THE DAILY
DISPATCH

1995 Indianapolis National Convention — SATURDAY, SEPT. 2

Prescription for an ailing VA

■ Legion forging revolutionary plan to strengthen and expand medical care for more veterans

The American Legion is expected to propose "truly revolutionary" legislation expanding veterans' eligibility for treatment through the VA health-care system.

"Under our proposal, the VA would offer basic, comprehensive and supplemental benefit packages to veterans and their dependents," said National Commander William M. Detweiler, addressing local media at the convention center Thursday. He said the proposal will be the most sweeping veterans legislation since the Legion-engineered GI Bill of Rights in 1944.

"This plan would allow many more veterans to come to the VA, and they would bring their third-party dollars into VA with them. It is truly revolutionary as far as veterans health care is concerned," he said.

The American Legion proposal, which is still being drafted, will be considered during the 77th National Convention sessions, said Detweiler, a native of New Orleans, La.

Long a leading priority among Legionnaires, meaningful, comprehensive VA reform has proven elusive. Detweiler said the reform proposal won't affect care and services provided to service-connected veterans, those VA by law is mandated to treat. Eligibility reform is key to opening VA's doors to veterans and their dependents.

"We believe the VA medical system must be completely changed and improved if it is ever to become an efficient health-care delivery system."
NAT'L CMDR. WILLIAM DETWEILER

"We believe the VA medical care system must be completely changed and improved if it is ever to become an efficient delivery system," said Detweiler.

He said the VA's current system is a mishmash of restrictive eligibility rules restricting treatment to veterans with service-connected conditions. The American Legion envisions a system open to all veterans – and their dependents – that functions like a competitive Health Maintenance Organization (HMO).

The infusion of third-party payments veterans can bring to the system will provide the means needed to expand coverage, says Detweiler. Those conditions will allow the VA to evolve into a "market-driven, customer-focused, managed care delivery system," Detweiler said.

The National Commander also told reporters convention delegates will hear updates on the Legion-led Citizens Flag Alliance campaign for a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. Flag from acts of physical desecration.

Recent surveys among registered voters show strong support for the amendment, with more than 60 percent saying they would sup-

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Vigilance vital to thwart terror within country

The smoke from the bomb that leveled the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City had barely cleared when newly appointed FBI Director Louis Freeh met with his terrorism experts who were on the verge of making arrests in the case.

"Congratulations, you failed. Your job was to keep this kind of tragedy from happening," he told the agents.

"He was right," recalled David J. Williams, assistant inspector of the FBI's Counter terrorism Section. "Prevention of terrorism within our country is one of the main objectives we strive for."

Williams, who appeared before a joint session of the National Security and Foreign Relations commissions Friday, is the coordinator of the investigation of the Oklahoma City bombing. Because of the ongoing probe, he was unable to comment on the case.

According to Williams, many terrorist plots planned within the United States have been thwarted by the FBI and other authorities. There were 24 reported terrorist incidents within the United States between 1990 and 1994. Yet, a single successful act is one too many, Williams said.

Internally, the FBI has been involved in counterterrorism measures since 1972. The role was expanded in 1986 to investigate homicides and other terrorist-related violence committed against Americans abroad.

On the home front, the FBI has special units that keep tab on the activities of violence-prone right- and left-wing groups, and factions that have committed terrorism directed at abortion clinics and laboratories where animals are used for research.

But terrorism from abroad is what seems to garner the most attention. Iran, Williams said, is beyond any doubt the most active of nations that promote terrorism, sponsoring radical Islamic fundamentalist groups such as *Hizballah* and *Hamas*.

While the nation is still reeling from the recent shock in Oklahoma City, the wake-up call for terrorism within our borders was made on the morning of Feb. 6, 1993 – the day the World Trade Center in New York

See FBI, page 3

BVA chief says vets' claims backlog still 'unacceptable'

VA's Board of Veterans Appeals is not doing its job properly – and the agency's top man is no fan of failure.

"Our output today is unacceptable, and it will continue to be unacceptable until we can adjudicate a decision within 180 days," said BVA Chairman Charles Cragin, speaking at Friday's meeting of the National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission.

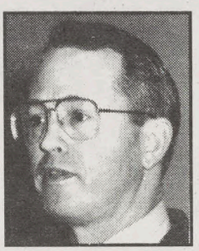
BVA's case and appeals process has been the target of persistent criticism by veterans' groups, and cutting the delays veterans have to put up with is Cragin's personal job No. 1, he said. He said BVA is rebounding from its steady productivity decline of recent years.

"We're on track to turn out 28,000 decisions this year, which will be 27 percent over fiscal year 1994," the year Cragin said his agency "bottomed out" in processing 22,045 cases. To make matters worse, half of those cases were remanded to VA regional offices for further development, adding to the delay time.

According to Cragin, in fiscal 1993, the claims backlog totaled 26,400; in 1992, it was 33,440; and in 1991, 45,000. In 1990, its first full year of operation, BVA adjudicated 46,900 cases. He said his goal is to make the number of cases BVA has in hand equal to the number pending at regional offices. Currently, BVA staff are working on 14,000 files while 42,000 cases at regional offices are ready for BVA consideration; another 24,000 are at regional offices on appeal.

To speed the process, effective Oct. 1 BVA will implement a management realignment plan intended to slice bureaucracy and improve case productivity. Also, Congress is expected to approve VA's request for 28 additional attorneys, added to the 59 new lawyers BVA hired effective Jan. 1.

> "We're on track to turn out 28,000 decisions this year, which will be 27 percent over fiscal year 1994."



CHARLES CRAGIN

Cragin said board members now must adhere to new quality and productivity standards, and increased use of video teleconferencing speeds case adjudication. Cragin said at the St. Petersburg, Fla. regional office, staff recently conducted 30 such hearings in one week, allowing board members to spend less time conducting hearings and more time rendering decisions. ❑

NRA draws bead on Americanism gun safety award

An estimated 200 million firearms are in half of the homes throughout the country. In most of those homes are children, who sometimes become innocent victims of accidental shootings.

For the last five years, The American Legion and National Rifle Association have targeted gun safety as a must among youngsters through the Eddie Eagle program. On Friday morning, the NRA was recognized for its role in developing the program.

The National Americanism Commission presented the annual American Legion National Education Award to the NRA, accepted by NRA First Vice President Marion P. Hammer.

"Since its inception in 1989, the program has reached more than 7 million children with its simple, yet effective message for any child who comes upon a firearm in an unsupervised situation," Hammer said. "The message is this: Stop! Don't touch. Leave the area. Tell an adult."

The National Safety Council estimates that fatal firearms accidents among children have declined 60 percent since 1975, due in large part to programs such as Eddie Eagle, according to the NRA.

Youth winners of Americanism programs also were recognized during the commission meeting. They are: Rick Lam Jr., 1995 Boys Nation President; Fernando Rodriguez Jr., 1994 American Legion Baseball Player of the Year; Aron Egner, 1995 Oratorical Champion; and Terry Bradley, 1995 Junior Shooting Sports Champion. Zachary Thomas, 1995 Boy Scout of the Year, was unable to attend the convention.

NO VEIN, NO GAIN: Blood donors sought

Legion family members on hand for the National Convention may want to leave a little bit of themselves before leaving Indianapolis.

The Central Indiana Regional Blood Center is seeking blood donors to help boost supplies for the area, which typically run low during the summer.

The center plans to launch a pilot project at this year's convention, asking visitors to donate platelets and plasma, as well as blood.

Platelets are used in treating cancer patients; plasma is used for burn victims and hemophiliacs.

"Legionnaires were generous in donating when they held their convention in Indianapolis in 1990, and we're confident they will help us again," says Margie Buddenbaum, spokeswoman for the blood center.

There were 328 blood units collected at that convention from American Legion family members. Donations are being collected in Rooms 107 and 108.

Hours of collection are 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday and Tuesday.

The draw began Friday. By day's end Friday, there were 66 donors.

The American Legion family is the largest blood donor group in the country. More than 107,000 blood units were donated to the national supply in 1994. ❑

Here's to your health in Indy

Arrangements have been made with the Roudebush Veterans Affairs Medical Center to provide emergency and non-emergency medical coverage for Legionnaires attending the 77th National Convention of The American Legion.

Routine medical care and first aid will be provided by VA nurses at the first aid station across from Exhibit Hall C in the Indianapolis Convention Center. Hours of operation:

Saturday, Sept. 2: 8 a.m.–2 p.m.
Sunday, Sept. 3: 8 a.m.–1 p.m.
Monday, Sept. 4: 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 5: 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.
Wednesday, Sept. 6: 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

The VA also will conduct a health fair from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sept. 1, 4 and 5. Screening will be for blood pressure, nutrition, respiration, dental, cholesterol, blood sugar, hearing and blood circulation.

After-hours coverage for emergencies, acute illness and accidents will be available through the Indianapolis emergency medical services. If you need assistance, dial 911 and give the nature and location of the emergency.

Parade, SkyConcert salute WW II vets

The streets of downtown Indianapolis will give way to floats. marching bands, special displays and a final, grand mass muster of World War II veterans in the National Convention parade Saturday afternoon. And when the parade is over, the skies will light up in a salute to the hard-won victory of World War II.

The victory parade, titled, "World War II Commemorated," coincides with the 50th anniversary of Japan's official surrender aboard the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.

The parade gets under way at 4 p.m. with an estimated 150 units expected to participate. WW II veterans, both Legionnaires and non members, will muster at The American Legion Mall at 3 p.m. before they become part of the marching contingent.

Following the four-hour parade, Legionnaires and their families are invited to remain downtown for a massive fireworks display that honors the men and women who wore the uniform of their country a half-century ago.

The American Legion is title sponsor for SkyConcert '95, a star-spangled salute to America's veterans scheduled for 8:30 p.m. Saturday at 10th Street along White River. The special show, a popular Labor Day event in the Indianapolis area, promises to be the biggest ever, say event organizers.

Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II with The American Legion

Buses to SkyConcert '95 for members of The American Legion family will depart just north of The American Legion Mall.

Between 5-7 p.m., Legionnaires on the Mall will be serenaded with selections from the war years performed by the *Jim Edison Orchestra.*

Buses for the SkyConcert will leave from the east side of Meridian Street, north of St. Clair St., from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Saturday.

Legionnaires will be driven to the parking lot of Roudebush VA Medical Center, where tents, food service and entertainment will be provided.

Following the SkyConcert, *The Glitz Orchestra* will perform on site for spectators, beginning at 9:15 p.m. Buses will return Legionnaires to American Legion Mall from 9:30-11:30 p.m. ❑

Jobless vets get cold shoulder from Congress

Veterans are getting the cold shoulder when they ask Congress to fund employment training opportunities, members of the National Economic Commission learned Friday.

"We're in a hard freeze, we can't hire anyone. What is going on in Washington? I'll tell you – veterans are in trouble," said Preston Taylor, assistant secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training (VETS), U.S. Department of Labor.

Taylor says bottom-line budget blues are forcing VETS to work harder educating Congress about the good work VETS does.

"We're in education mode now," Taylor said. He said the 1994 elections put a lot of new faces in Congress, and these new members, while not anti-veteran necessarily, may not understand veterans' employment needs.

"You can't go up to Capitol Hill and play hardball with these people. You have to come up with ideas that are better than theirs'. Any program not perceived to be effective is going to be killed," said Taylor, adding the education problem is aggravated by dwindling numbers of veterans in Congress.

He said he expects funding for VETS' Transitional Assistance Program to remain at current levels in fiscal year 1996, but "in the out years (three-to-five years) we're going to be in serious jeopardy," says Taylor.

Taylor said by fiscal year 1999, VETS will absorb a 12 percent cut in staff, and 10 percent in salaries to meet budget. In the current streamlining atmosphere, VETS is seeking congressional authority to be more flexible in using its resources. Specifically, Taylor said VETS favors removing the residency requirements for VETS staff.

Under current law, the secretary of labor can't assign someone to be a state director or to be an assistant director for VETS unless he or she is a veteran who has been a state resident at least two years.

Taylor said his agency also would back modifying current statutes by waiving the residency requirement for assistant state directors with at least two years experience. That would allow them to compete for state director positions as they become vacant. ❑

OKAY FOLKS, HERE'S THE DEAL ...

Subscribe before Sept. 30 to the Dispatch and receive a special annual discount of $12. But wait, that's not all. New subscribers and those who renew during convention will receive a Dispatch collector's pin. Come see us today at Booth 30.

• FBI

City was bombed by Islamic radicals.

Four men have been convicted on charges related to that incident; two others are at-large in the Mideast.

"If that bomb had gone off 35 minutes later, it would have been a greater tragedy," Williams said. "There would have been 200 children in the child-care area standing directly above the blast."

Williams, a Marine Corps infantry officer who served in the Vietnam War, encouraged Legionnaires to contact their U.S. senators and representatives and urge them to support **S.745** and **H.J.R. 1710.**

Both bills would expand the FBI's ability to investigate terrorist groups and their members without compromising the privacy rights of citizens. ❑

• COMMANDER

port a flag protection amendment given the chance. The House passed an amendment bill in July, and the Senate is set to take up a similar measure, **Senate Joint Resolution 31,** in October.

In his other remarks, he touched on the 1995 convention theme, "The American Legion Family – World War II Commemorated," and the events planned to honor veterans during 50th anniversary finale celebration of victory in World War II *(see story above).*

Delegates also will consider an estimated 150 resolutions covering the wide array of issues that concern Legionnaires.

About 20,000 Legionnaires and their families expected to converge on Indianapolis for the week-long convention. Plenary sessions of the organization get under way Monday, Sept. 4 at the Indiana Convention Center. Several guest speakers are scheduled to deliver remarks before convention delegates during those sessions. ❑

Hawaii team rides wave to title

■ Hawaii blanks Washington team, 2-0, in championship game; hurler wins top award

With a strong right arm and a pulled left hamstring, pitcher Jason Adaro led the Aiea, Hawaii, team to the 1995 American Legion Baseball World Series championship in Fargo, N.D., Aug. 25-30.

Aiea defeated Bellevue, Wash., 2-0 to win the final game.

The only two runs of the game were scored in the first inning: Hawaii center fielder Jason Takemura singled to lead off, and shortstop Lon Yamaguchi drew a one-out walk. After a double steal, Takemura scored on Bellevue catcher Burke Eathorne's throwing error. Yamaguchi went to third and later scored on a wild pitch.

Hawaii's runs were scarce, but Bellevue's runs were non-existent. "We ran into a buzz saw," said Bellevue manager Rob Reese.

Adaro limited the normally hard-hitting Bellevue team to only four hits while walking none and striking out eight.

All of the teams who faced Adaro in regional and World Series play suffered similar fates: Adaro didn't allow a run in his last 24 1/3 innings of playoff competition. His streak included a near no-hitter earlier in the series.

In addition to Adaro's pitching prowess, he won the batting championship with a .488 batting average (21 for 43) in regional and World Series play. Adaro accomplished these feats despite having a pulled hamstring since the state tournament in early August.

"This is like a dream," said an elated Adaro during a ceremony after the championship game. The pitcher/first baseman received four awards, including the George W. Rulon Player of the Year Award.

Aiea needed Adaro's pitching to win, too. Hawaii's opponents outscored them 12-10. The Sunday before the final game, Adaro wasn't sure if he'd be able to play, much less pitch. But Hawaii's coach Garrett Nago was confident.

"The plan was to let him go," said Nago. "It was live or die with him."

Here's how the eight teams fared in the double-elimination tournament

Aiea, Hawaii 4-1; **Bellevue, Wash.** 4-2; **Osseo, Minn.** 3-2; **Columbia, Tenn.** 2-2; **Rapid City, S.D.** 1-2; **Portland, Maine** 1-2; **Starkville, Miss.** 0-2; and **Waldorf, Md.** 0-2

AWARDS

George W. Rulon American Legion Player of the Year—Jason Adaro, Aiea, Hawaii

James F. Daniel Sportsmanship Award–Woody Heath, Bellevue, Wash.

Jack Williams Memorial Leadership Award—Manager Alan Higuchi and coaches Garrett Mago and Garret Yukumoto, Aiea, Hawaii

Louisville Slugger Batting Award–Jason Adaro, Aiea, Hawaii, .488 (21 for 43)

Bob Feller Pitching Award–Woody Heath, Bellevue, Wash., for 48 strikeouts in regional and World Series play.

Irvin Cowger RBI Award–Bobby Morgan, Columbia, Tenn. and Dom Crispo, Bellevue, Wash., with 15 RBI

Rawlings Big Stick Award—Jason Adaro, Aiea, Hawaii, with 29 total bases. ❑

Air show tickets are still available

Tickets to the Aviation Heritage Airshow, Sunday, Sept. 3, are still available.

The cost is $22 per person and includes bus transportation from the Indiana Convention Center to the airshow in Sellersburg, Ind., and back to delegates' hotels.

Vintage aircraft from the World War II era will be included in the show, as will a variety of other craft.

Besides admission, ticket-holders also will have special seating on the flight line, convention officials say.

Buses will depart the convention center at 9 a.m. and will return about 5:30 p.m.

Tickets may be ordered at the Tour Desk, near the registration area at the Indiana Convention Center.

56 senators sign on as flag bill co-sponsors

Fifty-six senators are co-sponsors of SJR 31, which calls for an amendment to allow the federal government and states to enact and enforce flag-protection laws.

The House approved a similar measure earlier this summer.

"We encourage flag supporters to contact their senators and thank them for becoming co-sponsors," says National Commander William Detweiler.

Passage of a constitutional amendment in the Senate requires a two-thirds majority, or 67 votes.

Alabama: Howell Heflin (D), Richard Shelby (R)
Alaska: Frank Murkowski (R), Ted Stevens (R)
Arizona: John Kyl (R), John McCain (R)
California: Dianne Feinstein (D)
Colorado: Hank Brown (R), Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R)
Delaware: William V. Roth, Jr. (R)
Florida: Connie Mack (R)
Georgia: Sam Nunn (D), Paul Coverdell (R)
Idaho: Larry Craig (R), Dirk Kempthorne (R)
Indiana: Richard Lugar (R), Daniel Coats (R)
Iowa: Charles Grassley (R)
Kansas: Bob Dole (R), Nancy Kassebaum (R)
Kentucky: Wendell Ford (D)
Louisiana: John B. Breaux (D), J. Bennett Johnston (D)
Maine: William S. Cohen (R), Olympia Snowe (R)
Minnesota: Rod Grams (R)
Mississippi: Thad Cochran (R), Trent Lott (R)
Missouri: John Ashcroft (R), Christopher S. Bond (R)
Montana: Max Baucus (D), Conrad Burns (R)
Nebraska: J. James Exon (D)
Nevada: Harry Reid (D)
New Hampshire: Judd Gregg (R),Robert Smith (R)
New Mexico: Pete V. Domenici (R)
New York: Alfonse D'Amato (R)
North Carolina: Jess Helms (R), Lauch Faircloth (R)
Ohio: Mike DeWine (R)
Oklahoma: James Inhofe (R), Don Nickles (R)
Pennsylvania: Rick Santorum (R)
South Carolina: Ernest Hollings (D), Strom Thurmond (R)
South Dakota: Larry Pressler (R)
Tennessee: Fred Thompson (R), Bill Frist (R)
Texas: Phil Gramm (R), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R)
Utah: Orrin Hatch (R)
Virginia: John Warner (R)
West Virginia: John Rockefeller IV (D)
Wyoming: Alan Simpson (R) Craig Thomas (R) ❑

Capitol Hill Contacts

A special telephone bank has been set up so that Legion family members can contact their senators' offices and encourage non-cosponsors to support **Senate Joint Resolution 31.**

The phone bank, which is being operated by the Citizens Flag Alliance, is located in the East Chamber of the Indiana Convention Center.

Flag supporters also will have the opportunity to contact their senators with special post cards prepared by the CFA. The cards are preaddressed to members of the Senate.

Legion family members are encouraged to take the time to fill out the cards, which the CFA will mail.