THE AMERICAN LEGION
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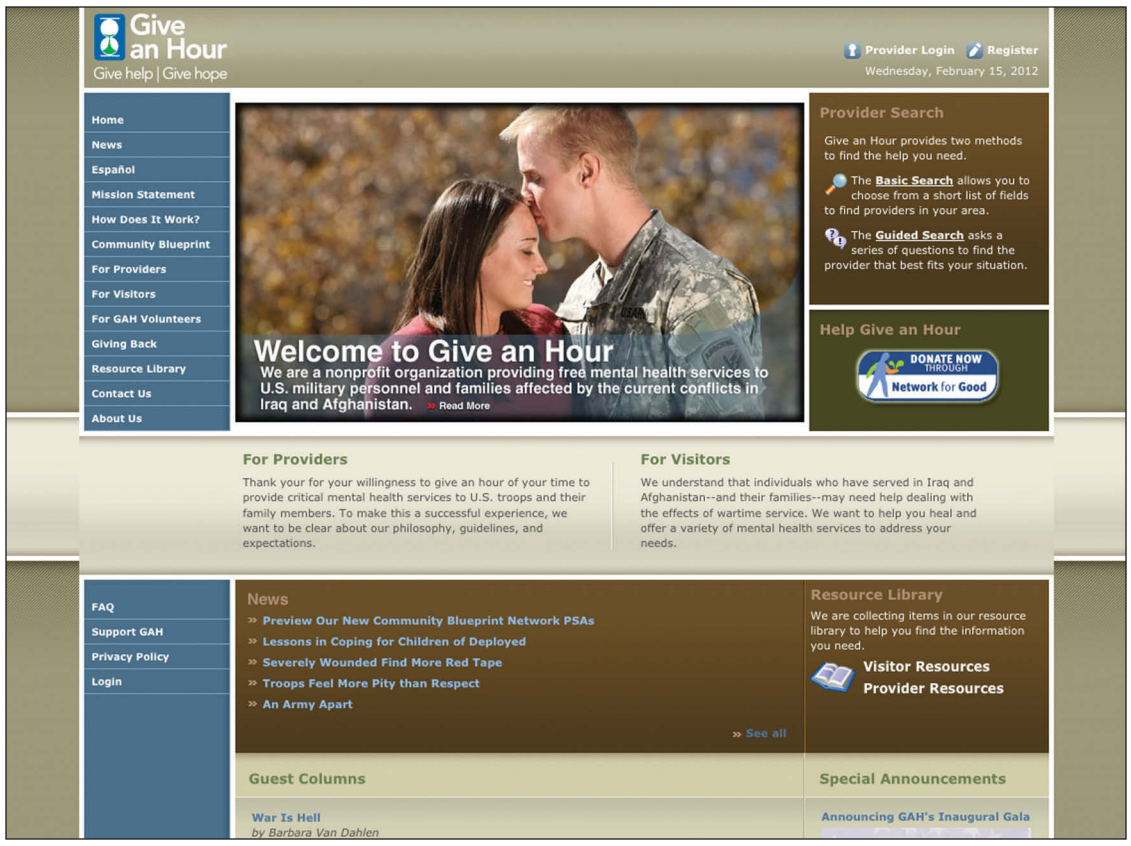
MENTAL HEALTH

GIVING MORE THAN AN HOUR

Legion briefed on program donating mental health care to servicemembers, veterans.

By Steve B. Brooks



Speaking before The American Legion's Veterans Policy and Oversight Committee in Washington on Jan. 18, Van Dahlen gave an overview of "Give an Hour," an organization she founded in 2005 to provide free mental health to U.S. servicemembers and veterans.

Van Dahlen said that after the discoveries of the psychological effects of military service during the Vietnam War, the country should have been fully prepared to deal with the same issues post-9/11. "But for all sorts of reasons that many of us know, that wasn't the case," Van Dahlen said. "(Give an Hour's) concept is very simple: harness the civilian mental health community (and) ask mental health professionals to literally give an hour each week of their practice to provide free service to those who serve and their family."

The goals of Give an Hour are to:

- Educate the general public;
- Develop a volunteer network of 40,000 mental health professionals;
- Enable easy and widespread access to volunteer network; and
- Diminish the stigma associated with mental health.

Volunteer providers include psychiatrists and psychologists, social workers, substance abuse counselors, and marriage and family therapists. Each provider commits one hour per week for one year to an individual or family.

Give an Hour also offers consultations to employers, first-responders, schools and veterans service organizations, and also provides in-service training to counseling centers, and education and outreach services.

With an average billing rate of $100 per hour, the organization already has donated more than $4.6 million worth of counseling and education services. More than 6,000 providers work for Give an Hour at this time, and Van Dahlen said that 50 to 80 more providers sign up weekly to help. Many of the providers in the program see more than one patient or provide more than an hour of service a week. While the program is targeted to post-9/11 servicemembers, "whenever we get a request from veterans who had served in other wars, we're always able to connect the dots," Van Dahlen said.

Those who seek care can go to the organization's website, enter their ZIP code and choose from a list of services available. A list of providers in their area

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NATIONAL SECURITY

Legion: DoD budget breaks promise

Pointing out that President Obama just pledged a month ago to "keep our armed forces the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped fighting force in history," American Legion National Commander Fang Wong warned that if the administration's 2013 defense budget is enacted, the U.S. military will once again return to a hollow force.

"To keep the best fighting force, you must recruit and retain the best people," said Wong following the announcement of the proposed Department of Defense budget. "By increasing, and in some cases quadrupling, health insurance fees for military retirees, you are sending a powerful message to those in uniform and to their families that their decades of service and sacrifice are unappreciated. Moreover, most believe that the Retirement Modernization Commission that this budget recommends will lead to a 401(k)-type plan, which will encourage people to leave the military for a safer and less demanding career in the private sector. 'Grandfathering' benefit cuts merely tells tomorrow's veterans that their service isn't as valuable as those who served before them."

The budget for 2013 represents an 8-percent cut from 2012. In October, the Legion passed a national resolution that called on Congress and the White House to "cease all efforts to reduce the defense budget from its current level."

Wong, a Vietnam War veteran, added that he fully understands the fiscal realities that Washington faces. "America has a debt crisis," he said. "But no debt is higher than what America owes its veterans, who already sacrificed years of

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PLANNER

FEBRUARY

Americanism Month

- **20** Presidents Day
- **22-25** Department Service Officer School, Washington
- **26-29** Washington Conference
- **26-29** National VA&R Conference, Washington
- **29** National VA&R Commission Meeting, Washington

MARCH

- **1** Eagle Scout of the Year applications due to department headquarters
- **12** Department certification of Oratorical contest winners due to National Headquarters
- **14** 90-percent membership target date
- **15-17** American Legion birthday

APRIL

Children & Youth Month

- **1** Eagle Scout of the Year applications due to National Headquarters
- **1-7** American Legion Child Welfare Foundation Week
- **11** 95-percent membership target date
- **13-15** 75th Annual High School Oratorical Contest, Indianapolis
- **15** American Legion Legacy Scholarship applications due to National Headquarters

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Legion birthday: a celebration of values

Its official name had not yet been adopted when The American Legion's purpose was stated in the form of a one-sentence paragraph. It was Monday morning, March 17, 1919, and a weekend gathering of officers and enlisted members of the American Expeditionary Forces was coming to a crescendo in Paris. The paragraph was what we might today call a "mission statement." It came from the Committee on the Constitution, chaired by G. Edward Buxton, who had been the commanding officer of Medal of Honor recipient Pvt. Alvin C. York, also in Paris that day. The paragraph read:

Fang A. Wong
National Commander

We, the members of the Military and Naval Service of the United States of America in the great war, desiring to perpetuate the principles of Justice, Freedom and Democracy for which we have fought, to inculcate the duty and obligation of the citizen to the State; to preserve the history and incidents of our participation in the war; and to cement the ties of comradeship formed in service, do propose to found and establish an association for the furtherance of the foregoing purposes.

Elements of that paragraph would later shape the Preamble to The American Legion Constitution, recited at the beginning of every official Legion meeting. Moreover, the values within the paragraph would come to life in innumerable ways over the next nine decades, all wrapped around key terms like "we, the members," "we have fought," and "to cement the ties of comradeship."

Not all military officials in France were thrilled about an unregulated rendezvous of officers and enlisted personnel at that time. Four months had passed since the armistice was signed. U.S. soldiers still in Europe were restless and ready to go home. Morale was a major issue. Many were going AWOL. Gen. John Pershing cautiously agreed, and passes were granted to summon members of the AEF to brainstorm ideas to boost their own spirits. In response, they formed The American Legion.

Bishop Charles H. Brent, senior chaplain for the AEF, was among the officials worried about what this gathering of battle-worn men might concoct. Political radicalism was a possibility. Brent was relieved to learn that all these troops wanted was to stay connected, help one another, never forget their wartime experiences, and defend the values and ideals for which they had fought. Some officials found it odd that these soldiers and sailors came away from the Paris Caucus expecting nothing from anyone other than each other.

Many wars have passed since the Meuse-Argonne Offensive where Alvin York made history under G. Edward Buxton's command, before both became dedicated Legionnaires. The first sentence of that first committee report, however, is as meaningful as ever today, as American Legion posts celebrate this organization's 93rd birthday and welcome home a new generation of patriots who long for little more than to stay connected, help each other, remember their wartime experiences, and protect the ideals for which they fought, expecting nothing from anyone other than themselves. They are us.

Memoranda

A MOMENT IN TIME

If you enjoy American Legion history, visit the Legion's website and click on "A Moment in Time." And if you like that, visit the site's collection of profiles of past recipients of our Distinguished Service Medal and National Commander's Public Relations Award.

www.legion.org

ROLLING THUNDER

More than 450,000 motorcyclists are expected to pour into Washington for the 25th anniversary of Rolling Thunder on Memorial Day weekend. Four special bikes have been custom-built in honor of the occasion, and will be unveiled at a special event May 26.

www.rollingthunderrun.com

SAL RADIO PODCASTS

Podcasts of "Sons of The American Legion Radio Report," which features top guests and hot topics related to the Legion, national security and the military, are now available on The American Legion website.

www.legion.org/sons/radio

Dispatch

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STILL SERVING AMERICA

Does your post have a unique community program, an innovative recruiting method or a creative way of spreading the Legion message that could be implemented at posts across the country? Tell us how your post and its members are ***Still Serving America.***

In submitting your information, include your full name, address and telephone number. Send your items, labeled ***Still Serving America****, to the correspondence address at left.*

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ACTIVATION

Want to get involved in one of The American Legion's many national programs? Do you have a question about veterans affairs, national defense or what is going on in Washington? All you have to do is pick up the phone or send an e-mail.

Americanism/Children & Youth
(317) 630-1203
acy@legion.org

Economic
(202) 861-2700
econ@legion.org

Finance
317-630-1222
finance@legion.org

Internal Affairs
(317) 630-1330
ia@legion.org

Legislation
(202) 263-2981
leg@legion.org

National Security/Foreign Relations
(202) 861-2700
nsfr@legion.org

National Convention
(317) 630-1292
dholmes@legion.org
bwilliams@legion.org

National Emblem Sales
(888) 453-4466
emblem@legion.org
emblem.legion.org

Public Relations
(317) 630-1253
pr@legion.org

The American Legion Magazine
(317) 630-1298
magazine@legion.org

The American Legion Library
(317) 630-1366
library@legion.org

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(202) 861-2700
var@legion.org

American Legion Baseball
(317) 630-1249
jquinlan@legion.org
legion.org/baseball

American Legion Child Welfare Foundation
(317) 630-1202
www.cwf-inc.org

American Legion Endowment Fund
(317) 630-1202

American Legion Riders
(317) 630-1265/ (317) 630-1269
smiller@legion.org/wsloan@legion.org

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

Family Support Network
(317) 630-1395
(800) 504-4098
familysupport@legion.org

Junior Shooting Sports
(317) 630-1249
cshort@legion.org

Legion College
(317) 630-1265
mherndon@legion.org

National Emergency Fund
(317) 630-1321
ia@legion.org

National Oratorical Contest
(317) 630-1249
cshort@legion.org

Sons of The American Legion
SAL@legion.org

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

A very good tip

Nevada post works with area restaurants to raise more than $11,000 for veterans.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

Rarely does a week go by that the media fails to mention our nation's current employment situation in our country. According to a recent report from the Department of Labor, the rate still sets at 9.1 percent for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – almost a full point above the national average.

Nearly one out of every 10 men and women who put their lives on hold in service to their country is coming home to find a grim job market.

To help combat this, The American Legion teams up with federal agencies and private entities to conduct dozens of veterans hiring fairs across the country each year, putting prospective employees face to face with employers.

When there's a gap between jobs, times can get tough. Meeting monthly responsibilities becomes difficult, if not impossible.

Some Legion posts are taking it upon themselves to help during this difficult time – posts like Darrell Dunkle Post 1 in Reno, Nev., which raised more than $11,000 over the course of five hours last Veterans Day to help out veterans in its community through its Tip a Veteran fundraiser. The money raised went to pay for holiday programs for homeless veterans, veterans in the Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program, and for recently transitioned servicemembers currently out of work. The funds paid for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, as well as Christmas presents for the veterans' families.

"A lot of these veterans just getting out of the military are coming home to no job, and we wanted to do something to ease their burdens around the holiday," Post 1 First Vice Commander Kim Young said. "We've done things where we've raised $400 here, $1,600 there, but we wanted something bigger to roll out every year."

Young came up with the idea of placing Legionnaires in area restaurants to solicit donations from patrons on Veterans Day. He and dozens of Post 1 Legion family members began a massive publicity campaign that included posters, handouts and shirts designed and printed by Legionnaire David Lyson, as well as getting advance coverage from a local radio station.

The original plan started with two restaurants, but as momentum gathered, that number increased to 11 and included restaurants in nearby Sparks and Carson City.

On Veterans Day, Post 1 Legionnaires headed to seven of the 11 restaurants; American Legion District 4 Legionnaires manned Bully's Sports Bar in Carson City, the Reno chapter of Vietnam Veterans of America handled the Denny's in Sparks, and the Reno Elks Lodge took care of a restaurant in Reno and another in Sparks.

The volunteers wore distinctive matching shirts at each restaurant and greeted each patron with a U.S. flag and an envelope that described the event and had a tax donation receipt inside. In some locations, the volunteers were able to assist the wait staff by serving food and clearing tables, which Young said gave restaurant patrons a kick.

"We wanted people to know why we were there, and we wanted them to see veterans helping veterans," Young said. "And the outpouring of help was phenomenal. An elderly lady who had to be in her 80s or 90s came into one of the restaurants and gave us a handful of change," he said. "She had driven 20 miles out of her way, and there was probably $10 in change. You just knew that it was her all. It was really touching."

In addition to raising nearly $12,000, Young said the event created strong relationships between Post 1, area businesses and the Elks Lodge. Plans already are in the works for a similar 2012 Veterans Day event, with once major difference.

"The goal this year is to raise $100,000," Young said. "We've already got a blueprint for next year." Six months before the next event, Young is going to organize a meeting that will include several Legion posts in the area. "We can split the money we make among the posts, but we're also going to take a percentage of it and put it toward a common goal," Young said. "I think it can be big.

"We're also willing to talk to any posts about how they can do a similar project. We think this is something that could be rolled out throughout the entire American Legion – in Nevada and anywhere else."

Young said he noticed in his community something that I've seen during travels across the country and that National Commander Fang A. Wong has seen as he visits each Legion department. "I saw a lot of people who want to help veterans but don't know how to do it," Young said. "We were able to present them with the opportunity to help, and they really were able to dig deep.

"It was a great success, but it took a team. You can come up with an idea, but to make it happen, it takes everybody. We got that kind of support."

www.nvlegionnaireone.org

AMERICANISM

Exercise your right to vote in 2012

As the 2012 presidential primaries continue, American Legion National Headquarters is encouraging Legionnaires to exercise their right to vote, and empower others to do the same, by mailing out updated "Get Out the Vote" brochures to departments.

The Legion's National Americanism Commission "Vote America '12" brochure aids Legionnaires on ways to run a successful voting campaign. Posts can encourage voting by becoming involved in registration drives and sponsoring town-hall meetings, while Legionnaires can serve as poll volunteers or poll workers. These are some of the tips offered by the brochure on encouraging citizens to vote.

Tell us about your Legion post's "Get Out the Vote" activities by downloading and returning the project feedback form. Information about how to run a successful "Get Out the Vote" campaign is available online.

www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/vote_feedback.pdf

www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/vote_brochure.pdf

LEGION RIDERS

Legion Riders chapter locator now available

A new tool on The American Legion's website allows users to locate American Legion Riders chapters across the country. Those interested in finding a nearby Legion Riders chapter can go to **www.legion.org/riders**, click on "Chapter Locator" on the left side of the page, and enter their city, state or ZIP code to locate a chapter.

Those wanting to have their chapter listed can email either **smiller@legion.org** or **wsloan@legion.org**, or call **(317) 630-1269** or **(317) 630-1265**.

www.legion.org/riders

POST ACTIVITIES

Consolidated Post Report form available online

Consolidated Post Report forms are now available online. The forms can be filled out electronically.

The Consolidated Post Report (CPR) was established in 1975 to assist departments in documentating the various activities a specific post does during the 12-month reporting period of June 1-May 31. The Consolidated Post Report may be the most important document your post will complete this year.

Your post's information, combined with that of other posts, is used when the national commander and others testify on Capitol Hill on behalf of all veterans. Each post has a story to tell, and when we speak collectively our strength is magnified.

Blank CPR forms have been mailed to department headquarters for distribution to posts. When using the paper form, send both the original and one copy to your department headquarters by the date specified. Keep a third copy for post records.

You can also complete and submit your CPR information from **myLegion.org**, using the online form. Make sure you have all your information ready, then simply sign on and look for Consolidated Post Report under the "Post and Department" options.

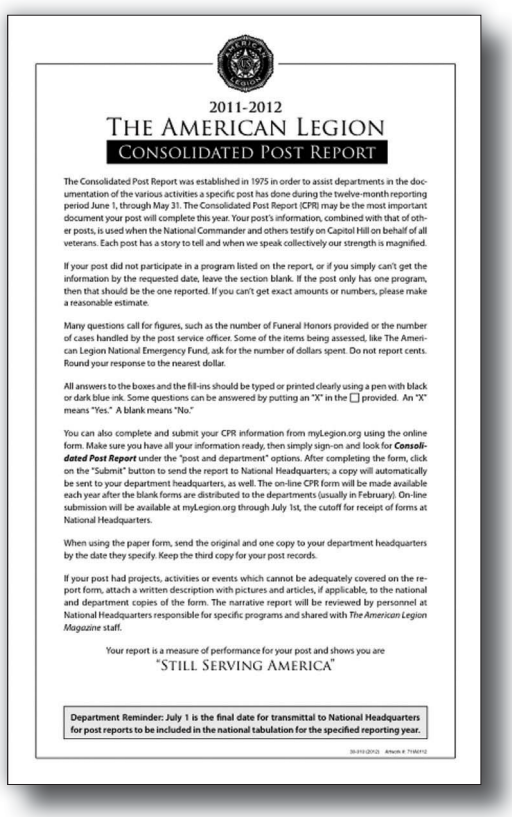
After completing the form, click on the "Submit" button to send the report to National Headquarters; a copy will automatically be sent to your department headquarters as well. The online CPR form will be made available each year after the blank forms are distributed to the departments.

Online submission will be available at **myLegion.org** through July 1, the cutoff date for receipt of forms at National Headquarters.

To increase participation in filling out CPRs, National Commander Fang A. Wong has instituted the following challenges and recognition to department leadership:

- Plaque at National Convention for 95 to 100 percent reporting.
- Certificates mailed for those over 75 percent reporting that show an increase in their response rate from 2011.
- Publish department commander's picture in *The American Legion Dispatch* for those in the 100 Percent Club and the 95 to 99 Percent Club.

www.legion.org/membership/cpr



2011-2012

THE AMERICAN LEGION

CONSOLIDATED POST REPORT

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If your post did not participate in a program listed on the report, or if you simply can't get the information by the requested date, leave the section blank. If the post only has one program, then that should be the one reported. If you can't get exact amounts or numbers, please make a reasonable estimate.

Many questions call for figures, such as the number of Funeral Honors provided or the number of cases handled by the post service officer. Some of the items being assessed, like The American Legion National Emergency Fund, ask for the number of dollars spent. Do not report cents. Round your response to the nearest dollar.

All answers to the boxes and the fil-ins should be typed or printed clearly using a pen with black or dark blue ink. Some questions can be answered by putting an "X" in the ☐ provided. An "X" means "Yes." A blank means "No."

You can also complete and submit your CPR information from myLegion.org using the online form. Make sure you have all your information ready, then simply sign-on and look for ***Consolidated Post Report*** under the "post and department" options. After completing the form, click on the "Submit" button to send the report to National Headquarters; a copy will automatically be sent to your department headquarters, as well. The on-line CPR form will be made available each year after the blank forms are distributed to the departments (usually in February). On-line submission will be available at myLegion.org through July 1st, the cutoff for receipt of forms at National Headquarters.

When using the paper form, send the original and one copy to your department headquarters by the date they specify. Keep the third copy for your post records.

If your post had projects, activities or events which cannot be adequately covered on the report form, attach a written description with pictures and articles, if applicable, to the national and department copies of the form. The narrative report will be reviewed by personnel at National Headquarters responsible for specific programs and shared with *The American Legion Magazine* staff.

Your report is a measure of performance for your post and shows you are "STILL SERVING AMERICA"

Department Reminder: July 1 is the final date for transmittal to National Headquarters for post reports to be included in the national tabulation for the specified reporting year.

VETERANS EMPLOYMENT

Legion continues strong presence at career fairs

Organization mans booth at two hiring fairs in D.C., one in New York City.

In the past month, The American Legion participated in three veterans or military-spouses hiring fairs – two in the nation's capital and one in New York City.

VA Hiring Fair. More than 500 tentative job offers were made to veterans at the Department of Veterans Affairs Hiring Fair in Washington on Jan. 18. The department hopes to continue that success by both expanding its hire-a-vet program and launching more veteran career fairs throughout the country.

According to VA, nearly 4,200 veterans attended the 13-hour career fair at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. Attending the event were employers from across the public and private sectors, including Microsoft, Lockheed Martin, JPMorgan, and the departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Interior, Agriculture and Labor.

A reported 6,400 public and private jobs were made available to attendees at the event, and about 2,600 veterans interviewed on site with potential employers.

Additionally, VA reports that about 700 veterans created online accounts for accessing their VA benefits, and 30 homeless veterans were referred to care providers. The Legion was among several veterans service organizations offering advice and counsel to attendees.

VA also used the career fair to showcase its innovative, high-tech VA for Vets program. VA for Vets provides online military-to-civilian skills translations, a web-based résumé-builder and search engine, and avatar-based technology that connects deployed servicemembers to VA before separation.

The Legion hosted a booth at the fair, manned by Economic Division assistant directors Steve Gonzalez and Davy Leghorn. Gonzalez said that about 75 veterans stopped by to inquire about Legion services, with several requesting applications for membership.

Military Spouse Career Forum. On Jan. 13, Washington was the site for the Military Spouse Career Forum and Hiring Our Heroes Job Fair. The event brought together more than 115 employers and veterans service providers – including the Legion – and more than 1,100 military spouse job-seekers.

Samuel Thomas, general manager of Events DC, said the event was, to date, "the largest hiring fair exclusively for military spouses."

One participating group was the Military Spouse Business Association (MSBA), founded in 2006 to help entrepreneurs in overcoming the difficulties of rebuilding their businesses wherever the military chooses to assign their spouses.

Joanna Williamson, the group's director of business development, said the Legion played a key role in helping MSBA get the Military Spouse Residency Relief Act passed by Congress.

"To have The American Legion really throw their support and their weight behind us substantiated our credibility," Williamson said. "It meant a lot. It certainly eased the burden that we had to shoulder as military spouses."

The Military Spouse Residency Relief Act essentially applies the same taxation rules that have long existed for servicemembers to military spouses. Namely, they generally no longer have to pay income taxes to states where they are assigned if those states are not their legal residences.

Williamson recounted how the Legion lobbied at congressional hearings for passage of the bill, which President Barack Obama signed into law on Nov. 11, 2009. "To have The American Legion really step up to the plate for a small group of military spouses dedicated to fixing this issue – like I said, it meant a lot," Williamson said.

MSBA offers guidance to military spouses on how they can successfully own and operate their own business despite frequent changes in duty stations. Williamson said her organization shares "the knowledge that we've already gained from being business owners. And going through this very odd business cycle that's particular to military spouses because we have to account for moving our businesses every two to three years. Standard businesses don't have that."

Gonzalez agreed that military spouses face unique hurdles in the world of employment.

"Sometimes, it's difficult for the husbands and wives of servicemembers to just find a new network or support group that will help them find jobs in their new locations," he said. "Even more complicated are the processes many of them have to go through to get relicensed or recertified for their same jobs in different states. Some of the spouses here have had to go through that several times in their professional lives."

Gonzalez said the Legion strongly supports the hiring of military spouses because it contributes to America's national security.

"When military spouses get jobs, that actually eases the burden of servicemembers," he said. "They don't have to worry as much about their husbands or wives at home while they're deployed overseas. This is also important because, if spouses have too many problems with their own jobs or careers, servicemembers will leave the military because of it."

Speakers at the career forum included Patty Shinseki, senior adviser for Joining Forces (an initiative to help military families started by Michelle Obama and Jill Biden); Laura Dempsey, senior advisor for military-spouse employment at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; and Rob Gordon, DoD's deputy assistant secretary for military community and family policy.

Sponsors of the career forum and job fair included the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, NBC Universal, NBC Channel 4 (Washington) and Events DC.

Left: A Legion staff member answers a question during a VA career fair in Washington on Jan. 19. Nearly 4,200 veterans attended the fair; more than 500 received tentative job offers.
Below: Marine veteran and active-duty Army National Guardsman J.C. Azarias, left, talks with Ray Coba of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority at a New York job fair by the VA regional office and co-sponsored by the Legion. Coba is an Army veteran and Legionnaire.

Photos by Noel St. John and Amy C. Elliott

In New York City. The Legion co-sponsored a job fair in New York in early February at the VA regional office, in coordination with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Department of Labor, the office of Rep. Bob Turner, R-N.Y., and other organizations. Primarily, the Legion assisted veterans in finding employment in the tri-state area.

Also present at the event were representatives from Helmets to Hardhats, Time Warner Cable, FDM, Verizon, the departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor, HBO, Prudential Investments, and many other companies and organizations from the private and public sectors.

The Legion's Department of New York was also represented, assisting veterans in filing benefits and providing a booth for department service officer Dana Verissimo, who assisted about 20 veterans with disability claims.

www.legion.org/careers
vaforvets.va.gov

MEMORIAM

Never one to back down

Richard Christian Jr., champion of Vietnam veterans in battle for Agent Orange and PTS claims, loses battle with cancer.

By Ken Olsen

Richard S. Christian Jr., who endured withering hostility from the Reagan administration for his meticulous and tireless work on behalf of Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange, died of cancer at a Virginia hospital on Jan. 20. He was 80.

Christian was the first director of the Army's Agent Orange Task Force, which later became the U.S. Army and Joint Services Environmental Support Group. He provided military records and analysis that were key to the groundbreaking Agent Orange research conducted by Columbia University professors Jeanne M. Stellman and Steven D. Stellman. Christian continued to press the Agent Orange issue as deputy director of The American Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division after leaving the federal government in the late 1980s.

"Without Dick Christian, no veteran would be getting compensation for Agent Orange," said Jeanne Stellman, professor emeritus and special lecturer at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, and a member of the Legion's PTS-TBI Ad Hoc Committee. "He's the person who kept the issue alive."

For Christian, that meant working long hours, nights and weekends – and never backing down.

"He was dedicated to finding the reason that veterans coming home from Vietnam were getting sick," added Don Hakenson, who worked for Christian and later became director of the Joint Services Environmental Support Group. "He was the right leader for the right organization at the right time. He had exceptional integrity."

Christian was a records management specialist who served two tours in Vietnam before retiring from the Army as a lieutenant colonel. The Pentagon sent him back to Vietnam as a civilian in the early 1970s to retrieve military records as the United States prepared to pull out of Southeast Asia. Christian recovered thousands of records, which his group used to reconstruct U.S. troop exposure to the more than 20 million gallons of Agent Orange sprayed during the war.

"He was everyone's go-to person on Agent Orange, including The American Legion, and he never took credit for it," Stellman said.

Christian's willingness to provide information to scores of veterans trying to prove Agent Orange exposure set him apart from other government officials, said John Sommer, former executive director of the Legion's Washington office. "He believed that people who had served their country in the armed forces should be compensated for the disabilities and diseases they suffered as a result of that service," Sommer said.

"At a time when Vietnam veterans weren't treated very well by the VA, here was a guy who tried to make sure they got a fair shake in the disability compensation system," said Bart Stichman, joint executive director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program, which has represented Agent Orange victims since the 1970s. "That took courage."

Christian became the Defense Department's representative to the Agent Orange Working Group assembled by the Reagan White House. His work made him a target for intense criticism from administration officials who wanted to derail Agent Orange exposure studies, even as Vietnam veterans developed non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, soft-tissue sarcoma and other diseases at an alarming rate.

"The White House and the executive agencies were out to kill the studies," Stellman said. "It was a no-holds barred situation."

Col. J. H. Robenson, adjutant general of the U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army, Heidelburg, Germany, presents the Legion of Merit to Maj. Richard S. Christian on May 12, 1969. *Photo by PFO James Turner*

Christian went head-to-head with the Centers for Disease Control, which opposed an Agent Orange epidemiological study on the grounds that there wasn't sufficient data. "At the same time, Christian is saying, 'We've got good records as to where the troops were and where they sprayed,'" Stichman said. "How could VA ignore its obligation to assist the veteran if he was saying we can help get that information?"

The epidemiological study was never conducted. But Christian persevered, and his congressional testimony later helped generate support for the Stellmans' study. "We could not have developed our exposure methodologies without him," Stellman said.

Beginning in the early 1980s, Christian was also called upon to search the Vietnam records he had retrieved for evidence to support veterans' post-traumatic stress claims.

Christian left the Joint Forces Environmental Support Group in 1988. He continued his work on Agent Orange and post-traumatic stress as deputy director of VA&R for the Legion from 1989 to 1995. He also helped families of POW/MIAs and oversaw the Legion's Vietnam Veterans Family Assistance Program. "There is so much that would not have happened if not for Dick Christian," Sommer said.

Christian also had a distinguished record as a soldier. Born Feb. 26, 1931, in Newark, N.J., he lied about his age and joined the Army in 1946 when he was 15. He went to Korea as a platoon leader with the 7th Infantry and was wounded on Sept. 26, 1952, said his widow, Julita Christa Christian.

The Chinese pounded Christian's platoon with an estimated 500 artillery and mortar rounds before trying to overrun the hill they were holding. Christian refused to be evacuated until the enemy withdrew, after six hours of hand-to-hand combat. He was belatedly recognized for his heroism with the Silver Star in October 2000, Julita said.

Christian met and married his first wife, Adelaide Christian, during a deployment to Austria. The couple had a son, Richard Christian III. Adelaide died of cancer in 1963. He met Julita Christa Arzt in Heidelberg, Germany, a year later. They were married in 1965 and returned to the United States in 1972, settling in Virginia. The couple had two daughters, Karin Christian and Melanie Hendricks. Christian is also survived by three grandchildren.

Burial will be at Arlington National Cemetery on April 26.

SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

SAL website redesigned

In an effort to keep Sons of The American Legion members updated on membership and news about detachments and squadrons nationwide, the SAL national website has been redesigned.

The new site better serves its visitors by offering timely news stories, photos and videos, as well as direct access to membership reports, publications and downloads.

Additionally, visitors can easily link to the SAL's social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, and listen to tapings of the "SAL Radio Report," during which two New York SAL members discuss military issues, troop support, and the programs and services of the Legion and SAL.

Visitors can stay connected to the SAL website when on the go, thanks to a new mobile-phone application for Apple's iPhone and Google's Android.

Android and iPhone users can both download the app online.

"With the new SAL application available from some phones and iPads, the Sons are moving into the future of telecommunications," said Wes Wills, the Kansas detachment adjutant. "The site is still a work in progress, but everyone that I have talked to about the site has had positive comments."

www.legion.org/sons
market.android.com
www.apple.com/itunes

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

VPOC briefed on DoD's future budget

On Jan. 18 and 19, the Veterans' Policy Oversight Committee – which includes various leaders of The American Legion – met at the Legion's Washington office. The committee received a number of briefings on subjects of key interest to the Legion, including one about the future Department of Defense budgetsand their impact on U.S. national security.

Kenneth F. Governor
Chairman, National Legislative Commission

President Obama and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other civilian and military Pentagon leadership, spoke at a Pentagon press conference on Jan. 5 to roll out the administration's strategy for countering national threats, sustaining U.S. global leadership and giving the president's strategic priorities for defense policy for the fiscal 2013 budget.

The president released his fiscal 2013 budget on Feb. 13. Within that budget are specific proposals for DoD funding that address efforts to meet the $1 trillion in defense cuts due to the Budget Control Act of 2011. Prior to the budget's release, program cuts, troop end-strength numbers and other specifics were leaked in order to meet the needs of Congress and DoD.

Some of those leaks included:

- An $8.5 million reduction in the DoD base budget, including military construction funds from the 2012 appropriation.
- Reducing the Navy carrier force from 11 to 10 carrier groups.
- Reducing the Air Force inventory by 200 fighters, with a possible delay or extension of the F-35 fighter program.
- Reducing the end strength of the Army and Marine Corps by 10 to 15 percent. This is a typical peacetime "drawdown" tactic, designed to show an immediate reduction in spending. This same tactic was employed under the Carter and Clinton administrations.
- Reducing the overall DoD budget by $487 billion over 10 years, rather than the $450 billion reduction that is the current benchmark. This amount is the first "down payment" required under the terms of the Budget Control Act, which mandates a total of $1 trillion in reductions to DoD programs over the next decade.
- Reducing the U.S. security emphasis in Europe, Africa and South America, and increasing emphasis in the Asia-Pacific region. This re-emphasis points to allowing allied nations – especially members of NATO – to be more responsible for their own national security.
- Changing retirement and medical benefits in some manner, including the proposal of a Retirement Modernization Commission.

Defense areas in which the budget proposed major changes include: a reduction in nuclear forces; a reduction in Army and Marine Corps personnel totaling 92,000; increases in cyber-warfare systems, special operations forces, and other high-tech weapon systems; new emphasis on the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions; and increased reliance on reserve components as active forces are reduced. As part of restructuring the military force, DoD will rebalance the infrastructure of facilities both overseas and in the United States.

The budget proposal asks Congress to authorize a new BRAC round as the most effective way to achieve savings in infrastructure. Panetta said the budget will achieve an additional $60 billion in savings over five years.

The Appropriations, Armed Services and Budget committees in both chambers will conduct hearings on the DoD budget beginning in February and continue throughout the spring. As with previous budgets, Congress will make changes as they see fit to the president's proposed budget.

The American Legion has capitalized on these hearings to our benefit in the past, making recommendations to ameliorate some of the administration's more radical proposals. For example, in 2011, we used the congressional budget process to change the TRICARE fee-increase proposals.

Several special-interest groups have approached the Legion and asked for our assistance in modifying some of the proposals in the fiscal 2013 budget.

The Legion will continue to foster these contacts and work together where these opportunities are mutually beneficial to the Legion and veterans and servicemembers.

In order to be effective, it will be imperative for the Legion to stay closely involved with DoD, other veterans and military service organizations, and Congress. We must carefully respond to the facts and proposals.

House passes two measures dealing with memorials

On Jan. 24, the House of Representatives passed two measures dealing with U.S. war memorials. First, the House passed **H.R. 2070**, the World War II Memorial Prayer Act of 2011. This measure directs the Secretary of the Interior to install in the area of the World War II Memorial in Washington a suitable plaque or inscription with the words of a prayer spoken by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during a radio address to the American people.

The prayer was broadcast on the morning of D-Day, June 6, 1944, as U.S. and Allied troops were launching the invasion of Europe. The vote for passage was 386-26, sending the bill to the Senate for further action.

Later that day, the House passed **H.R. 290**, the "War Memorial Protection Act," by a voice vote. This bill will amend Title 36, U.S. Code, to ensure that veteran and war memorials commemorating the service of members of the U.S. Armed Forces may contain religious symbols. This measure awaits further action by the Senate.

Senate panel reviews Arlington Cemetery progress

On Jan. 25, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs conducted a hearing to examine the progress in contract management and overall progress at Arlington National Cemetery.

Rocked with a variety of scandals over mismanagement in recent years, Arlington has been under an improvement process for the past 19 months with new leadership, including Director Kathryn Condon.

Condon spoke to the committee, along with Lt. Gen. Peter Vangjel, Inspector General of the U.S. Army; Brian Lepore, GAO director of defense capabilities and management; and Belva Martin, GAO director of acquisition and sourcing management.

Martin said that "Arlington has made significant progress" over the last year and a half toward respectability. Condon noted that they are now "fully in compliance with all federal regulations."

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., was the driving force behind the hearing from the committee side, and lauded the improvements at Arlington, referencing site visits she had personally conducted. McCaskill had personally sponsored provisions in **P.L. 111-339** (signed into law Dec. 22, 2010) that called for regular reports on progress at the cemetery.

This hearing also reviewed the findings of those legally mandated reports. The findings, as noted by McCaskill, represent a "sea change" in leadership, with changes that are substantial and significant.

Still, many unanswered questions remain about the period of mismanagement leading up to the crisis that Condon was brought in to resolve. Perhaps as much as $12 million in funds remains unaccounted for from 2004 to 2010. McCaskill recognized this as appalling but said, "I don't think there is any indication of people walking off with (the money). I think this is incompetence – gross incompetence."

Although the $12 million is still unaccounted for, it is actually part of a larger chunk of $27 million previously thought missing. The recovered portion, $15 million, has been located by auditors and directed toward much-needed improvements in the cemetery's computer and IT infrastructure, as well as providing for new burial equipment and upgrades to the columbarium, where the ashes of cremated servicemembers can be interred.

The current annual operating budget of $45 million is "now transparent and can be accounted for down to the last dollar," Condon said.

Fiscal 2013 federal budget's effects on veterans, military

In addition to DoD and national defense, the other major area of concern to the Legion in the fiscal 2013 federal budget released on Feb. 13 is VA and veterans health care.

Current indications are that VA's budget will be spared the harsh cuts facing DoD. A number of VA's accounts – general operating expenses, information technology, the National Cemetery Administration, state veterans-cemeteries construction grants and state veterans-homes construction grants, for example – have been effectively frozen for the past few years. The major- and minor-construction accounts have been funded at amounts that do not meet the needs for new or replacement facilities. By the same token, the medical-care accounts are almost certain to be fully funded under the advance appropriations process.

The Legion will fully analyze the president's plan, and act to ensure that our nation's veterans continue to receive "the best care anywhere."

The Legion is greatly concerned that reducing DoD's budget will place a greater strain on our forces, as well as possibly endangering our national security. The president has made it clear that he intends to make some major cuts in DoD programs.

Based on his fiscal 2013 budget, troop strengths, weapons systems and foreign deployments are major targets. These proposed reductions are larger than originally expected.

In the months to come, Legion representatives will appear before a number of congressional committees and subcommittees, testifying on the fiscal needs of DoD and VA. We agree that our nation needs to make hard choices to address the current crisis, but not at the expense of our servicemembers, veterans and their families.

Visit Legislative section of legion.org for more info

The Legislative section of **www.legion.org** contains a variety of up-to-date information on Legion efforts in Washington.

The section includes links to Legion written testimony, weekly updates on key legislative issues, legislative point papers, listings of Legion resolutions with legislative intent, and breaking stories about House and Senate hearings attended by, and receiving testimony from, Legion staff.

There is also a section explaining how to use **thomas.loc.gov**, a website administered by the Library of Congress that provides legislative information to any and all interested persons or organizations.

www.legion.org/legislative

NATIONAL CONVENTION

2012 National Convention hotel directory

Photo courtesy Indianapolis Convention & Visitors Association

The following is a list of department assignments for hotels during the 94th National Convention in Indianapolis.

COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT
601 W. Washington St.
(317) 822-9029
www.theplacetobeindy.com
Department: Ohio

CROWNE PLAZA
123 W. Louisiana St.
(317) 236-7464
www.downtownindianapolishotel.com
Departments: Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oregon

EMBASSY SUITES
110 W. Washington St.
(317) 236-1800
embassysuites1.hilton.com/en_US/es/hotel/INDWWES-Embassy-Suites-Indianapolis-Downtown-Indiana/index.do
Departments: New Mexico, Tennessee, Washington

FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES
601 W. Washington St.
(317) 636-7678
www.theplacetobeindy.com
Departments: Arkansas, California

HILTON INDIANAPOLIS
120 W. Market St.
Indianapolis, IN
(317) 972-0600
www.indianapolishilton.com
Departments: Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, West Virginia, American Legion National Headquarters

HILTON GARDEN INN
10 E. Market St.
(317) 955-9700
www.hiltongardenindianapolis.com
Departments: Mississippi, New Jersey

HYATT REGENCY
1 S. Capitol Ave.
(317) 616-6066
indianapolis.hyatt.com
Departments: Delaware, Iowa, Michigan, Montana, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Sons of The American Legion, 8 et 40

INDIANAPOLIS MARRIOTT
350 W. Maryland St.
(317) 822-3500
www.indymarriott.com
Departments: Alaska, District of Columbia, France, Hawaii, Mexico, New York, Philippines, Puerto Rico, American Legion National Headquarters

JW MARRIOTT
10 S. West St.
(317) 822-8554
www.jwindy.com
Departments: Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, American Legion National Headquarters

OMNI SEVERIN
40 W. Jackson Place
(317) 634-6664
www.omnihotels.com/FindAHotel/IndianapolisSeverin.aspx
Departments: Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts

SHERATON
31 W. Ohio St.
(317) 635-2000
www.sheratonindianapoliscitycentre.com
Departments: Georgia, Texas

SPRINGHILL SUITES
601 W. Washington St.
(317) 972-7293
www.theplacetobeindy.com
Departments: Maine, Oklahoma, Wyoming

WESTIN
50 S. Capitol Ave.
(317) 231-3922
www.westinindianapolis.com
Departments: Kentucky, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters, American Legion National Headquarters

Editor's note: *Legionnaires attending the 94th National Convention in Indianapolis should contact their respective department adjutant for housing information.*

www.legion.org/convention

TAPS

John Barrett
Tallahassee, Fla.

John Barrett of Post CN05 (Department of New York) passed away Oct. 7 at age 71. He was a Vietnam War Air Force veteran.

Mr. Barrett served as department commander from 1992 to 1993 and National Foreign Relations Council vice chairman from 1989 to 1990.

John B. Dunlap
Post Falls, Idaho

John B. Dunlap of Post 143 (Department of Idaho) passed away Feb. 4 at age 78. He was a Vietnam War Navy veteran.

Mr. Dunlap served as department commander from 1995 to 1996, Alternate National Executive Committeeman from 2009 to 2010, National Americanism Council vice chairman from 2009 to 2010, national commander's representative to the National Counter-Subversive Activities Committee from 1997 to 2000, National & Homeland Security Council vice chairman from 1996 to 1997, and National Distinguished Guests Committee vice chairman from 1992 to 1995, 2002 to 2004 and 2010 to 2011.

George D. Siehl
Okeechobee, Fla.

George D. Siehl of Post 149 (Department of West Virginia) passed away Jan. 27 at age 94. He was a World War II and Korean War Army veteran.

Mr. Siehl served as department commander from 1971 to 1972 and National Foreign Relations Council vice chairman from 1973 to 1974.

Donald L. Small
Newmarket, N.H.

Donald L. Small of Post 67 (Department of New Hampshire) passed away Feb. 11 at age 77. He was a Korean War Air Force veteran.

Mr. Small served as department commander from 1998 to 1999 and National Distinguished Guests Committee vice chairman from 2000 to 2008.

He was a member of the National Commission on Children & Youth from 2008 to 2012 and the National Public Relations Commission from 1994 to 2000.

Robert E. Yeager
DuBois, Pa.

Robert E. Yeager of Post 17 (Department of Pennsylvania) passed away Jan. 26 at age 87. He was a World War II Army veteran.

Mr. Yeager served as National Americanism Council vice chairman from 1999 to 2011.

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVE

Post visits to be rewarded

The District Commander Post Visitation Award is an incentive for personal visits to posts by district commanders and vice commanders. The desired result is a personal visit to each post in a given district by either the district commander or, in bigger districts, one of the district vice commanders. Personal contact at this level sets the example for post membership workers to make the personal contacts necessary for a successful membership program.

CRITERIA. To qualify for the award, the district commander and/or vice commanders must visit each post in the district during their year. For districts with more than 30 posts, the district vice commanders can assist in making visits, but the district commander must visit at least 30 of the posts personally.

CERTIFICATION. A list of posts in each district can be obtained with the assistance of department headquarters. The list will be mailed in spreadsheet format to each district commander. At the completion of the 100-percent visit requirement, the district commander will send the completed spreadsheet to the department, which will forward it to National Headquarters by Aug. 1, 2012.

AWARDS. Each district commander who achieves the 100-percent visit requirement will receive a certificate recognizing the achievement. There are five categories of recognition, and five additional prizes awarded based on a drawing of the eligible district commanders in each category. The categories are: districts with up to 20 posts, districts with 21 to 35 posts, districts with 36 to 50 posts, districts with 51 to 65 posts, and districts with 65 or more posts. The commander drawn from the group of 100-percent commanders in each category will receive a gift certificate from Emblem Sales. The amount of the certificate recognizes the increased difficulty in achieving the award in larger districts.

- Category 1 (up to 20 posts) – $100
- Category 2 (21 to 35 posts) – $200
- Category 3 (36 to 50 posts) – $300
- Category 4 (51 to 65 posts) – $400
- Category 5 (65 or more posts) – $500

www.legion.org/commander/districtpost

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVE

Post Excellence Award continues

National Commander Fang Wong has continued the Post Excellence Award program, which honors posts that show excellence in membership participation, youth activities, community service, and support to veterans and U.S. troops.

The award promotes membership growth, demonstrates Legion values to youth, and increases the Legion family's visibility through community-service projects. Many posts may already qualify for a Post Excellence Award because of their programs and activities.

www.legion.org/commander/postexcellence

CRITERIA. Standards to be achieved in each area include:

Membership – Post membership must be at least one member greater than the previous year. Post officer must attend district meetings.

Youth Activities – The post must sponsor and actively participate in at least one primary youth program: Boys State, Legion Baseball, the Oratorical Contest, Boy Scouts of America or Junior Shooting Sports.

Community Service – The post must organize a community-service project that involves Legion-family members. Potential projects abound; for example, a post could focus on a Children & Youth service, or fulfill a strictly local need. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.

Service to Troops or Veterans – The post must organize a project supporting troops or veterans, involving Legion-family members outside the post. Projects could include Legion programs such as the Family Support Network or Heroes to Hometowns. Or they could simply help a local veteran with needed improvements to a home. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.

CERTIFICATION. District commanders must certify posts as having fulfilled the four specified criteria. District commanders will submit a list of posts meeting the criteria to department headquarters. The list should include post name, post number, address and commander's name. Ideally, the last two criteria will be accompanied with copies of press releases, submitted to local media, that raise awareness for the projects. This ensures that the projects were not only accomplished but that an attempt was made to enhance the Legion's public image. The copies submitted should include a date-time stamp, showing receipt by the media outlet. The department adjutant will transmit information as posts qualify.

Each qualifying post receives a certificate of recognition, mailed to the department and awarded to the post. District commanders whose districts have at least 50 percent of posts reach certification will receive framed certificates recognizing their achievements. District commanders whose districts achieve the highest percentage of recognized posts will receive additional awards. In the event of a tie within a department, all district commanders with the same percentage will receive recognition.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

VA budget gets mixed reviews

Grateful that the Obama administration's VA budget avoids the draconian cuts that are facing the Pentagon, American Legion National Commander Fang A. Wong called the 2013 plan for the department "better than a Valentine, but well-short of Christmas."

"More than 1 million active-duty servicemembers will join the ranks of 22 million civilian veterans during the next five years," Wong said, following the release of the proposed budget. "We must have a budget that is prepared to recognize their outstanding service by meeting their needs for health care, jobs, housing and education. For the most part, this $140.3 billion budget does that."

Wong praised the creation of the Veterans Job Corps, which VA estimates will put up to 20,000 veterans to work. "The top priority for most veterans leaving the service is to obtain meaningful employment," he said. "It's one reason that The American Legion sponsors job fairs across the country. With this new program, we won't have to go it alone."

The increase in the disability pay and pension budgets are also provisions that The American Legion welcomes, Wong said.

"On the other hand, we are very disappointed that the major construction budget is taking a big hit," he said. "There are facilities that desperately need completion in Denver and Orlando. How will this affect the thousands of veterans in those areas? VA construction, both major and minor, is woefully underfunded."

GIVING from Page 1

is made available.

Van Dahlen wants to help remove the stigma attached to mental health issues that arise from military service.

"Mental health issues are a continuum," she said. "You can have two people experience the exact same thing. One will have wicked symptoms because of all kinds of stuff – vulnerabilities, prior experiences. We know those things create a risk. They'll have more intense reactions.

"Does that mean they're more damaged than the other person? No. It just means that it's a collection of their own chemistry, psychology ... physiology. We need to do a better job of educating our culture so that people understand (that) two soldiers who go to war, they come home, they may have experienced the same thing. They're going to react differently. It doesn't mean that either one of them is weak or not a good soldier.

www.giveanhour.org

BUDGET from Page 1

service, lost family time, physical injury and the comforts of home so that the other 90 percent of Americans can continue to live in freedom. Throughout our nation's history, every time we cut defense we paid for it with American blood."

Although U.S. forces have left Iraq, Wong pointed out that Iran, North Korea and international terrorism remain as threats to U.S. interests. "Our men and women in the military have performed magnificently over the last decade. We must not return to a pre-9/11 mentality and be victimized by their past success in defending us."

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVE

Recruiters to be honored with 'I Serve with PRIDE' pin

During the 2011-2012 membership year, National Commander Fang Wong is awarding his National Commander "I Serve with PRIDE!" pin to any Legion-family member who signs up eight members. These can be any combination of new members, members who transfer from their department headquarters post, or current members who renew.

A new member is defined as any eligible person joining for the 2012 membership year who was not a member of the Legion during the 2011 membership year.

The national commander's goal is to recognize those in the Legion family who actively recruit new members into the nation's largest veterans service organization for the 2012 membership year. To maintain the integrity of the national commander's pin-incentive program, only one will be awarded per individual.

The certification form for this program may be submitted now. Upon receipt, national Membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. The "I Serve with PRIDE!" pin-incentive program will end on June 30, 2012.

www.legion.org/commander/supereightincentive