THE DAILY —— DISPATCH

1995 Indianapolis National Convention — WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 6

Brown lashes out at VA budget cutters

VA Secretary Jesse Brown has an answer for budget planners in Congress who believe veterans' benefits must be cut to scale back the nation's federal budget deficit.

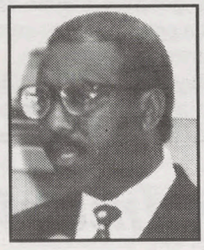
"There are those who feel that veterans are getting a free ride. But, I ask them, who the hell do you think paid for the ticket?" Brown asked, bringing on the first of several sustained bursts of applause from Tuesday's crowd of convention delegates.

■ *Legion unveils revolutionary health care plan for America's vets*

See back page

Brown laid it on long and strong to the partisan audience, striking out at congressional critics shaping the fiscal year 1996 budget. Brown charged veterans benefits are "under attack" by citing figures he said show veterans are being unfairly targeted by a Congress pushing to cut $1 trillion in spending by 2002.

Under this nightmarish congressional scenario, to help balance the federal budget by 2002 the VA would be forced to fire 61,000 doctors, close 41 of its 172 hospitals, chop 150 construction projects; deny care to 1 million veterans; and stick low-income veterans with paying for their medication, and other veterans with paying costly deductibles.



JESSE BROWN

Other proposals Congress is considering would apply means tests to veterans compensation, a course Brown said penalizes veterans who show initiative and strive to overcome their disabilities.

He criticized the proposal, saying the line between a veteran's income and disability compensation should hold.

"Compensation has nothing to do with his pay check or his wife's income," said Brown. "Our veterans should be compensated for their disabilities and not penalized for their abilities."

The secretary also criticized proposals to eliminate the 10 and 20 percent disability ratings for veterans; and imposing what amounts to another means test by stopping all compensation for any veteran rendered incompetent if the value of his or her estate exceeds $25,000.

He said the adminstration's VA budget for fiscal year 1996, beginning Oct. 1, increased spending for health-care by $1 billion without affecting other veterans' programs.

By contrast, the House Appropriations Committee this summer boosted health-care spending by $563 million, but paid for it by slicing appropriations from hospital construction needed for facilities in Florida and California; and for service-connected veterans.

"It will be a sad time in our history if we allow the ill-informed to lead us away from our most solemn obligation – caring for our veterans. You and I know that it is a simple idea:

See BROWN, back page

Their mission meant peace

■ Pilot of *Enola Gay* says his mission succeeded because of others' service and sacrifices

While much has been said about the mission of the *Enola Gay* in helping bring a speedy end to World War II, it was the true grit and courage of the men and women on the front lines and home front who made it all possible.

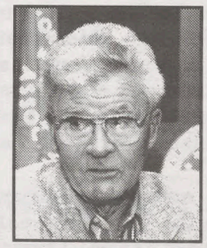
"The men and women of this nation arose quickly to do what they had to do after Pearl Harbor. The war became a family affair for all Americans," said retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul Tibbets Jr. Tibbets, the pilot of the B-29 bomber *Enola Gay*, which dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, credited World War II veterans and those who worked in defense plants as paving the wave to victory for the Allies.

Tibbets and fellow crew members of the historic mission were on hand for Tuesday's convention session to receive the prestigious 1995 American Legion Distinguished Service Award medals. Joining Tibbets in the limelight were navigator Dutch Van Kirk, bombardier Tom Ferebee and radio operator Richard Nelson.

But the limelight is something Tibbets and the crew has never sought for their important role in history.

"They have never sought publicity or recognition for what they did. They only wanted to be good airmen and do their job," an emotional National Commander William Detweiler said before introducing the crew and presenting them with their medals.

"Many of you here today would not be here if not for the mission of the *Enola Gay*."



PAUL TIBBETS

> "The men and women of this nation arose quickly to do what they had to do after Pearl Harbor."

Tibbets briefly outlined the responsibilities that he and the unit he headed, the 509th Composite Group, leading up to the Hiroshima mission. The group trained in the remote area of Wendover, Utah, for several months before it was transferred to the Pacific theater.

Many of the crews of the 509th flew actual combat missions against Japan to prepare for what they might face if they were selected to fly an atomic mission.

see ENOLA GAY, page 2

Legion help needed for better education

The Clinton administration's top educator asked Legionnaires to lead the charge for excellence in education with the same vigor they used in forging America's victory in World War II.

"Let me ask you to lead us in one more great crusade for America," said U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley. "You won the war against fascism and communism. Now I ask you to help America win the war against ignorance. And more than that – win the war for excellence in education."

Riley recalled the Legion's pivotal role in drafting and winning congressional approval for the original Servicemans' Readjustment Act of 1944. He called the GI Bill of Rights the "crown jewel" in Legionnaires' longtime support for youth and education.

"We have so many problems in our country, but if everyone had the same commitment to serving their fellow Americans as Legionnaires do, we'd be a lot closer to some solutions," said Riley, a member of Post 3, Greenville, S.C.,who was introduced to delegates by his old family friend, Past National Commander E. Roy Stone, also a member of Greenvile Post 3.

Excellence in education is a major component of America's national security strategy, said Riley. He said military planners know well-educated recruits have higher retention rates, require reduced training time and are more productive than those who don't have the benefit of a solid education.

The department is tackling this problem by creating a school-to-work apprenticeship program aimed at preparing high school graduates for "real-world" jobs, including providing tax breaks for workers trying to further their education and training.

> "You won the war against fascism and communism. Now I ask you to help America win the war against ignorance."

Riley also touched on the administration's stance on school prayer, the presence of "political correctness" in school history books, instilling students with positive values and plans to work with Legion programs promoting November's National Education Week.

On school prayer, Riley walked the line. He said that while the administration recognizes students don't "leave their religious beliefs behind at the (school) door," he stopped short of endorsing prayer in school.

"So long as the rights of all are respected, the Constitution already protects religious expression," Riley said. "In this God-fearing nation, the public schools must not be hositle to religion," he said.

Riley said he recently issued guidelines spelling out what type of religious activities are "allowable" in the nation's public schools. Allied to these guidelines are efforts to support what Riley called "character education" because too many of today's youth are not learning the fundamental difference between right and wrong.

He said the programs aren't intended to substitute for strong parental control, since parents, not governments, raise children. But with support from parents, nationwide programs are being implemented to teach pupils good citizenship, responsiblity, honesty, respect for oneself and others, discipline and hard work.

Riley admitted the department has made mistakes in too many schools in teaching youngsters history. He said National History Standard guidelines that downplay or eliminate important historical milestones like the Yalta Conference from school textbooks are "deeply disappointing to me." ❑

Scouts support flag amendment

The Boy Scouts of America supports the constitutional amendment to restore to the American people the right to protect the U.S. Flag from physical desecration – a right they had before the Supreme Court took it away in the 1989 T*exas versus Johnson* decision.

"The American flag is the primary symbol of our country and we applaud The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance (CFA) in their quest to secure the flag-protection amendment," said Jere Radcliffe, chief scout executive of the Boy Scouts of America National Office. "The Boy Scouts of America will do everything in its power to see that this important measure becomes the law of the land."

Radcliffe's comments were made Monday to delegates attending the 77th National Convention of The American Legion. During the week-long convention, Legion members have been contacting their U.S. Senators' offices and asking for their support for the flag amendment.

"The American Legion and Boy Scouts of America are partners in patriotism, and I can think of no greater act of patriotism than to do what the vast majority of American citizens want – protect the flag of their country."

The Legion and the CFA have spearheaded efforts for the amendment since 1989, when the Supreme Court ruled that flag-burning was an appropriate expression of free speech and protected under the First Amendment of the Constitution.

On June 28, the House of Representatives gave its overwhelming bipartisan approval by a vote of 312-120 to **House Joint Resolution 79,** a bill that would allow the states and the Congress to enact and enforce flag-protection laws.

Senate Joint Resolution 31, is expected to be considered on the Senate floor later this year. Currently, 56 senators of both political parties are cosponsors of the bill. Sixty-seven votes are required to pass the amendment out of the Senate.

After clearing the Senate, the amendment will be sent to the states for ratification. Three-fourths of the states – 38 – must pass the amendment for it to become the 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The American Legion and Boy Scouts of America have maintained a strong relationship since the founding of The American Legion in 1919. Legion Posts have chartered more than 2,400 scouting units, and last year sponsored 1,735 units.

"We applaud the Boy Scouts of America for its decision to support the flag-protection amendment," said American Legion National Commander William M. Detweiler. "The American Legion looks forward to working with America's scouts in this important quest to preserve American values and our flag." ❑

• ENOLA GAY

"We could not have gotten to Tinian (the island air base where the 509th was deployed) nor could we have gotten to Hiroshima without the sacrifices of others," Tibbets said. "You made it happen. You helped bring about the end of World War II."

Detweiler pledged to the *Enola Gay* crew the Legion's continued demand that the aircraft be fully restored and displayed separately on its own merits. The plane currently is on display at the National Air and Space Museum in the nation's capital. ❑

Today is the last edition of the *Daily Dispatch* at convention. But you can continue to get the latest Legion news year-round by subscribing to the *DISPATCH.*

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Legion helped memorials succeed

Learning the lessons of sacrifice and valor the nation's World War II generation taught us is a legacy today's Americans should heed, Legion delegates were told Tuesday.

"If we learn and remain prepared and strong, then maybe, just maybe, World War II will be recorded as the *last* world war," retired Army Lt. Gen. Claude M. Kicklighter told Legionnaires in reporting on activities of the Department of Defense's WW II Commemorative Committee.

Kicklighter, the committee's executive director, said more than 700 American Legion Posts and Auxiliary Unitshave been designated "commemorative communities" nationwide since 1991, when DoD's began its four-year commemorative program.

Groundbreaking ceremonies for a World War II memorial in Washington are scheduled in November, he reported.

More than 7,000 communities nationwide have honored their WW II veterans, he said. Committee staff sent history books and other material to 20,000 schools in the United States over the past four years. Kicklighter, a member of American Legion Post 141, Richmond, Va., asked the Legion's continued support and expertise in future years when ideas will be needed to commemorate the golden anniversaries of the Korean and Vietnam wars.

In other memorial updates Tuesday, Past National Commander John P. "Jake" Comer delivered his final report on Legion involvement supporting the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

"If you go to Washington you'll see it's one of the most beautiful monuments in our nation's capital, and you'll see that our Korean War veterans are forgotten no more," said Comer.

Korean War Veterans memorabilia still is on sale at a booth near the Emblem Sales area in the convention center until the convention concludes. Items include a video of Legion events surrounding dedication of the memorial July 27 on the Mall in Washington, for $11.95; a $5 packet that includes an official commemorative logo, a sticker, pin and patch, plus a "passport" Korean veterans used during the week-long event.

PNC JAKE COMER

Legionnaires, Auxiliary members and Sons of The American Legion Squadrons together raised $618,362 in direct contributions and sales of Korean War commemorative coins. Sales from a lapel pin designed by Illinois Legionnaire Jack Cover brought in $80,000 alone, Comer said.

Korean War veterans attending the dedication in Washington over five days last July remember the heat and humidity. Comer, a member of the memorial's advisory board, said the board spent $140,000 for water alone, with participants consuming 700,000 bottles of water.

Members of The American Legion Family can buy a poster signed by artist George Skypeck for $25. The unique poster depicts all the units of every branch that served during the Korean War.

Diane Carlson Evans Tuesday thanked Legion delegates for the organization's contributions to the Vietnam Women's Memorial, dedicated in Washington, D.C. on Veterans Day 1993.

"Now, the memorial is healing wounds and capturing the hearts of millions around the world," Evans said.

In 1985, Legionnaires first backed the idea for a lasting tribute to women who served the nation in Vietnam by passing a resolution of support. Since then, Legionnaires have donated $135,000 toward planning and construction costs for the $4 million memorial.

The Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Inc., still needs $300,000 to retire its debt for the memorial's design, construction and maintenance, Evans said.

Another memorial project honoring America's women who wore the uniform was the subject of a report by retired Air Force Gen. Wilma Vaught, president of the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, Inc.

Vaught thanked National Commander William Detweiler for attending June 22 groundbreaking ceremonies for the memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. Authorities approved the memorial site in 1988 near a gate outside Arlington, and a design was approved in 1989.

Vaught also thanked Legionnaires for helping organizers collect records for a special computerized register included in the design.

"We have registered 125,000 names of the 1.8 million who served so we have a long way to go," Vaught said. ❑

Depts. draw blood awards

Blood. It's the gift of life. And Legionnaires in several states who have given big have been recognized for their efforts in the National Commander's Blood Donor Awards for the past year.

The National Security Commission announced winners of the awards at the 1995 American Legion National Convention. They are:

Category I (Departments with 100,000 or more members): Post participation, **Florida**; individual participation, **Minnesota**

Category II (70,000-99,999 members): Post and individual participation, **Wisconsin**

Category III (40,000-69,999 members): Post and individual participation, **Georgia**

Category IV (25,000-39,999 members): Post and individual participation, **Tennessee**

Category V (10,000-24,999 members): Post and individual participation, **Rhode Island**

Category VI (less than 10,000 members): Post and individual participation, **Delaware**

The American Legion is the largest identifiable group in the country to donate blood. Legionnaires donated 107,000 blood units last year.

In that same vein, National Security Commission Chairman Anthony Jordan of Maine was among those American Legion family members who donated blood during the convention.

"Donating blood is a small act that has such great impact," said Jordan. "I encourage all Legionnaires to participate when they can."

The Central Indiana Regional Blood Center has been conducting the draw in the Indiana Convention Center.

By the end of the blood drive Tuesday, donations totaled 257, according to blood collection officials.

"Because of Legionnaires' generous donations, the number of units we collected will touch the lives of 1,028 people," said Margie Buddenbaum, spokeswoman for the blood center.

Each donation collected is used to help an average of four people, according to Buddenbaum. ❑

Veterans' preference figures in big with these U.S. companies

For some businesses, hiring veterans is big business.

National Commander William Detweiler recognized three such firms Tuesday morning when he presented representatives from the companies with the 1995 American Legion Employer of the Year Awards. Recipients were:

Small Company (50 or more employees) – Southwest Research Institute, San Antonio, Texas

Medium Company (51-200 employees) – Caldwell Machining Inc., Emporium, Pa.

Large Company (201 or more employees) – Boeing Aerospace Operations, Midwest City, Okla.

Eighteen of Southwest's workforce are veterans; 27 of Caldwell's 57 workers are veterans; and 160 of Boeing's 284 employees are veterans.

Delegates approve sweeping VA health plan

At a time when the VA health care medical system is struggling to meet the needs of the nation's veteran population, The American Legion is offering a revolutionary plan that will ensure not only the survival, but a stronger and more responsive system.

Delegates at the 1995 National Convention took that action Tuesday afternoon when they gave their approval to **Resolution. 141** *(VA&R Convention Committee)*, The American Legion Veterans' Health Care Security Plan.

"We have a choice," said National Commander William Detweiler. "We can let the VA health care system die a slow death or we can do something to bail the VA out and build it into the strong health care system it can be. We do not have the option of doing nothing."

The Legion plan would offer basic, comprehensive and supplemental benefit packages to all veterans and their dependents. It also would allow the VA to retain monies it collects from third-party insurers of non-service-connected veterans who are treated in VA medical facilities.

"The infusion of such payments into the VA system will provide the means to expand coverage," the commander said.

Detweiler stressed The American Legion Veterans' Health Care Security Plan will not affect care and services provided to service-connected veterans, those who the VA is mandated by law in which to provide medical services.

Legion leaders say the health care plan, if adopted as written, would function similar to a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO).

After a discussion period, a time at which several delegates questioned how the health care plan would work, **Resolution 141** was put to a vote. The "ayes" took the vote, but there were some "nay" votes to the plan.

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>
> – NAT'L CDMR. WILLIAM DETWEILER –

Among the details of The American Legion Health Care Security Act:

- Reorganize the Veterans Health Administration to improve access, quality and efficiency of the medical care provided to veterans
- Operate the veterans health care system based upon the principles of "managed care"
- Assure all veterans with service-connected illnesses and disabilities access to services necessary for the treatment of their disabilities at no charge to the veteran
- Assure all veterans with service-connected disability rating of 50 percent or greater, access to all VA health care services at no cost
- Assure all special category veterans, indigent veterans and service-connected veterans rated under 50 percent disabled, access to VA health care services at no charge or reduced charge
- Assure the long-term viability of the veterans health care system by encouraging veterans who presently do not receive care, and their dependents, to enroll in the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Security Plan
- Improve the long-term financial health of the veterans' health care system by increasing other resources of the system to include other federal programs, third-party payers and employers of veterans
- Permit the VA to retain all payments made to the Department for health care services
- Eliminate unnecessary, duplicative or contradictory regulations which hamper the ability of the veterans' health care system to operate effectively and efficiently
- Federal appropriations for the DVA health care system shall be based upon a capitated method using the calculation of fully allocated costs of care to service-connected and other veterans receiving care at no charge
- Require the secretary of Veterans Affairs to report to the Congress at designated intervals on the financial soundness of the system, the budget-neutrality of the system and the quality of care rendered.

Passage of measure also rescinds all American Legion resolutions in conflict with **Resolution 141.** ❑

Ambassador says thanks to U.S. for WW II liberation

The Netherlands ambassador to the United States offered Legionnaires his country's thanks for liberating his country during World War II – and brought presents to demonstrate the Dutch people's gratitude.

The ambassador's address Tuesday was shorter than his impressive name, which reads: His Excellency Adriaan Pieter Roetert Jacobovits de Szeged. The ambassador presented National Commander William Detweiler one of 55 commemorative collector plates expressing The Netherlands' gratitude to World War II-era veterans who helped overthrow Nazi rule in Europe a half century ago.

Each Department of The American Legion will receive one of the hand-painted plates, produced by a firm which has been producing high-quality dinner ware and commemorative plates since the 1500s. Each plate's elaborate patterns include an inscription that reads, "In Gratitude of 50 Years of Freedom."

Prior to the ambassador's address, Rep. Dan Burton, R-Ind., greeted Legion delegates, applauding the Legion's decision to honor the crew of the *Enola Gay* with its Distinguished Service Award.

"That mission saved lives, and the historical revisionists who say otherwise are just plain wrong," said Burton.

The Hoosier congressman also praised all World War II veterans and said it was fitting to honor their sacrifices in this 50th anniversary year of the war's victorious conclusion. ❑

Tomorrow At Convention

Wednesday marks the final day of the 77th National Convention of The American Legion.

Among the highlights of todays events, delegates will hear from the Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who is scheduled to deliver remarks at 9:45 a.m.

At 10:55 a.m., National Commander William Detweiler will be presented with the colors as the outgoing Legion chief. At noon, delegates will elect the 1995-96 National Commander and vice commanders.

• BROWN

You care for those who cared for the nation," said Brown.

He said The American Legion and other veterans' service organizations must stay alert to efforts on Capitol Hill to further erode veterans health-care, compensation and pension benefits.

"We must stay alert because we have hypocrites in the land," Brown said. "They say nothing is too good for veterans. Then they turn around and do just that – nothing!"

The secretary pledged to continue the fight for appropriations needed for improving health-care services for women veterans; and programs for veterans suffering from Agent Orange, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and undiagnosed Persian Gulf illnesses.

Brown conceded all Americans, including veterans, favor making government more efficient, but he blasted VA critics who call the VA a "sacred cow" and label him a "lobby fox in the hen house," a tag Brown said he embraces with pride. And he asked Legionnaires' help remind lawmakers of freedom's price.

"They have lost so much, and the nation has an obligation to them. And – with your help – that is an obligation we shall keep," he said. ❑