DISPATCH Daily

"For God & Country"

SALT LAKE CITY NATIONAL CONVENTION — SUNDAY, SEPT. 1, 1996

No Clinton? No problem.

■ National Commander skips over presidential snub, looks to Tuesday.

National Commander Daniel A. Ludwig is busy looking forward to a repeat of the great National Convention Legionnaires enjoyed in Salt Lake City in 1984. On Friday, however, local media were more interested in looking back to probe reasons behind the presidential no-show at this year's gathering.

Ludwig, speaking at a news conference at the Salt Palace Convention Center, mentioned the 6,000 delegates and alternates scheduled to attend the 78th National Convention. In opening remarks the National Commander mentioned the more than 16,000 members of The American Legion family coming to Salt Lake City, and the positive economic impact – about $45 million all told – their visit will mean for local merchants. But President Bill Clinton's decision not to appear prompted the most attention.

Ludwig

"Obviously, it's a great disappointment to us; we have a tradition of presidential candidates appearing at our conventions," Ludwig said. He noted scheduled appearances by presidential candidates Bob Dole and H. Ross Perot, and said the president citing scheduling conflicts for his disappearing act, "rings hollow."

"The president of the United States is the master of his own schedule. If he believed that America's veterans were a priority, he would make the time to talk to us," said Ludwig, who was anxious to move on to more pertinent topics, like Legionnaires' continued to fight to win congressional approval for a constitutional amendment allowing Congress the right to protect the U.S. Flag from physical desecration. He also was eager to discuss the GI Bill of Health, a Legion-led effort to open VA health-care to more veterans.

Ludwig speculated the president's hesitated to visit the convention because of his opposition to the flag-protection amendment, which passed by on overwhelming margin in the House last year, but fell three votes short of passage in the Senate on Dec. 12, 1995. He dwelled on the victory won by the Citizens Flag Alliance, a

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Memorial Service begins at 10:30 a.m.

They are known the world over for their music. And this morning, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir will gain new fans after they perform at The American Legion's Patriotic Memorial Service.

The service and music gets under way at 10:30 a.m. at the Tabernacle on Temple Square near the Salt Palace Convention Center.

Seating in the Tabernacle is limited to an estimated 5,000 seats. Additional seating will be available, however, say organizers. For overflow seating, an estimated 1,500 seats will be available in the Assembly Hall, the Neo-Gothic building south of the Tabernacle.

Also, 480 seats will be available in Theaters 4 and 5 at the North Visitors Center, just north of the Tabernacle on Temple Square. Additional seating will be available in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building, the 10-story white building just east of Temple Square.

The choir was founded in 1847, not long after Mormon leader Brigham Young led followers to the Great Salt Lake. Today, the 300-member chorus performs every Sunday and their performance is broadcast over more than 1,500 radio and television stations.

Keynote speakers at this year's Patriotic Memorial Service are Gordon B. Hinckley, president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and American Legion National Chaplain the Rev. Mr. Joseph Reynolds. ❑

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

The president's decision to not visit the Beehive State Labor Day weekend is unfortunate for veterans and citizens here and is a bit surprising, in light of history. The 1992 American Legion Convention in Chicago played a significant role in the presidential campaign, which candidate Clinton did attend.

— *The Deseret News*, Aug. 31, 1996

Old Glory and pride on parade on Salt Lake City streets

Beneath a cloudless sky and a blazing high desert sun, American Legion family members stepped off onto Salt Lake City streets yesterday afternoon for a star-spangled National Convention parade.

Hundreds of Legionnaires, members of the Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion, Scout units and Junior ROTC proudly hoisted American flags as they marched near the head of the parade column. As the colors fluttered in the breeze, onlookers along the parade route covered their hearts with their right hands and Legionnaires snapped salutes as the flagspassed by.

"Check that line, dress it up," one cadence caller told the unit he was leading. "We're carrying Old Glory here!"

The parade was indeed a family affair with the Legion's "first family." National Commander Daniel A. Ludwig of Minnesota was joined by his wife, Mary, and their children, John and Ann, and they took their places with other dignitaries on the reviewing stand at the end of the route.

The Honorary Grand Marshal for this year's parade was immediate Past National Commander William M. Detweiler; grand marshal, Army Maj. Gen. Richard F. Reeder; and deputy grand marshals, Brig. Gen. D. Max Ewing, assistant adjutant of Utah National Guard, and Navy Rear Adm. Richard D. West, deputy director, Ballistic Missile Defense Organization.

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With the beat of the drum and the blaring of brass, the Band of the Tonawandas, Post 264, N.Y., made their way down Temple Street, playing a range of patriotic tunes that drew applause from the crowd. The band was fresh off their first-place victory in The American Legion Band competition conducted earlier in the day *(see story page 4)*.

MASS APPEAL: The massing of the colors is a crowd-pleasing staple of National Convention parades.

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Missile defense system hits home

No Legionnaire need be told that the world is a dangerous place. And the proliferation of weapons and delivery technologies makes it potentially more dangerous each day.

That reality shows clearly the need for a strong missile defense system to be developed and readied for rapid deployment, says Rear Adm. Richard D. West, deputy director for the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO).

"Congress wants this program, the president wants this program. And America needs this program," West told a joint meeting of the National Security and Foreign Relations commissions Saturday morning.

In a speech rich in techno-speak, West outlined the recent past and near future for missile defense systems, both at home and abroad. His organization, the BMDO, has primary responsibility for three entwined missions in that area: theater missile defense, national missile defense, and advanced technology development. All play an important role in ensuring the lives and safety of Americans.

Theater missile defense, which covers missiles with a range under 3,500 kilometers, primarily entails protecting battlefield forces. The current system under development, known as THAAD, is the first system built from the ground up to counter theater threats. "We've had some bad luck so far," West says, "with three failures in the last six months. They were all due to technical problems, however, so while we were disappointed, we're also confident this system will work. It must work."

"It's easy to overlook future needs to meet current ones, but we also must not limit ourselves if we are to avoid obsolescence in our defensive systems."

Rear Adm. Richard West

National missile defense must protect the entire United States, including Alaska and Hawaii. Unfortunately, as West points out, that task is hampered by the current Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense Treaty, commonly called the ABM treaty. "We're allowed only one site under the ABM Treaty, and that's in South Dakota. That's a long way from the farthest tip of the Aleutian islands," West says.

The final mission of BMDO is advanced technology development. That may be the most important mission, since all these programs are being developed, but have yet to receive permission to begin development and deployment. "The advanced technology program is the seed corn for our future. It's easy to overlook future needs to meet current ones, but we also must not limit ourselves if we are to avoid obsolescence in our defensive systems," West says.

So an idea that first gained prominence with disparaging remarks comparing it to "Star Wars" and other science fiction tripe may very well be necessary to ensure America's future. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher must feel like Copernicus and Galileo right now. ❑

McGruff helps kids avoid the rough stuff

A mechanical version of McGruff the Crime Dog has been making the rounds of the Salt Palace Convention Center. Its got all the right moves, just like the program partnership forged between The American Legion and the National Crime Prevention Council.

The McGruff® Safe Kids program already has proven an effective tool in teaching kids and parents key points about safeguarding children. Posts, Auxiliary Units and SAL Squadrons are joining the safe kids effort.

"The McGruff Safe Kids program is designed to instruct with scaring kids. The Safe Kids Identification Kits include a unique fingerprinting ink process, along with straightforward, common sense information every parent should know," says Kurt Boerner, president of the National Crime Prevention Council.

A show of hands at Saturday's joint session of the National Americanism Commission and the National Commission on Children & Youth showed most attending had heard of McGruff and his *Take a Bite Out of Crime* campaign. Boerner was joined at the joint session by council executive director Louis Dominguez, who alerted Legionnaires to the escalating threats children face in today's world. Gangs, drugs, single-parent families and the race to excel academically and socially all imperil this precious natural resource: the nation's children.

In April, National Commander Daniel A. Ludwig and council officials joined federal, state and local law enforcement officers at a news conference in Washington D.C., where they announced the national rollout of the Safe Kids program. The effort already is a big success.

• The First Ward American Legion Post 1254 and Auxiliary of Binghampton, N.Y., received a National Star award in 1993 for compiling fingerprints and other identification information for 1,200 elementary school kids for easy reference by parents.

The Auxiliary's C&Y chairperson, Mary Smack, arranged for the Post and Unit to purchase 1,250 McGruff Safe Kids Identification Kits, using the Post's bingo proceeds. She met with local educators and PTA officers from the First Ward's four elementary schools to discuss logistics, and coordinated with local police to involve law enforcement in the process. The group worked out a schedule in which Auxiliary volunteers and two local police officers, often working on their own time, visited the schools to present the Safe Kids material.

Following completion of the program, a local radio station and supermarket sponsored "Safe Kids" days at several stores, with Auxiliary volunteers providing staff support and additional kits.

• More recently, in Ohio four American Legion Posts and Auxiliary Units contributed McGruff Safe Kids kits to a latchkey safety program conducted by the Ohio State University Extension and FCE Homemakers of Adams County. The effort targeted all third grade students in the county to alert them to "stranger dangers." Kits were sent home with children, and parents were asked to fingerprint their kids and file away that portion of the kit.

TOP DOGS: NationalCommander Daniel A. Ludwig poses with McGruff the Crime Dog and a law enforcement official last April at the rollout of the Safe Kids program, conducted in Washington, D.C.

The Posts and Units included Post 325, Manchester, Ohio; Morris-Baldridge Auxiliary Unit 583, Cherry Fork, Ohio; Thompson-Wallingford Post 594, Peebles, Ohio; and Walter Harris Jr. Post 325, West Union, Ohio.

• Advance publicity in local newspapers and other media made the McGruff Safe Kids Day in Gulf Shores, Ala., a success. On a recent Saturday, local police and fire departments provided personnel, a patrol car and fire engine, and set to work fingerprinting area youngsters whose parents stopped by American Legion Post 44 in Gulf Shores. The Post and Auxiliary handed out snapshots of each child to go along with the fingerprints, and provided refreshments. The teamwork on the local level made for an enjoyable social occa-

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"I've always felt that veterans are motivated by pageantry, ceremony and parades while serving our country," said Bill Stokes, a member of Post 178, Denham Springs, La., in an earlier interview with the DISPATCH. Stokes is chief judge of National Convention competitions.

There was a wide range of marching and drill units. Many in the Philippine delegation were dressed in native clothes. The Pure Heaven Color Guard of Ames, Iowa, with their vintage broad-brimmed cavalry hats and uniforms contrasted with the modern battle dress of local airborne and Special Forces soldiers and Marines.

Delegations from most American Legion Departments closed ranks, carrying their banners, flags and other materials unique to their states.

Several hours later, the last of the marchers, a Civil War fife and drum unit passed the review stand, and the 78th National Convention Parade was history. ❑

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Color guards, bands pick up the beat in SLC

■ Copper Knights, Pure Heaven and Speedway top color guard finishers.

The American Legion National Convention means many things to many people. Primarily, though, it determines the policy stances the Legion family will pursue in the coming year. No convention of any organization, however, should be without its share of pageantry, pomp and fanfare.

To that end, the Legion conducted its annual color guard and band competitions once again. David Priester, color guard coordinator and marching execution judge from Dale City, Va., says the competition among contestants was fierce, with one class winner decided by one quarter of a point after some mandatory penalties had been assessed.

"Most of the color guard runs were incredibly clean, with just a few small penalties for trailing or point-of-honor violations," Priester says. Other judges included Tracey Bullardof Virginia Beach, Va., and Dan Niebauer of Erie, Pa., for General Effect; Darlene Priester of Dale City, Va., for equipment execution; and Jack Mertes of Lake Worth, Fla., for timing and penalties.

BANDWAGON: The precision and discipline of color guard competition inspires admiration from Legionnaires and a critical eye from the judges.

A tradition seems to be taking shape in the competitions, however, as winners in both the color guard and marching band contests from last year took top honors once again. For that accomplishment, they will lead next year's primary divisions in the National Convention parade in Orlando, Fla., just as they led yesterday's impressive entourage through the streets of Salt Lake City.

The final results in the national contests are:

Senior Color Guard—Military Class (The American Legion)

First Place: Speedway (Indiana) Post 500 Honor Guard

Second Place: Department of Texas, Post 321

Senior Color Guard—Military Class (Open Eligibility)

First Place: Pure Heaven Color Guard, Post 37

Second Place: Vanguard Women's Auxiliary, Unit 1

Third Place: Sons of The American Legion (Maryland) Color Guard, Squadron 77

Fourth Place: Algot Johnson Unit 69 (Michigan) Color Guard

Fifth Place: Sons of The American Legion Color Guard, Squadron 209

Senior Color Guard—Open Class

First Place: Copper Knights (Arizona) Color Guard, Post 36

Second Place: Applecore Senior (Missouri) Color Guard, Post 370

Marching Band

First Place: The Band of the Tonawandas (New York), Post 264

Second Place: Greater Kansas City (Missouri) American Legion Band

Third Place: Oconomowoc (Wisconsin) American Legion Band ❑

Blood bank in the black

Counting on Legionnaires to be generous with their lifesblood is like money in the bank.

Inter-Mountain Health Care Blood Services reports members of The American Legion family donated 43 units of blood Saturday at Exhibit Hall I at the Salt Palace Convention Center.

The blood draw continues from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 3-4, at the same location.

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Legion-led coalition of 109 organizations that support the amendment drive. The CFA long ago won public support for its cause.

"National polls consistently show about 80 percent of the American public wants our national flag to be protected from physical desecration," said Ludwig, adding 49 of the 50 state legislatures passed memorializing resolutions asking Congress to pass the flag protection amendment.

Recent polls also suggest most Americans will make the flag amendment a major factor, some say ***the*** main factor, in how they vote. "I'd like to think that Americans who care about the flag will take their convictions to the ballot box in November," said Ludwig.

Improving health care for veterans and their families will be another major focus of the upcoming plenary sessions, said Ludwig. The GI Bill of Health will position VA for the needs of veterans in the 21st century. The proposal, **H.R. 3950**, was introduced in the House Aug. 2 by Rep. James Longley, R-Maine. It calls for transforming VA into a managed care network to include veterans and, if they wish, their dependents. The GI Bill of Health changes how care is provided while generating new funding sources needed to expand VA's capacity to fulfill its mission.

"It will open VA hospitals and clinics to more veterans, remove senseless restrictions that increase the cost to the taxpayer, and provide our veterans with the best medical care in the world," he said.

Ludwig related stories he's heard from members of the Legion family who find the local hospitality and small-town feeling to their liking. "Legionnaires have already told me about walking down the sidewalk, and passing people who nodded and said, 'hello,'" he said. ❑