly 48% of the Legion’s income is derived from membership dues (including amounts allocated for magazine subscriptions). An additional 11 - 12% is generated through advertising for the American Legion Magazine. Another significant source of income is Emblem sales, which includes the sale of apparel, jewelry, and other items bearing the American Legion Emblem. Income is expended by the Legion on several different programs including The American Legion Magazine, Emblem sales, veterans' assistance and rehabilitation, youth programs and others. The Legion's youth programs include American Legion baseball, scholastic contests and Boy's State.

Principles of Consolidation: The consolidated financial statements include the accounts of The American Legion National Headquarters, The American Legion Charities ("ALC"), The American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation ("ALEF"); and the National Emergency Fund ("NEF") (collectively, "the Legion"). All material inter-organizational accounts and transactions have been eliminated in consolidation. The American Legion Charities is a tax exempt trust established to solicit funds from individuals, organizations and corporations to disburse said funds as may be directed to various Legion programs and charities. The American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation, a tax-exempt Indiana corporation, was created to provide permanent funding for the rehabilitation of American veterans and assistance to orphans of veterans. The National Emergency Fund is a tax-exempt trust established to provide gifts and grants to relieve suffering and ameliorate financial hardship incurred by American Legion members, families and Posts.

Basis of Accounting: The financial statements have been prepared on the accrual basis of accounting in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America ("GAAP").

Use of Estimates in Preparation of Financial Statements: The preparation of financial statements in conformity with GAAP requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets and liabilities and disclosure of contingent assets and liabilities at the date of the financial statements and the reported amounts of revenues, expenses, gains, losses and other changes in net assets during the reported period. Actual results could differ from those estimates.

Financial Statement Presentation: The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with GAAP, which requires, among other things, that the financial statements report the changes in and total of each of the net asset classes, based upon donor restrictions, as applicable. Net assets are to be classified as unrestricted, temporarily restricted and permanently restricted. The following classes of net assets are maintained:

Unrestricted Net Assets – The unrestricted net asset class includes general assets and liabilities of the Legion, as well as assets and liabilities designated by the National Executive Committee, the governing body of the Legion. The unrestricted net assets of the Legion may be used at the discretion of management to support the Legion’s purposes and operations.

Temporarily Restricted Net Assets – The temporarily restricted net asset class includes assets of the Legion related to gifts with explicit donor-imposed restrictions that have not been met as to specified purpose, or to later periods of time or after specified dates. Unconditional promises to give that are due in future periods and are not permanently restricted are classified as temporarily restricted net assets. As the restrictions are met, the net assets are released from restrictions and included in unrestricted net assets. Contributions for which the restrictions are met in the same period in which the contribution is received are also recorded as temporarily restricted revenue and releases from restrictions.

Permanently Restricted Net Assets – The permanently restricted net asset class includes assets of the Legion for which the donor has stipulated that the contribution be maintained in perpetuity. Donor-imposed restrictions limiting the use of the assets or its economic benefit neither expire with the passage of time nor can be removed by satisfying a specific purpose.

Cash and Cash Equivalents: Cash and cash equivalents include cash on hand and less than 90 day deposit balances with banks. The Legion maintains all of its cash deposits in banks and brokerage firms. This may result in a concentration of credit risk in the case of a severe regional financial failure. The maximum amount at risk is the excess of the deposit liabilities reported by the banks over the amounts that would have been covered by federal insurance. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation ("FDIC") insures deposits up to $250,000 per financial institution.

Accounts Receivable and Allowance for Uncollectible Accounts: The Legion bills members, posts, and departments for dues and bills agencies for advertising in the Legion magazine. Interest is not normally charged on receivables. Management establishes a reserve for losses on its accounts based on historic loss experience and current economic conditions. Losses are charged off to the reserve when management deems further collection efforts will not produce additional recoveries. Management estimated that no allowance was necessary for the years ended December 31, 2016 and 2015.

Inventory: Inventory consists of Emblem items held for sale, magazine paper and publication rights and is stated at the lower of cost or market using the first-in, first-out ("FIFO") method. Supplies which are not intended for sale are expensed when purchased.

Investments: Investments are carried at fair value. The fair values of investments are based on quoted market prices, where available. If quoted market prices are not available, fair values are based on quoted market prices of comparable instruments. Realized and unrealized gains and losses are reflected in the consolidated statements of activities. Premiums or discounts on investments are generally recognized at the time of disposal or maturity.

Property and Equipment: Expenditures for property and equipment and items which substantially increase the useful lives of assets are capitalized at cost. The Legion records depreciation on the straight-line method at rates designated to depreciate the costs of assets over their estimated useful lives. Buildings are depreciated on the straight-line method using a thirty year life. All other capital assets are depreciated over lives ranging from three to seven years.

Impairment of Long-Lived Assets: In accordance with GAAP, the Legion reviews its property and equipment for impairment whenever events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying value of an asset may not be recoverable. If the fair value is less than the carrying amount of the asset, an impairment loss is recognized for the difference. No impairment loss has been recognized during the years ended December 31, 2016 and 2015.

Collections: The Legion owns many collectible military related items and historical documents which were not recorded as they were acquired. It is often impracticable to determine a value for collections and accordingly, the Legion has concluded that they need not be capitalized. Some of these items have been appraised for insurance purposes.

Support and Revenue: The Legion reports gifts of cash and other assets as restricted support if they are received with donor stipulations that limit the use of the donated assets. When a donor restriction expires, that is, when a stipulated time restriction ends or purpose restriction is accomplished, temporarily restricted net assets are reclassified to unrestricted net assets and reported in the statement of activities as net assets released from restrictions.

Dues Income and Expense: Dues are recognized as income over the applicable membership period, which is on a calendar-year basis. In addition to other methods of obtaining new members, the Legion uses direct mail and other direct marketing approaches. The income generated from direct membership solicitation is recognized over the applicable membership period (calendar year). The direct-response expenses incurred in obtaining new members are deferred and recognized in the subsequent membership year.
Income Taxes: The Legion is exempt from federal income taxes under section 501(c)(19) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. ALC, ALEF and NEF are exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. None of the entities are considered to be a private foundation. The Legion is subject to income tax on unrelated business income. In 2016 and 2015, the Legion incurred no tax expense.

Current accounting standards require the Legion to disclose the amount of potential benefit or obligation to be realized as a result of an examination performed by a taxing authority. For the years ended December 31, 2016 and 2015, management has determined that the Legion does not have any tax positions that result in any uncertainties regarding the possible impact on the Legion’s financial statements. The Legion does not expect the total amount of unrecognized tax benefits to significantly change in the next 12 months. The Legion recognizes interest and/or penalties related to income tax matters in income tax expense. The Legion did not have any amounts accrued for interest and penalties at December 31, 2016 and 2015.

Fair Value of Financial Instruments: The carrying amount of all financial instruments of the Legion, which include cash and cash equivalents, accounts receivable, beneficial interest in trust, investments, accounts payable, and notes payable, approximate fair value.

Expense Allocation: As disclosed in Note 16, expenses have been classified as program services, management and general, member development and fund raising based on actual direct expenditures. Additionally, some expenses are allocated among departments based upon estimates of the amount of time spent by Legion employees performing services for those departments.

Subsequent Events: Management has performed an analysis of the activities and transactions subsequent to December 31, 2016, to determine the need for any adjustments or disclosures to the financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2016. Management has performed their analysis through April 28, 2017, the date the financial statements were available to be issued.

NOTE 2 – COLLECTIONS

The Legion owns many collectible military related items and historical documents which were not recorded as were acquired. It is often impracticable to determine a value for collections and accordingly, the Legion has concluded that they need not be capitalized. These items have been appraised, or are in the process of being appraised for insurance purposes and are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appraisal date</th>
<th>Replacement value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World War I Posters 12/10/2015</td>
<td>$ 492,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War I Posters 12/10/2015</td>
<td>469,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Unit Histories 12/10/2015</td>
<td>112,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Art Collection 12/10/2015</td>
<td>980,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Collection 12/10/2015</td>
<td>120,475</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE 3 – INVESTMENT IN AFFILIATE

The Legion, in conjunction with approximately 120 other organizations, has created a nonprofit corporation known as The Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc. (“CFA”) for the purpose of aiding in the campaign to secure a constitutional amendment empowering the Congress and the States to enact legislation to protect the Flag of the United States of America from physical desecration.

CFA recognized a change in net assets of $605 and $2,236 in 2016 and 2015, respectively. Accordingly, the Legion’s investment in CFA has been changed by these amounts and corresponding adjustments have been reflected in unrestricted net assets for 2016 and 2015.

NOTE 4 – BENEFICIAL INTEREST IN CHARITABLE LEAD TRUST

The ALEF has been named a beneficiary of a charitable lead trust. Under the charitable trust, the ALEF is to receive quarterly distributions in the amount of $9,919 until December 2020, or until the funds of the trust are exhausted. Based on the terms of the trust and a 2.05% discount rate in 2016 and a 2.54% discount rate in 2015, the present value of future benefits expected to be received by the ALEF is estimated to be $515,994 and $585,743 at December 31, 2016 and 2015, respectively.

NOTE 5 – FAIR VALUE OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

Fair value is defined as the price that would be received for an asset or paid to transfer a liability (an exit price) in the Legion's principal or most advantageous market for the asset or liability in an orderly transaction between market participants on the measurement date.

GAAP establishes a fair value hierarchy which requires an entity to maximize the use of observable inputs and minimize the use of unobservable inputs when measuring fair value. GAAP describes three levels of inputs that may be used to measure fair value:

Level 1: Quoted prices for identical assets or liabilities in active markets that the entity has the ability to access as of the measurement date.

Level 2: Significant other observable inputs other than Level 1 prices such as quoted prices for similar assets or liabilities; quoted prices in markets that are not active; or other inputs that are observable or can be corroborated by observable market data.

Level 3: Significant unobservable inputs that reflect a reporting entity's own assumptions about the assumptions that market participants would use in pricing an asset or liability.

In many cases, a valuation technique used to measure fair value includes inputs from multiple levels of the fair value hierarchy. The lowest level of significant input determines the placement of the entire fair value measurement in the hierarchy.

The fair value of money markets and common stock are based on quoted prices in active markets (Level 1 inputs). The fair value of U.S. Government and agency obligations, asset backed securities, corporate bonds, and state and municipal bonds are based on quoted market prices of similar securities with similar due dates using the market approach (Level 2 inputs). Common stock and asset backed securities are not held by the Legion, but are held in the defined benefit plan assets which are disclosed in Note 15. The fair value of beneficial interest in trust assets is determined using the income approach and is based on a valuation model that calculates the present value of estimated distributed income. The valuation model incorporates assumptions that market participants would use in estimating future distributed income.

The Legion is able to compare the valuation model inputs and results to widely available published industry data for reasonableness; however, the Legion is unable to redeem the assets of the trust and only receives distributions (Level 3 inputs).

Assets and Liabilities Measured at a Recurring Basis: Assets and liabilities measured at fair value on a recurring basis are summarized below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset Description</th>
<th>Fair Value Measurements at Dec. 31, 2016 using</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quoted Prices in Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)</td>
<td>Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits in trust</td>
<td>$ -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money market accounts</td>
<td>16,823,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Government obligations</td>
<td>39,610,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and municipal bonds</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate bonds</td>
<td>43,767,903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$ 16,823,777 $ 110,084,063 $ 151,994
Fair Value Measurements at Dec. 31, 2015, using

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets:</th>
<th>Quoted Prices in Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)</th>
<th>Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)</th>
<th>Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 185,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money market accounts</td>
<td>11,831,530</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Government obligations</td>
<td>46,632,144</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and municipal bonds</td>
<td>23,063,167</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate bonds</td>
<td>39,607,430</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,831,530</strong></td>
<td><strong>108,792,741</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 185,743</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables below presents a reconciliation and statement of activities classification of gains and losses for all assets measured at fair value on a recurring basis using significant unobservable inputs (Level 3) for the years ended December 31, 2016 and 2015:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beneficial Interest in Trust</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning balance, Jan. 1, 2016</td>
<td>$ 185,743</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in value of split interest agreements</td>
<td>5,927</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributions from trust</td>
<td>(39,676)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ending balance, Dec. 31, 2016</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 151,994</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beneficial Interest in Trust</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning balance, Jan. 1, 2015</td>
<td>$ 217,900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in value of split interest agreements</td>
<td>7,519</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributions from trust</td>
<td>(39,676)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ending balance, Dec. 31, 2015</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 185,743</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE 6 – PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT

The Legion’s property and equipment, and the related accumulated depreciation at December 31, 2016 and 2015 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C., real estate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>$ 80,000</td>
<td>$ 80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>5,621,056</td>
<td>5,621,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis real estate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>389,264</td>
<td>389,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>4,082,610</td>
<td>4,082,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture, fixtures and equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Headquarters, Indianapolis</td>
<td>6,834,390</td>
<td>6,880,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td>765,312</td>
<td>766,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction in progress</td>
<td>98,838</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less accumulated depreciation</td>
<td>(13,192,296)</td>
<td>(12,468,555)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 4,679,174</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 5,272,164</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Depreciation expense for the years ended, December 31, 2016 and 2015 was $795,306 and $829,447, respectively.

NOTE 7 – LONG-TERM DEBT

In 2013, the Legion refinanced its long-term debt. Principal and interest is payable in monthly installment, with the final payment due December 3, 2020.

The stated interest rate is 1.35% plus the 30-day London Inter Bank Offered Rate ("LIBOR"). The outstanding balance on long-term debt is $831,449 and $1,025,149 as of December 31, 2016 and 2015.

The future maturities of the long-term debt are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$199,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>205,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>211,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>215,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 831,449</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interest expense was $25,424 and $34,495 for the years ended December 31, 2016 and 2015, respectively.

As a strategy to mitigate exposure to the risk of interest rate fluctuations, the Legion entered into an interest rate swap agreement on the long-term debt on December 3, 2013. This interest rate swap has been designated as a derivative and provides for the Legion to receive interest from the counterparty at the 30-day LIBOR rate plus 1.35% and to pay interest to the counterparty at fixed rate of 2.98% on a notional amount of $831,449 and $1,025,149 at December 31, 2016 and December 31, 2015, respectively. The interest rate swap matures in 2020. Under the agreement, the Legion pays or receives the net interest amount monthly, with the monthly settlements included in interest expense.

NOTE 8 – LEASES

The Legion has several non-cancelable operating leases, primarily for facilities, computer equipment, and copiers that expire at various dates through 2020. Rent expense under these leases for the years ended December 31, 2016 and 2015 was $478,963 and $482,073, respectively.

Minimum lease commitments are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$214,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>77,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>69,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>41,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 403,476</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the Legion had a lease with the State of Indiana for rental of the National Headquarters building in Indianapolis which expired on June 30, 2013. The Legion is operating on a month-to-month basis until a new lease agreement extending the lease term is finalized. According to the terms of the lease, the Legion is required to maintain the interior of the building, and provide adequate insurance on the building in lieu of lease payments. The cost of maintenance for 2016 and 2015 was $982,978 and $975,940, respectively. Insurance coverage is included in the Legion’s general insurance policy.

NOTE 9 – PAID-UP-FOR-LIFE MEMBERSHIP FUND

The National Executive Committee approved the establishment of a life membership plan available to any member of a participating department. In accordance with the plan, the assets of the Paid-Up-For-Life ("PUFL") Membership Fund are included in unrestricted, board designated net assets and segregated in a trust account from which funds equal to the annual dues of life members are withdrawn for current operations each year. The trust agreement provides that the Legion has the right to withdraw part or all of the assets of the trust account and to modify or terminate the trust agreement at its discretion.

Under the terms of the PUFL program, participating member’s national, state and local dues are paid by the Legion for the remainder of the individual’s life. Management has estimated and recognized a liability for the future payments to state and local Legion organizations. Likewise, management has deferred recognition of the national dues portion of the members’ payment. Deferred PUFL dues are recognized in annual amounts equal to the national dues in effect each year. The liability and deferred revenue amounts are estimated by the Legion’s actuaries using PUFL membership summaries and discount rates comparable to the Legion’s recent investment performance.
NOTE 10 – RESTRICTED AND RESERVE DESIGNATED FUNDS
The restricted fund is designated for use by the National Finance Commission and National Executive Committee and reported as unrestricted, board designated net assets. Earnings of the restricted fund, along with the principal, can be expended only upon recommendation of the National Finance Commission and a two-thirds affirmative vote of the National Executive Committee at two successive meetings. It is the policy of the Legion to transfer 10% of the prior year's defined net income from operations to the restricted fund. The Legion made no transfers to the restricted fund in 2016 and 2015.
The reserve fund is also designated for use by the National Finance Commission and National Executive Committee and reported as unrestricted, board designated net assets. However, earnings of the reserve fund may be used for the general operations of the Legion. The principal can be expended only by action of the Legion at its national convention, or by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the National Executive Committee in two successive meetings not less than 60 days apart.

NOTE 11 – TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS
Temporarily restricted net assets are donor-restricted for specific purposes. At December 31, 2016 and 2015 the restricted purposes are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund Type</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overseas Graves Decoration Fund</td>
<td>$987,387</td>
<td>$999,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung scholarships</td>
<td>1,909,776</td>
<td>1,976,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Fund</td>
<td>12,429,174</td>
<td>11,058,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Emergency Fund</td>
<td>4,973,624</td>
<td>4,622,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scouts</td>
<td>467,899</td>
<td>467,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation Comfort Warriors</td>
<td>2,500,222</td>
<td>2,063,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Devore</td>
<td>316,089</td>
<td>308,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin J. Dintz VA Boy's State</td>
<td>662,226</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung American Legion Alumni Association</td>
<td>280,227</td>
<td>372,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>154,534</td>
<td>66,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$24,729,158</strong></td>
<td><strong>$21,934,493</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE 12 – NET ASSETS RELEASED FROM RESTRICTION
Net assets were released from donor restrictions by incurring expenses satisfying the restricted purposes or by occurrence of other events specified by donors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose restrictions accomplished</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overseas graves decoration</td>
<td>$23,345</td>
<td>$21,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships and grants (including relief aid)</td>
<td>575,196</td>
<td>343,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Affairs &amp; Rehabilitation and Children &amp; Youth programs</td>
<td>685,694</td>
<td>931,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,284,235</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,296,836</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE 13 – PERMANENTLY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS
Permanently restricted net assets represent donor-restricted gifts that have been invested and are to be maintained in perpetuity. Income from the Samsung scholarship fund is to be used to fund undergraduate scholarships for descendants of Korean War veterans and other wars in which U.S. servicemen and servicewomen participated. Income from the American Legion Endowment Fund is to be used to support the veterans affairs and rehabilitation and children and youth activities of the Legion.

At December 31, 2016 and 2015 the permanently restricted net assets are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund Type</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samsung scholarships</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Endowment Fund</td>
<td>7,996,779</td>
<td>8,060,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$12,996,779</strong></td>
<td><strong>$13,060,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE 14 – ENDOWMENT COMPOSITION
The Legion's endowments include donor restricted endowment funds and are comprised of two separate funds, the American Legion Endowment Fund and the Samsung scholarship fund. In accordance with GAAP, net assets associated with endowment funds, including funds designated by the National Executive Committee to function as endowments, are classified and reported based on the existence or absence of donor imposed restrictions.

Interpretation of Relevant Law: The National Executive Committee has interpreted the State of Indiana's Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act ("SPMIFA") as requiring the preservation of the fair value of the original gift as of the gift date of the donor restricted endowment funds absent explicit donor stipulations to the contrary. As a result of this interpretation, the Legion classifies as permanently restricted net assets (a) the original value of gifts donated to the permanent endowment, (b) the original value of subsequent gifts to the permanent endowment, and (c) net accumulations to the permanent endowment made in accordance with the governing documents of the Legion. The remaining portion of the donor restricted endowment fund that is not classified in permanently restricted net assets is classified as temporarily restricted net assets until those amounts are appropriated for expenditure by the Legion in a manner consistent with the standard of prudence prescribed by SPMIFA. In accordance with SPMIFA, the Legion considers the following factors in making a determination to appropriate or accumulate donor restricted endowment funds:

1. The duration and preservation of the fund
2. The purposes of the Legion and the donor restricted endowment fund
3. General economic conditions
4. The possible effect of inflation and deflation
5. The expected total return from income and the appreciation of investments
6. Other resources of the Legion
7. The investment policies of the Legion

Endowment net asset composition by type of fund as of December 31, 2016:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily restricted</th>
<th>Permanently restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donor restricted endowment funds</td>
<td>$29,252</td>
<td>$1,909,776</td>
<td>$12,996,779</td>
<td>$14,877,303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Funds</strong></td>
<td><strong>$29,252</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,909,776</strong></td>
<td><strong>$12,996,779</strong></td>
<td><strong>$14,877,303</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Endowment net asset composition by type of fund as of December 31, 2015:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily restricted</th>
<th>Permanently restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donor restricted endowment funds</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$1,976,952</td>
<td>$13,060,100</td>
<td>$15,037,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Funds</strong></td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$1,976,952</td>
<td>$13,060,100</td>
<td>$15,037,052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changes in endowment net assets for the year ended December 31, 2016:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily restricted</th>
<th>Permanently restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, beginning of year</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$1,976,952</td>
<td>$13,060,100</td>
<td>$15,037,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment gains/losses:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment income, net of fees</td>
<td>53,977</td>
<td>422,865</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>476,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net appreciation (realized and unrealized)</td>
<td>(11,974)</td>
<td>2,912</td>
<td>(118,553)</td>
<td>(127,615)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total investment gain/loss</strong></td>
<td>$42,003</td>
<td>$425,777</td>
<td>$118,553</td>
<td>$340,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New gifts</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$55,232</td>
<td>$55,232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appropriation of endowment assets for expenditure (71,255) (492,953) - (564,208)

Net assets, end of year $29,252 $1,909,776 $12,996,779 $14,877,303

Changes in endowment net assets for the year December 31, 2015:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily restricted</th>
<th>Permanently restricted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, beginning of year</td>
<td>(64,308)</td>
<td>$2,166,616</td>
<td>$12,987,835</td>
<td>$15,090,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment income, net of fees</td>
<td>53,939</td>
<td>384,312</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>438,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net depreciation (realized and unrealized)</td>
<td>(12,274)</td>
<td>(82,381)</td>
<td>(65,509)</td>
<td>(160,164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total investment gain</td>
<td>$41,665</td>
<td>$301,931</td>
<td>$65,509</td>
<td>$278,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New gifts</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>137,774</td>
<td>137,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation of endowment assets for expenditure</td>
<td>22,643</td>
<td>(491,595)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(468,952)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, end of year</td>
<td>$1,976,952</td>
<td>$13,060,100</td>
<td>$15,037,052</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Return Objectives and Risk Parameters: The Legion has adopted investment and spending policies for endowment assets that attempt to provide a predictable stream of funding to programs supported by its endowment while seeking to maintain the purchasing power of the endowment assets. Endowment assets include those assets of donor-restricted funds that the Legion must hold in perpetuity or for a donor-specified period(s). Under this policy, as approved by the National Executive Committee, the endowment assets are invested in a manner that is intended to produce income while assuming a low level of investment risk.

Strategies Employed for Achieving Objectives: To satisfy its long-term rate-of-return objectives, the Legion relies on a total return strategy in which investment returns are achieved through both capital appreciation (realized and unrealized) and current yield (interest and dividends). The Legion targets fixed income securities to achieve its long-term return objectives within prudent risk constraints.

Spending Policy and How the Investment Objectives Relate to Spending Policy: Realized and unrealized gains/losses are added to the principal of the American Legion Endowment Fund and distributions are limited to cumulative interest, net of fees. On the Samsung scholarship fund, the capital appreciation is temporarily restricted and can be spent, along with the interest, net of fees, according to the spending policy. Endowment fund principal, unless otherwise directed by the donor, shall not be disbursed except for emergency situations. In order to make a principal disbursement, a majority vote by the Legion National Executive Committee will be required.

Funds with Deficiencies: From time to time, the fair value of assets associated with individual donor-restricted endowment funds may fall below the level that the donor of SPMLA requires the Legion to retain as a fund of perpetual duration. In accordance with GAAP, deficiencies of this nature that are reported in unrestricted net assets which total $29,252 as of December 31, 2016. This deficiency resulted from AFE expenditures outpacing interest and dividend income available for spending during 2016. As of December 31, 2015, the Legion did not have any funds with deficiencies.

Note 15 — Employee Benefits
The Legion has a defined-benefit pension plan covering substantially all of its employees as well as those of certain affiliated and subordinate groups. The plan was established in 1944 by vote of the Legion's National Convention. Contributions to the plan are made by the Legion and other participating groups on the basis of annual actuarial valuations.

In May 2008, the Legion voted to freeze the plan effective June 30, 2008 and voted to adopt a 401(k) savings plan with a qualified automatic contribution arrangement effective July 1, 2008. The result of the freeze is that current employees still received the benefits they had earned as of June 30, 2008, but no future benefits were earned and no new employees were added. The 401(k) savings plan calls for a 100% match of the first 1% contributed by the employee and a 50% match of the net 5% contributed by the employee. Thus, the maximum matching percentage an employee will receive is 5.5%. The Legion made contributions of $387,851 and $390,532 in 2016 and 2015, respectively.

The following table sets forth the Legion's portion of the plan's funded status and amounts recognized in the Legion's consolidated statement of financial position at December 31, 2016 and 2015:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefit obligation</td>
<td>($57,280,490)</td>
<td>($58,432,275)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair value of plan assets</td>
<td>45,221,772</td>
<td>45,290,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded status</td>
<td>($12,058,718)</td>
<td>($13,141,467)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service cost</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest cost</td>
<td>2,246,369</td>
<td>2,230,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual loss (return) on assets</td>
<td>(2,944,092)</td>
<td>1,774,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amortization of prior service costs</td>
<td>121,085</td>
<td>121,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amortization of loss</td>
<td>2,506,774</td>
<td>2,470,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference between expected and actual return on assets</td>
<td>(96,857)</td>
<td>(5,143,044)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net periodic pension cost</td>
<td>$1,833,279</td>
<td>$1,453,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net loss</td>
<td>($2,794,943)</td>
<td>($835,079)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior service cost</td>
<td>(121,085)</td>
<td>(121,085)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost</td>
<td>($2,916,028)</td>
<td>($956,164)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measurement date 12/31/2016 12/31/2015

Estimated future benefit payments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$3,385,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>3,436,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>3,422,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>3,460,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>3,511,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022-2026</td>
<td>17,701,836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The asset investment policy is a lower risk strategy with the primary objective of preservation of capital with an emphasis on long-term growth and generation of current income to provide adequate cash flow needed for benefit payments. The target asset allocation is 0-20% in cash or cash equivalents, 40-60% in fixed income and 40-60% in equities. Prohibited investments include real estate investment trusts, real estate partnerships, mutual funds, private equity, hedge funds and guaranteed investment certificates.

The fair value of the Legion's defined benefit plan assets at December 31, 2016 and 2015 are as follows. See Note 5 for descriptions of inputs for each type of asset.
### Fair Value Measurements at Dec. 31, 2016, using

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quoted Prices in Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)</th>
<th>Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)</th>
<th>Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money market accounts</td>
<td>$ 1,517,962</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Government and agency obligations</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,914,844</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asset backed securities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,284,457</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal bonds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,890,339</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate bonds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16,027,526</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common stock:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>502,790</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrials</td>
<td>2,075,214</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer discretionary</td>
<td>1,710,141</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer staples</td>
<td>1,231,831</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>1,269,167</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>1,609,698</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financials</td>
<td>1,987,249</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunication</td>
<td>385,962</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>3,322,040</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>492,252</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 16,104,606</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 25,117,166</strong></td>
<td><strong>$</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Historical returns of multiple asset classes were analyzed to develop a risk free real rate of return and risk premium for each asset class. The overall rate for each asset class was developed by combining a long-term inflation component, the risk free real rate of return, and the associated risk premium. A weighted average rate was developed based on those overall rates and the target asset allocation of the plan.

### Weighted-average assumptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discount rate</td>
<td>3.81%</td>
<td>3.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected return on plan assets</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of compensation increase</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The amounts of net loss and net prior service cost expected to be recognized as components of net periodic benefit cost for the year ending December 31, 2016 are $1,832,279 and $1,231,085, respectively.

### NOTE 16 – FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

The following represents a functional breakdown of the Legion’s expenses by program and supporting services:

#### Program services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veterans programs and services</td>
<td>$38,798,600</td>
<td>$38,677,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americanism, Children &amp; Youth activities</td>
<td>2,900,234</td>
<td>2,325,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>41,698,834</td>
<td>41,003,204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Supporting services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management and general</td>
<td>17,166,955</td>
<td>16,554,732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member development</td>
<td>9,122,226</td>
<td>10,916,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11,740,441</td>
<td>12,541,193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$38,029,622

$79,728,456

$81,015,928

Member development includes direct response advertising expense of $5,082,548 and $6,766,626 for the years ended December 31, 2016 and 2015.

### NOTE 17 – LITIGATION

The Legion is currently involved in and/or has been mentioned as a defendant or co-defendant in several legal actions. It is the opinion of the National Judge Advocate that these claims are without merit and any ultimate liability of the Legion with respect to these actions will not materially affect the financial statements of the Legion.
## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

The American Legion National Headquarters
Consolidating Statement of Financial Position
December 31, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSETS</th>
<th>American Legion National Headquarters</th>
<th>American Legion Charities</th>
<th>American Legion Endowment Fund</th>
<th>National Emergency Fund</th>
<th>Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and cash equivalents</td>
<td>$998,919</td>
<td>$172,414</td>
<td>$19,567</td>
<td>$66,591</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$1,256,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts receivable</td>
<td>5,290,669</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,234</td>
<td>20,674</td>
<td>(33,688)</td>
<td>5,285,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest receivable</td>
<td>704,496</td>
<td>23,088</td>
<td>66,945</td>
<td>42,372</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>836,951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses and deposits</td>
<td>1,909,365</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,868</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,911,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred membership expense</td>
<td>4,950,405</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,950,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due from American Legion Endowment Fund</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,000,000)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventory</td>
<td>2,847,503</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,847,503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in affiliate (CFA)</td>
<td>13,575</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>151,994</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>151,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td>18,713,992</td>
<td>195,502</td>
<td>250,608</td>
<td>129,637</td>
<td>(2,033,686)</td>
<td>17,259,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>15,421,583</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15,421,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segregated for Restricted and Reserved funds</td>
<td>34,066,122</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34,066,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid-Up-For-Life Membership fund</td>
<td>29,615,976</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29,615,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samisung scholarship fund</td>
<td>7,609,593</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,609,593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building funds</td>
<td>5,938,456</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,938,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 11 Memorial scholarship fund</td>
<td>12,065,719</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12,065,719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special account – Endowment Fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,252,939</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,252,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General account – Endowment Fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,463,980</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,463,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Emergency Fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,841,986</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,841,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Charities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,791,850</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,791,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,839,837</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,839,837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property, plant and equipment, net</td>
<td>108,557,085</td>
<td>3,791,850</td>
<td>9,716,919</td>
<td>4,841,986</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>126,907,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,679,174</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,679,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$131,950,251</td>
<td>$3,987,352</td>
<td>$9,967,527</td>
<td>$4,971,623</td>
<td>(2,033,686)</td>
<td>$148,843,085</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIABILITIES</th>
<th>American Legion National Headquarters</th>
<th>American Legion Charities</th>
<th>American Legion Endowment Fund</th>
<th>National Emergency Fund</th>
<th>Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts payable</td>
<td>$3,406,252</td>
<td>$32,664</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$3,405,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships payable</td>
<td>1,091,879</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,091,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to American Legion National Headquarters</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,000,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposits on emblem merchandise sales</td>
<td>290,318</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>290,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred income</td>
<td>1,394,884</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,394,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues income</td>
<td>27,449,484</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27,449,484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred income – direct membership solicitation</td>
<td>3,696,407</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,696,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued vacation benefits</td>
<td>1,002,001</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,002,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued pension expense</td>
<td>12,058,718</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12,058,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other liabilities</td>
<td>1,528,684</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,528,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes payable</td>
<td>831,449</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>831,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues income – Paid-Up-For-Life Membership</td>
<td>23,532,607</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23,532,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life memberships due to state and local posts</td>
<td>26,093,304</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26,093,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102,375,987</td>
<td>32,664</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,033,686)</td>
<td>102,374,983</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NET ASSETS</th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
<th>Temporarily restricted</th>
<th>Permanently restricted</th>
<th>Total net assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7,481,030</td>
<td>17,113,234</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>29,574,264</td>
<td>148,843,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,310,387</td>
<td>2,844,301</td>
<td>7,996,779</td>
<td>7,967,527</td>
<td>46,468,102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(29,252)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,971,623</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3,987,352</td>
<td>$9,967,527</td>
<td>$4,971,623</td>
<td>(2,033,686)</td>
<td>$148,843,085</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

The American Legion National Headquarters
Consolidating Statement of Financial Position
December 31, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSETS</th>
<th>American Legion National Headquarters</th>
<th>American Legion Charities</th>
<th>American Legion Endowment Fund</th>
<th>National Emergency Fund</th>
<th>Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and cash equivalents</td>
<td>$ 925,465</td>
<td>$ 174,028</td>
<td>$ 37,747</td>
<td>$ 84,135</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 1,221,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts receivable</td>
<td>6,003,488</td>
<td>1,793</td>
<td>59,380</td>
<td>(399,128)</td>
<td>5,662,531</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest receivable</td>
<td>715,785</td>
<td>19,451</td>
<td>60,665</td>
<td>36,229</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>832,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses and deposits</td>
<td>3,018,888</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,888</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,020,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred membership expense</td>
<td>4,004,549</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,004,549</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due from American Legion Endowment Fund</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,000,000)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inventory</td>
<td>2,818,625</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,818,625</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in affiliate (CFA)</td>
<td>14,234</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14,234</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial interest in trust</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>185,743</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>185,743</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19,501,012</td>
<td>190,479</td>
<td>288,018</td>
<td>176,744</td>
<td>(2,399,128)</td>
<td>17,760,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>10,760,717</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,760,717</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segregated for Restricted and Reserved funds</td>
<td>33,246,316</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33,246,316</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid-Up-For-Life Membership fund</td>
<td>31,395,174</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31,395,174</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung scholarship fund</td>
<td>7,779,450</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,779,450</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building funds</td>
<td>5,778,612</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,778,612</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 11 Memorial scholarship fund</td>
<td>10,419,912</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,419,912</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special account – Endowment Fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,263,718</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,263,718</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General account – Endowment Fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,508,680</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7,508,680</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Emergency Fund</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,445,426</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,445,426</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Charities</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,234,150</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,234,150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,702,116</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,702,116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>103,082,297</td>
<td>3,234,150</td>
<td>9,772,398</td>
<td>4,445,426</td>
<td>120,534,271</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property, plant and equipment, net</td>
<td>5,272,164</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,272,164</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$ 127,855,473</td>
<td>$ 3,427,629</td>
<td>$ 10,060,414</td>
<td>$ 4,622,170</td>
<td>(2,399,128)</td>
<td>$ 143,566,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIABILITIES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounts payable</td>
<td>$ 3,632,029</td>
<td>$ 406,405</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$ 4</td>
<td>(399,128)</td>
<td>$ 3,639,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships payable</td>
<td>1,020,888</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,020,888</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to American Legion National Headquarters</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(2,000,000)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposits on emblem merchandise sales</td>
<td>394,662</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>394,662</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred income</td>
<td>816,199</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>816,199</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues income</td>
<td>21,236,699</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21,236,699</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred income – direct membership solicitation</td>
<td>3,840,834</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,840,834</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued vacation benefits</td>
<td>997,727</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>997,727</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accrued pension expense</td>
<td>13,141,467</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,141,467</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other liabilities</td>
<td>1,945,295</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,945,295</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes payable</td>
<td>1,025,149</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,025,149</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred dues income – Paid-Up-For-Life Membership</td>
<td>22,915,052</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22,915,052</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life memberships due to state and local posts</td>
<td>24,962,632</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24,962,632</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95,928,633</td>
<td>406,405</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(2,399,128)</td>
<td>95,935,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET ASSETS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
<td>11,691,899</td>
<td>944,152</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12,636,051</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporarily restricted</td>
<td>15,234,941</td>
<td>2,077,072</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>4,622,166</td>
<td>21,934,493</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently restricted</td>
<td>5,030,000</td>
<td>8,060,100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,090,100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total net assets</td>
<td>31,550,940</td>
<td>3,021,224</td>
<td>8,060,414</td>
<td>4,622,166</td>
<td>47,630,444</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$ 127,855,473</td>
<td>$ 3,427,629</td>
<td>$ 10,060,414</td>
<td>$ 4,622,170</td>
<td>(2,399,128)</td>
<td>$ 143,586,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Legion National Headquarters</td>
<td>American Legion Endowment Fund</td>
<td>American Legion Emergency Fund</td>
<td>National Emergency Fund</td>
<td>Eliminations</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue, gains and other support</td>
<td>$ 25,782,809</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 25,782,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National member dues</td>
<td>$ 6,165,333</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 6,165,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct membership solicitation</td>
<td>631,106</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 631,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member service fees income</td>
<td>2,506,181</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 2,506,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity income</td>
<td>13,020,287</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 13,020,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of emblem items</td>
<td>9,563,462</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>(532,856)</td>
<td>$ 15,748,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>14,131,421</td>
<td>1,628,800</td>
<td>55,232</td>
<td>465,002</td>
<td>(532,856)</td>
<td>15,748,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>1,566,817</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 1,566,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label and printing fees</td>
<td>2,298,062</td>
<td>93,631</td>
<td>239,800</td>
<td>139,186</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 2,770,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and dividends, net of fees</td>
<td>192,928</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>(41,874)</td>
<td>25,514</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 166,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net realized gains (losses)</td>
<td>235,551</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>(235,551)</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 2,772,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Endowment Fund</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 2,772,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,772,247</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 2,772,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78,856,204</td>
<td>1,722,831</td>
<td>253,158</td>
<td>630,302</td>
<td>(768,407)</td>
<td>80,694,088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expenses

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>16,198,035</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 16,198,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee benefits</td>
<td>4,207,101</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 4,207,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of sales – Legion</td>
<td>7,036,004</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 7,036,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department and magazine costs</td>
<td>2,943,026</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 2,943,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct publications</td>
<td>10,853,367</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 10,853,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive, staff and program travel</td>
<td>3,630,516</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 3,633,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission and committee</td>
<td>1,758,486</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 1,758,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and postage</td>
<td>12,910,600</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 12,910,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships, grants and awards</td>
<td>1,572,325</td>
<td>689,983</td>
<td>235,551</td>
<td>194,944</td>
<td>(693,407)</td>
<td>$ 1,989,396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and other operating</td>
<td>13,299,378</td>
<td>19,110</td>
<td>19,097</td>
<td>7,801</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 13,345,446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupancy and usage</td>
<td>2,049,531</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 2,049,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special projects and programs</td>
<td>2,747,803</td>
<td>121,400</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>(75,000)</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$ 2,794,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79,216,172</td>
<td>830,493</td>
<td>257,393</td>
<td>192,805</td>
<td>(768,407)</td>
<td>76,728,456</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in net assets from operations

|                                      | (359,968)                             | 892,338                       | (4,235)                        | 437,497                | $ -         | 966,632   |

Net unrealized gains (losses) - investments

|                                      | (515,048)                             | 41,126                        | (88,652)                       | (88,040)               | $ -         | (850,614) |

Net change in PULF

|                                      | (1,886,814)                           | $ -                            | $ -                            | $ -                    | $ -         | (1,886,814) |

Amortization of pension loss

|                                      | (2,506,774)                           | $ -                            | $ -                            | $ -                    | $ -         | (2,506,774) |

Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost

|                                      | 2,916,026                             | $ -                            | $ -                            | $ -                    | $ -         | 2,916,026  |

Change in net assets

|                                      | (2,352,576)                           | 933,464                       | (92,887)                       | 349,457                | $ -         | (1,162,542) |

Net assets, beginning of year

|                                      | 31,926,840                            | 3,021,224                     | 8,060,414                      | 4,622,166              | $ -         | 47,630,644 |

Net assets, end of year

|                                      | 29,574,264                            | 3,954,688                     | 7,967,527                      | 4,971,623              | $ -         | 46,468,102 |
**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

The American Legion National Headquarters

Consolidating Statement of Activities,

Year ended December 31, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Legion National Headquarters</th>
<th>American Legion Charities</th>
<th>American Legion Endowment Fund</th>
<th>National Emergency Fund</th>
<th>Eliminations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revenue, gains and other support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National member dues</td>
<td>$ 25,741,665</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$ 25,741,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct membership solicitation</td>
<td>6,906,057</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6,906,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member service fees income</td>
<td>703,326</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>703,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity income</td>
<td>2,830,783</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,830,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of emblem items</td>
<td>13,142,697</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13,142,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>10,132,570</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,132,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>13,104,677</td>
<td>1,637,068</td>
<td>137,774</td>
<td>614,515</td>
<td>854,019</td>
<td>14,640,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label and printing fees</td>
<td>2,297,959</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,297,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and dividends, net of fees</td>
<td>2,220,878</td>
<td>48,389</td>
<td>203,953</td>
<td>119,619</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,592,839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net realized gains (losses)</td>
<td>280,698</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(9,901)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>270,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Legion Endowment</td>
<td>183,383</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(183,383)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,793,630</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(35,000)</td>
<td>2,773,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80,418,313</td>
<td>1,710,457</td>
<td>331,826</td>
<td>734,134</td>
<td>(1,072,402)</td>
<td>82,122,328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Expenses**

|                           |                                       |                           |                                |                         |             |             |
| Salaries                  | 15,857,984                            | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 15,857,984  |
| Employee benefits         | 3,970,750                             | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 3,970,750   |
| Cost of sales – Legion    | 7,126,612                             | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 7,126,612   |
| Department and magazine costs | 3,068,596                     | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 3,068,596   |
| Direct publications       | 11,373,424                            | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 11,373,424  |
| Executive and staff travel| 3,856,491                             | -                         | 4,190                          | -                       | -           | 3,860,681   |
| Commission and committees | 1,555,482                             | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 1,555,482   |
| Printing and postage      | 13,091,362                            | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 13,091,362  |
| Scholarships, grants and awards | 1,536,281                     | 1,206,466                 | 183,383                        | 43,700                  | (1,072,402) | 1,897,428   |
| Office and other operating| 15,167,088                            | 19,991                    | 16,269                         | 1,822                   | -           | 15,205,040  |
| Occupancy and usage       | 1,966,184                             | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 1,966,184   |
| Special projects and programs | 1,927,979                      | 114,426                   | -                              | -                       | -           | 2,042,405   |
|                           | 80,498,213                            | 1,340,883                 | 203,842                        | 45,382                  | (1,072,402) | 81,015,928  |

Change in net assets from operations

|                           | (79,900)                              | 369,574                   | 127,984                        | 688,742                 | -           | 1,106,400   |

Net unrealized losses - investments

|                           | (1,173,344)                           | (81,394)                  | (67,881)                       | (63,467)                | -           | (1,386,086) |

Net change in PUFL

|                           | 751,375                               | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 751,375     |

Amortization of pension loss

|                           | (2,470,872)                           | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | (2,470,872) |

Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost

|                           | 956,164                               | -                         | -                              | -                       | -           | 956,164     |

Change in net assets

|                           | (2,016,577)                           | 288,180                   | 60,103                         | 625,275                 | -           | (1,043,019) |

Net assets, beginning of year

|                           | 33,943,417                            | $ 2,733,044               | $ 8,000,311                    | $ 3,996,891            | -           | $ 48,673,663|

Net assets, end of year

|                           | $ 31,926,840                          | $ 3,021,224               | $ 8,060,414                    | $ 4,622,166           | -           | $ 47,630,644|
Abbreviations

ACLU .......................................................... American Civil Liberties Union
ALA ............................................................... American Legion Auxiliary
ALR ............................................................. American Legion Riders
ANAVICUS ............................................ Army, Navy, Air Force Veterans in Canada – United States
ANEC ........................................................ Alternate National Executive Committee
CAP ............................................................... Combat Air Patrol
CAPT ........................................................... captain
CBOC ........................................................... Community-Based Outpatient Clinic
CEO ............................................................. chief executive officer
CFPB ........................................................... Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
CIA .............................................................. Central Intelligence Agency
CJRC .......................................................... Combined Junior Rifle Club
CMC ............................................................ Central Military Commission
CO ............................................................. commanding officer
CONUS .................................................... continental United States
CPA ............................................................. certified public accountant
CTF ............................................................. Carrier Task Force

DMZ ............................................................. demilitarized zone
DNA ............................................................. deoxyribonucleic acid
DOD ............................................................ Department of Defense
DODDS ....................................................... Department of Defense Dependents Schools
DVOP ........................................................ Disabled Veterans Outreach Program

ED .............................................................. Department of Education
EMT ............................................................ emergency medical technician

FODPAL ..............Foreign and Outlying Departments and Posts of The American Legion

HB ............................................................... House Bill
HHS .......................................................... Department of Health and Human Services
HUD ........................................................ Department of Housing and Urban Development
ILC ....................................................................................................... International Latex
ISIS ..................................................................................................... Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

JAG ........................................................................................................... Judge Advocate General
JAGC ...................................................................................................... Judge Advocate General Corps
JROTC ..................................................................................................... Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps

KIA ........................................................................................................... killed in action

LT .............................................................................................................. lieutenant
LVER ....................................................................................................... Local Veterans Employment Representative

MCJROTC .............................................................. Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps
MCVET .............................................................. Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training
MIA ........................................................................................................ missing in action
MSSA ................................................................. Microsoft Software and Systems Academy
MVP ......................................................................................................... Million Veteran Program

NATO ................................................................................................. North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEC ....................................................................................................... National Executive Committee
NEF ....................................................................................................... National Emergency Fund
NJROTC .............................................................. Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps
NSA ......................................................................................................... National Security Agency
NVMM ............................................................. National Veterans Memorial and Museum
NWQ ...................................................................................................... National Work Queue

ORH ......................................................................................................... Office of Rural Health
OSS ......................................................................................................... Office of Strategic Services

PNC ......................................................................................................... Past National Commander
POA .......................................................................................................... power of attorney
POW ......................................................................................................... prisoner of war
PTSD ....................................................................................................... Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

RCMP .................................................................................................. Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RHC ....................................................................................................... Rural Health Consultant
ROTC ................................................................................................... Reserve Officers Training Corps
Index

2017 Boys Nation President ................................................................. 6
2017 Eagle Scout of the Year ................................................................. 7
2017 Junior Shooting Sports Precision Champion ............................. 7
2017 Junior Shooting Sports Sporter Champion ................................. 8

A

Abbreviations ...................................................................................... 199
Acceptance Speech: Newly Elected National Commander .................. 163
Acosta, R Alexander Hon. ................................................................. 50
Address:
  Brigadier General Kevin Vereen, Deputy Commanding General, Operations ...... 13
  Charles Dahlquist, National Commissioner, Boy Scouts of America ............... 96
  Colonel Tom Moe .............................................................................. 89
  Donald E. Ballard, Medal of Honor Recipient ........................................... 16
  Dr. Poonam Alaigh ........................................................................... 79
  Greg Pratt ......................................................................................... 70
  Hon. David J. Shulkin ........................................................................ 63
  Hon. Donald J. Trump ....................................................................... 75
  Hon. R. Alexander Acosta .................................................................. 50
  Hon. Ted Cruz .................................................................................. 85
  John D. Monahan ............................................................................. 72
  Judith C. Young, Gold Star Mothers .................................................. 118
  MG Garrett Harencak ......................................................................... 113
Administering the Oath of Office to the National Commander ............. 162
Ahasteen, Justin CPL ........................................................................... 10
Air Carrier Access ................................................................................ 144
Alaigh, Poonam Dr. ............................................................................ 79
American Legion Baseball .................................................................... 6
American Legion Riders, The ............................................................... 31
American Legion World Series ............................................................ 159, 175, 176
Americanism report ............................................................................ 92
Amodei, Mark Hon. ............................................................................ 30
Announcement of Annual Recipients .................................................. 175
Appreciation to Host City .................................................................... 100
Authorization to Build Veteran College Search Tool ........................... 106

B

Ballard, Donald E. ............................................................................. 16
Boy Scouts of America ......................................................................... 96, 99
bullying and harassment .................................................................... 128

C

Call for Convention ............................................................................ 41
Call to Order ....................................................................................... 55
chemical exposure ............................................................................. 139, 143
Child Welfare Foundation .................................................................. 21, 94
Consolidated Post Reporting 2016-2017 .............................................. 24

Bold typeface indicates the title of a resolution
Constable, Virginia A. SPC ................................................................. 9
Constitutional Amendments report ..................................................... 45
Conway, Adam, 2016 American Legion Baseball All-Academic Team Captain .... 6
Cortez Masto, Catherine, Hon. ............................................................ 28
Counter Transnational Organized Crime .......................................... 132
Credentials & Rules ........................................................................... 43
Cruz, Ted ............................................................................................ 85

D
Dahlquist, Charles ........................................................................... 96
Davis, Mary E. .................................................................................. 20
defense budget .................................................................................. 77, 127
Department Membership Awards ..................................................... 21
Department of Veterans Affairs Automobile Allowance Program .......... 141
Department of Veterans Affairs Pharmacy Medication Dispensing Requirements 141
Department of Veterans Affairs Rural Health Care Program .................... 145
disabled veterans .............................................................................. 141, 144
Donations to National Commander's Charity Fund .............................. 40
Donations to Operation Comfort Warriors ......................................... 135
Donations to The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation ............... 95
Donations to the National Emergency Fund ........................................ 26

E
Election of National Officers ............................................................... 154
Election of National Vice Commanders ............................................. 166
Expand the Presumptive Period for Veterans Who Served in South Korea .... 138
Expanding Department of Veterans Affairs Employment Pathways .......... 107
Expansion of Presumptive Conditions Associated with Camp Lejeune
  Contaminated Drinking Water ......................................................... 144
Extend Allotted Time for Claims Review by Service Officers ................. 140

F
Finance report .................................................................................. 44
Flannigan, David ............................................................................. 36
Foreign and Outlying Departments and Posts of The American Legion .... 35
Fourth Estate Award ........................................................................ 123, 124, 182
Frain, Jeff C. .................................................................................... 20

G
G.I. Bill .............................................................................................. 77, 110
Gates, Robert M., Dr. ....................................................................... 57
Georgopoulos, Apostolos P., Dr. ........................................................ 19
Gold Star Mothers National Monument Foundation .............................. 118
Greetings:
  Chia-Kai Lu .................................................................................. 38
  David Flannigan .......................................................................... 36
  Jeff C. Frain, National Commander, Sons of The American Legion ....... 20
  Larry T. Guzy ............................................................................ 39
  Mary E. Davis, National President, American Legion Auxiliary ............ 20

Bold typeface indicates the title of a resolution
 Ronald G. Smith .......................... 37
Gulf War illness .............................................. 19
Guzy, Larry T. .............................................. 39

H

Harencak, Garrett ........................................ 113
Heller, Dean .................................................. 87
homeland security .................................. 132, 133, 134

Homeland Security and the Opioid Epidemic ................. 133
homeless veterans ........................................ 67

I

illegal immigration ........................................ 133

Improve VA Communication with Service Officers ............. 139
Internal Affairs report ..................................... 99
Invocation .................................................... 55

L

law enforcement ........................................... 2
Legacy Run .................................................... 32
Legacy Scholarship Fund ................................ 31, 32, 35
Legislation report ......................................... 121
licensing and credentialing .......................... 52
Lu, Chia-Kai ................................................... 38

M

Medal of Honor for E. Royce Williams ............................ 128
Medal of Honor Society .................................. 16
medical marijuana ...................................... 142
membership program .................................. 21, 22, 47, 48
Microsoft Software & Systems Academy .............. 108
military recruitment .................................... 14, 114, 116
Miliary Spouse Employment ............................... 104
Mitchell, Kalynn L, SrA ................................. 12
Moe, Tom ...................................................... 89
Mojave Desert Veterans Memorial ...................... 84
Monahan, John D. .......................................... 72

N

National Commander’s Report to Convention ................. 47

National Cybersecurity Strategy ............................... 134
National Defense Budget ................................ 127
National Emergency Fund ................................ 102
National Emergency Fund Awards ...................... 25
National President The American Legion Auxiliary ....... 172
National Recruiter of the Year ......................... 24
National Security report .................................. 126
National Veterans Memorial and Museum ............... 89, 101

Newly Elected National Commander, Sons of The American Legion .... 172

Bold typeface indicates the title of a resolution
Operation Comfort Warriors............................................................................................................. 32, 135, 136

P

Permit VA Providers to Discuss the Use of Medical Marijuana in Those States
That Have Legalized Marijuana..................................................................................................... 142
Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. Religious Liberty Award................................................................. 84
Plaque and Colors to Outgoing National Commander......................................................... 152
Post 9/11 GI Bill.............................................................................................................................. 106, 107

POW/MIA Policies ......................................................................................................................... 129
Pratt, Greg ........................................................................................................................................ 70

Presentations:
  2017 National Firefighter of the Year..................................................................................... 62
  2017 National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year......................................................... 61
  American Legion Fourth Estate Awards, The................................................................ 123
  Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion.................................... 68
  Consolidated Post Reporting 2016-2017 ........................................................................ 24
  Daniel J. O’Connor Americanism Trophy........................................................................ 91
  Department Membership Awards....................................................................................... 21
  Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year Award.......................... 113
  Employer of the Year Award for Hiring Veterans........................................................... 111
  Frank N. Belgrano, Jr., Trophy......................................................................................... 93
  Garland Murphy, Jr. Award............................................................................................ 93
  Harvey H. Klee...................................................................................................................... 56
  Mark Ochenbein, Soldier’s Wish....................................................................................... 120
  National Commander’s Media & Communications Award........................................ 58
  National Emergency Fund Awards.................................................................................. 25
  National President, American Legion Auxiliary............................................................. 172
  National Recruiter of the Year.......................................................................................... 24
  Newly Elected National Commander, Sons of The American Legion...................... 172
  Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. Religious Liberty Award........................................................... 84
  Plaque and Colors to Outgoing National Commander ................................................... 152
  Plaque of Appreciation to the City of Cincinnati............................................................. 60
  Ralph T. O’Neil Education Trophy..................................................................................... 93
  The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal, Dr. Apostolos P. Georgopoulos..... 19
  The American Legion Patriot Award................................................................................. 57
  The American Legion Riders............................................................................................. 31
  U. S. Grant Legacy Award................................................................................................. 94
  William F. Lenker National Trophy................................................................................... 147

Preserve Veteran and Servicemember Rights to Gainful Employment and
Borrower Defense Protections ................................................................................................. 108

Prohibition on Wrongful Broadcast or Distribution of Intimate Visual Images.... 128

Protect Veteran and Servicemember Rights to Fair Consumer Arbitration........ 109

R

Radiation-Exposed Veterans......................................................................................................... 143
Report of Independent Auditors.............................................................................................. 183

Bold typeface indicates the title of a resolution
Reports:
- Americanism ............................................................................................................ 92
- Constitutional Amendments .................................................................................... 45
- Credentials & Rules ................................................................................................. 43
- Finance .................................................................................................................... 44
- Internal Affairs ........................................................................................................ 99
- Legislation ............................................................................................................. 121
- National Commander’s Report to Convention ......................................................... 47
- National Security ................................................................................................... 126
- Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation ......................................................................... 137
- Veterans Employment & Education ....................................................................... 103

Research Into Hearing Loss Due to Loud or Constant Noise Exposure in the Military ................................................................................................................. 143

Resolutions:
- No. 3: WWII Veterans Hospital and Medical Eligibility ..................................... 138
- No. 8: Expand the Presumptive Period for Veterans Who Served in South Korea ..................................................................................................................... 138
- No. 13: Improve VA Communication with Service Officers ................................ 139
- No. 14: Extend Allotted Time for Claims Review by Service Officers .............. 140
- No. 15: Department of Veterans Affairs Pharmacy Medication Dispensing Requirements ..................................................................................................... 141
- No. 16: Department of Veterans Affairs Automobile Allowance Program .......... 141
- No. 17: Counter Transnational Organized Crime ................................................. 132
- No. 19: Homeland Security and the Opioid Epidemic ........................................ 133
- No. 20: National Cybersecurity Strategy .............................................................. 134
- No. 21: National Defense Budget ......................................................................... 127
- No. 22: POW/MIA Policies .................................................................................. 129
- No. 23: Prohibition on Wrongful Broadcast or Distribution of Intimate Visual Images ................................................................................................. 128
- No. 26: Support Effort of the Small Business Administration’s Office of Veterans Business Development and Veteran Business Outreach Centers ................................................................................................. 105
- No. 27: Sanctuary Cities ....................................................................................... 133
- No. 28: Permit VA Providers to Discuss the Use of Medical Marijuana in Those States That Have Legalized Marijuana .................................................. 142
- No. 40: USS Liberty ............................................................................................. 144
- No. 41: Radiation-Exposed Veterans .................................................................... 130
- No. 47: Research Into Hearing Loss Due to Loud or Constant Noise Exposure in the Military ................................................................................................. 143
- No. 58: Expansion of Presumptive Conditions Associated with Camp Lejeune Contaminated Drinking Water ................................................................. 144
- No. 70: Medal of Honor for E. Royce Williams ................................................... 128
- No. 74: Air Carrier Access .................................................................................. 144
- No. 75: Department of Veterans Affairs Rural Health Care Program .................. 145
- No. 76: Veterans Emergency Room or Urgent Care Facility Relief ................. 146
- No. 77: Authorization to Build Veteran College Search Tool .............................. 106
- No. 78: Support Greater GI Bill Outcomes by Closing 90-10 Loophole .............. 107
- No. 79: Expanding Department of Veterans Affairs Employment Pathways ...... 107
- No. 80: Support Expansion of Microsoft Software and Systems Academy ........ 108
- No. 81: Military Veterans Spouse Employment ................................................... 104

Bold typeface indicates the title of a resolution
No. 82: Preserve Veterans and Servicemember Rights to Gainful Employment and Borrower Defense Protections .......................................................... 108
No. 83: Protect Veteran and Servicemember Rights to Fair Consumer Arbitration .......................................................... 109
No. 84: Support and Strengthen the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA).................................................. 110
No. 85: Support Employment and Veterans Reemployment Rights of National Guard and Reservists Returning from Deployment ................. 105
No. 86: Appreciation to Host City .................................................................................................................. 100
No. 87: WWI National Memorial in Pershing Park, Washington, D.C ...................................................... 101
No. 88: National Veterans Memorial and Museum .................................................................................. 101
Rowe, Mike ........................................................................................................................................... 58
Rowley, Joseph ........................................................................................................................................ 61

S

Sanctuary Cities ................................................................................................................................. 133
Sandoval, Brian, Hon ......................................................................................................................... 28
Sasone, Paul ........................................................................................................................................ 111
Schieve, Hillary Hon ......................................................................................................................... 30
Servicemembers Civil Relief Act ........................................................................................................ 110
Shulkin, David J. .................................................................................................................................. 63
Smith, Allanesha SrA ............................................................................................................................ 11
Smith, Ronald G. .................................................................................................................................. 37
Soldier’s Wish ....................................................................................................................................... 120, 121
spouse employment .......................................................................................................................... 104
State Veterans Homes ....................................................................................................................... 88
Steinberg, Andrew, 2017 National Oratorical Contest First Place Winner ........................................ 8
Stephens, Robin N. PO2 ....................................................................................................................... 9
Stith, Emily, 2017 Junior Shooting Sports Precision Champion ........................................................................... 7
suicide prevention ............................................................................................................................. 67, 81
Support and Strengthen the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) .................................................. 110
Support Effort of the Small Business Administration’s Office of Veterans Business Development and Veteran Business Outreach Centers ................. 105
Support Employment and Veterans Reemployment Rights of National Guard and Reservists Returning from Deployment .............................................................................. 105
Support Expansion of Microsoft Software and Systems Academy ......................................................... 108
Support Greater GI Bill Outcomes by Closing 90-10 Loophole ........................................................................ 107
System Worth Saving program ............................................................................................................ 80

T

Temporary Financial Assistance ........................................................................................................ 21, 22, 165
Terhune, Robert J. .................................................................................................................................. 29
Thomas, Darius, 2017 Boys Nation President ....................................................................................... 6
tolerance ................................................................................................................................................ 2
transnational organized crime ............................................................................................................. 132
Trump, Donald J. ................................................................................................................................... 75

U

Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 ........................................ 105
United States World War I Centennial Commission ........................................................................... 73
USAA ..................................................................................................................................................... 70

Bold typeface indicates the title of a resolution
USO .............................................................................................................................................. 20
USS Liberty .................................................................................................................................... 130

V

VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017 .................................................. 77
VA Choice and Quality Employment Act of 2017 .................................................................... 77
VA medical centers .................................................................................................................. 65
Vereen, Kevin .......................................................................................................................... 13
veteran claims ........................................................................................................................... 66, 88, 139, 140
veteran education ...................................................................................................................... 106, 107, 108
veteran employment ................................................................................................................ 51, 60, 105
veteran healthcare .................................................................................................................... 28, 64, 65, 66, 76, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 88, 133, 138, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146
veteran memorials ..................................................................................................................... 84, 89, 90, 101
veteran-owned businesses ......................................................................................................... 106
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation report .................................................................................. 137
Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 ............................................... 79
Veterans Emergency Room or Urgent Care Facility Relief ..................................................... 146
Veterans Employment & Education report ............................................................................. 103

W

Warden, John ............................................................................................................................. 29
Ware, Darren O. ......................................................................................................................... 62
Welcome:
  Hon. Brian Sandoval ............................................................................................................. 28
  Hon. Catherine Cortez Masto ............................................................................................ 28
  Hon. Dean Heller ................................................................................................................ 87
  Hon. Hillary Schieve ......................................................................................................... 30
  Hon. Mark Amodei .......................................................................................................... 30
  John Warden .................................................................................................................... 29
  Robert J. Terhune ............................................................................................................ 29
William F. Lenker National Service Trophy ............................................................................. 147
World War I Centennial ........................................................................................................... 73
World War I Memorial ........................................................................................................... 74, 101
WWI National Memorial in Pershing Park, Washington, D. C. ............................................. 101
WWII Veterans Hospital and Medical Eligibility ................................................................... 138

Y

Young, Judith C. ....................................................................................................................... 118
Youth Champions ..................................................................................................................... 5, 7, 12

**Bold typeface** indicates the title of a resolution