DISPATCH Daily

"For God & Country"

SALT LAKE CITY NATIONAL CONVENTION — WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 4, 1996

Dole shares vets' values, views

Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole told 6,000 delegates to The American Legion National Convention yesterday that their priorities are his priorities.

Increased veterans benefits, a stronger national defense, and a constitutional amendment to protect the flag of the United States from physical desecration were all on the agenda as Dole spoke of his vision for America as the 20th century comes to a close. But before he could get to that, a pressing issue of the moment had to be addressed.

"Just last night those who currently wear America's uniform received their call," Dole said of the missile attack on Iraq, a punishment for Saddam Hussein's continued aggression against Kurdish rebels in that Middle East nation's northern region. "The American soldiers are freedom's heroes, and we support them without hesitation or reservation."

After speaking with President Bill Clinton, retired Gen. Colin Powell, and others, Dole said all sides agreed that actions must be taken to ensure the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard from northern Iraq. He also wants all Kurdish prisoners released, an end to interference by Iran and Iraq among the Kurds, re-establishment of the U.N. nuclear weapons inspection effort, and a stop to Saddam's support of international terrorism.

"We must be decisive in confronting this threat and humbling this tyrant," Dole added. "In matters like this, all of us think, not as Republicans or Democrats, but as Americans. And as Americans, we wish our troops success and safety."

That was just the first of many references the GOP leader made to bipartisanship during his half-hour presentation. He stressed that no political party has a monopoly on values or ideals, but that differences stem from a conflict of vision, particularly on subjects of great interest to Legionnaires.

"We see it in the protection of the American flag. This is more than an

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QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"I want to thank my good friend, Jerry Solomon, who is working with you on the GI Bill of Health. Together, we will ensure that VA hospitals are centers of excellence, and that every veteran and their family has access to first-rate care."

— presidential candidate Bob Dole

CFA chairman blasts gutter art

When the Phoenix Art Museum unveiled a special exhibit earlier this year, *Old Glory: The American Flag in Contemporary Art*, it drew a lot crowds—and it drew fire from most who found the works as blatant examples of flag desecration.

Just ask retired Army Maj. Gen. Patrick Brady, chairman of the Citizens Flag Alliance (CFA), who toured the exhibit: "In the name of art, which should be beautiful and inspirational, they had taken our flag, the most beautiful and inspirational of all American works of art, and stuffed it in a toilet and trampled it underfoot.

"Some think this controversy was trivial, but the saddest thing I saw in the museum was the faces of our youths as they tried to untangle what they said in the Pledge of Allegiance and what their parents taught them with what they saw in the toilet and on the dirty floor of that museum."

Brady

Brady, a Medal of Honor recipient of the Vietnam War, said the flag-protection amendment campaign is more than just a battle to legally protect the flag. He said much bigger issues are at stake every time Old Glory is physically desecrated—common decency, values and respect.

Brady also encouraged delegates to get involved in the CFA's nationwide *Vote For The Flag* campaign. The nonpartisan voter registration and *Get-Out-The-Vote* programs are key planks in the quest, but the CFA chairman emphasized what the campaign was not about.

"We are not endorsing or supporting anyone's election or defeat," said Brady. "Vote for flag has just one basic purpose—to make sure all the millions of Americans who want their flag protected are registered to vote, know where their candidates stand on the issues, and go to the polls on Election Day."

Following Brady's remarks, Rep. Gerald Solomon, R-N.Y., co-author of the flag-protection amendment which cleared the House in June 1995, was recognized for his leadership on the issue. A Legion member with the

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Ludwig promotes flag, GI Bill of Health

■ Top Legionnaire extols role of veterans in society

The American Legion stands on the right side in the tug-of-war of values that will determine America's future, National Commander Daniel A. Ludwig told delegates to the 78th National Convention.

In his last major address as National Commander, the Minnesota Legionnaire talked about service to God and country, hallmarks of the values The American Legion embraces in its programs and support of veterans and their families. Ludwig reminded convention delegates that remaining neutral in the struggle for a strong America is not an option.

"For our great country to remain free, we must support policies based on solid values. We *must* take a stand on certain issues. We *must* make our elected officials do the same. Laws *must* reflect a sense of right and wrong, not a sense of anything goes," Ludwig extolled the estimated 6,000 delegates and alternates who filled the cavernous Salt Palace Convention Center hall.

Protecting the U.S. Flag from acts of physical desecration is a values issue, said Ludwig. "Burning Old Glory is not free speech – it's a sacrilege. It's a defilement of an American institution," he said. "Poll after poll tells us the majority of Americans want their flag protected. We came close in the 104th Congress ... we will win in the 105th Congress!"

Ludwig said the tug-of-war for America's future is being fought on many fronts – political, social, economic and medical. Reforming the Department of Veterans Affairs – saving it from what Ludwig said was a "sure death" – and opening new funding streams to treat more veterans is of paramount importance to the future of veterans' health-care.

He said provisions in **H.R. 3950**, introduced Aug. 2 by Rep. James B. Longley Jr., R-Maine, carry the seeds of reform that allow veterans to use existing third-party health benefit plans to pay for VA medical care. Equally important, VA should be allowed to retain payments it receives for services instead of sending the money to the treasury. The reform measure also would allow VA to treat dependents of veterans, military retirees, and those covered under CHAMPUS, Tricare, Medicare or Medicaid.

Ludwig said allowing more patients access to more diverse forms of care will ensure the VA system survives to serve new generations of the nation's veterans.

"The GI Bill of Health protects the service-connected provisions of today while it meets the health-care needs of more veterans and their families... The GI Bill of Health makes sense. This plan is the right thing to do for veterans; it's the right thing to do for families of veterans. We're in a tug-of-war for America's future. Get your hands on the rope and pull for this plan," he said.

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Orlando delivers star-spangled tribute

Tony Orlando has inherited from Bob Hope the unofficial title of goodwill ambassador to the nation's veterans. By their response at Tuesday's opening session of the 78th National Convention, Legionnaires seem happy Bob passed the torch to Tony.

Orlando's appearance at the first day session set the tone of celebration and appreciation for the sacrifices America's veterans have made for the nation's survival, themes echoed by state and Salt Lake City officials who welcomed convention delegates on their opening day.

"When we forget our veterans, we forget our future. The true bridge to the future is to never forget the past," Orlando told the audience.

Displaying the affable style that has made him a popular draw among family audiences, Orlando sang a patriotic medley of songs, beginning with Neil Diamond's *Coming to America*, his trademark tune, *Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the Old Oak Tree*, and *That's America to Me*. At one point Orlando left the stage to mingle in the audience, shaking hands and spreading enthusiasm.

"I took a lesson from Elizabeth Dole at the (Republican National) convention. I'm coming out there with you guys!" said an excited Orlando. During *Yellow Ribbon*, projections of giant yellow ribbons illuminated the halls adjacent to the convention hall stage.

In between numbers Orlando talked about the annual free Veterans Day shows he stages at his theater in Branson, Mo. His example has prompted other entertainers to conduct free concerts for veterans on Nov. 11, while local merchants offer discounts to veterans and their families who make the trip to southwest Missouri.

The singer recalled his 1995 Veterans Day Tribute, when Bob Hope joined him on stage at the Tony Orlando Theater in Branson. Orlando recalled the first time he sang his signature song, *Yellow Ribbon*, at a welcome home for American ex-POWs at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas in 1973, an event Bob Hope emceed. Now fighting age and poor health, Hope set the standard for entertaining the men and women in military service and brought some relief and diversion to veterans for a half century. Speaking of Hope's visit last year to Branson, Orlando recalled Hope telling him, "I pass the torch to you guys."

Orlando's affinity for veterans and their service was reinforced by a video at yesterday's opening session. Titled, *Still Serving America*, the video related examples of Legionnaires involved in various community service projects that highlight their "devotion to mutual helpfulness."

Speakers welcoming Legionnaires and their families to town included Salt Lake City Mayor DeeDee Corradini; Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt; state Attorney General Jan Graham; American Legion Auxiliary National President Syble Deshotel; H. Dale Brockbank, Utah's 1995-96 Department Commander; and William Christoffersen, president of the National Convention Corporation of Utah, Inc.

Attorney General Graham, the first woman elected to statewide office since statehood in 1896, told delegates the majority of Utahns, and Americans, know and appreciate veterans.

"We are so thrilled to have you here. The dignity, sense of pride and honor, you can really feel it in the air," Graham said in characterizing the qualities she admires in the visiting delegates. "You have a sense of honor, courage, duty, love of family and of God, and a fundamental belief, not in the power of hate, but of love. What you have done means so much to us." ❑

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On the topic of defense, Ludwig told Legionnaires some lawmakers in Washington dismiss threats to America's defense in the wake of the Soviet Union's demise. Shrinking military budgets are a danger signs that America's ability to deter major regional threats, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation among renegade nations like Libya and North Korea may be diminishing. He said Saddam Hussein's recent aggression against the Kurds of northern Iraq, and America's military response, are strong arguments for not shifting too many budgetary resources from defense to the domestic programs.

"The end of the Cold War was a milestone, but as we've seen time and time again it was not the beginning of a global utopia. America – and Americans – must take national defense seriously," Ludwig said. "If you want to reduce the deficit, then do it. But our troops must have the best – the best training, equipment, facilities, the best of everything. No compromise on national defense."

Ludwig also addressed reminded delegates of the Legion's commitment to youth. One of the newest initiatives is The Samsung Scholarship program. This year up to 10 high school seniors each will be awarded a $30,000 scholarship.

Hatch pleases home folks

American society is suffering from a steady erosion of basic standards and values and nothing demonstrates that trend more when Old Glory is put to the torch.

"Nothing symbolizes the traditional values of this nation more than our flag," said Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah. "Isn't it ridiculous the American people have been denied the right to protect the flag that they hold near and dear?"

Hatch, who co-authored the proposed flag-protection amendment which was narrowly defeated in the Senate last December, spoke to more than 6,000 Amer-ican Legion National Convention delegates Tuesday morning.

"Some have confused liberty with license, but The American Legion and American people know the difference," said Hatch. "In the next Congress, we will look to reverse the vote from a year ago, and to do that, we must get more people elected who support the amendment to protect the flag."

Hatch placed the blame for the flag amendment's failure on the door of the White House. The senior Utah senator said President Bill Clinton used political pressure to sway potential swing-vote Democrats when the Senate voted on the amendment.

A Clinton official testified against the amendment before a congressional panel last year. That action drew fire from amendment supporters, including the Legion. At the 1992 American Legion National Convention in Chicago as a presidential candidate, Clinton left many with the strong impression that he would support the flag-protection amendment.

"President Clinton may have won the short-term battle on this issue, but we're going to win the war in getting this amendment."

— Sen. Orrin Hatch

"President Clinton may have won the short-term battle on this issue, but we're going to win the war in getting this amendment," Hatch said, drawing heavy applause and cheers from the crowd.

Hatch, said the American flag has particular meaning to him. His older brother, an airman in World War II, was shot down over Europe and died. "The flag that draped my brother's coffin means everything to me." ❑

Future in good hands with youth champs

Few organizations have done as much for future generations of Americans as The American Legion. That sentiment was echoed time and again yesterday by the Legion's youth champions.

National Vice Commander Keith Baker of Iowa presented the young leaders to the delegates of the National Convention in a brief but sincere ceremony of appreciation.

Kem Thomas Footman of Indianapolis, Ind., was honored as the 1996 Boys Nation president, but he preferred to honor Legionnaires. "I owe thanks to all of you for giving me the opportunity to even be alive. You all have paid the ultimate sacrifice to make certain America stood as America should," he said.

Precision category gold medalist in the Junior Shooting Sports program, Katherine M. DelGrosso, agreed. "The American Legion deserves thanks for caring enough to ensure that youth programs are out there, being conducted well, with an emphasis on both learning and fun. Your work is really appreciated," said the Salem, Ore., native.

1996 Boy Scout of the Year Grant E. Garrigues of San Diego, Calif., said the Legion's "patriotism and commitment to America's future, through support of groups like Boy Scouts of America, is greatly appreciated."

1995 American Legion Baseball Player of the Year Jason Adaro, Aiea, Hawaii, repeated those sentiments. "Being involved with the Legion makes me proud to be an American," he said.

But perhaps the most eloquent praise of the afternoon, as to be expected, came from the winner of the National High School Oratorical Contest — Kaleen Love of Mesa, Ariz.

"I didn't plan to say much here today. But witnessing the events at this convention, hearing Tony Orlando sing and Bob Dole speak, I know I have a duty to remember. I must remember history, what you members of The American Legion defended. I must remember the story of my own grandfather who was stranded at sea during war. I will remember these things, and what is more, I will not let others forget," Love said.

Of course, none of these young people forgot where they began, each thanking his or her parents for their contribution in making these awards possible.

Following the ceremony, Larry Hice, assistant general sales manager of Buick Motor Division presented American Legion Baseball with a $183,000 donation. In the past few years, the Buick-Legion partnership has garnered an additional $3,400,000 for The American Legion.

Legionnaires laud 'Mr. Veteran'

As a young Army infantry officer in World War II, G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery led his troops into battle. As a member of Congress the last three decades, Montgomery has led the charge for veterans' benefits and has sought new ways to ensure that veterans are a priority.

Because of that long-time activist role, Montgomery, a Democrat who represents Mississippi's 3rd congressional district, received the prestigious 1996 American Legion Distinguished Service Award Medal. Among his colleagues and veterans' service organizations he is know as "Mr. Veteran."

"Outstanding service to our nation is the main criterion for this award and The American Legion certainly finds your lifelong service meets—and exceeds—that objective," said National Commander Daniel A. Ludwig in presenting the award.

Montgomery will retire from the House of Representatives at the end of the year, capping a 30-year career on Capitol Hill. Most of that time, he has served as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, but he is best known for his role as chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Montgomery

"Commander Ludwig tells me I was elected for this award by a unanimous vote," Montgomery said. "That kind of thing doesn't happen too often in politics."

Montgomery, a Legion member of Post 21, Meridian, Miss., said one of the highlights of his career as a veterans' advocate was helping elevate the VA to the cabinet level. "Now, veterans can go in the front door of the White House and not the back door," he said.

Montgomery lauded the Legion for its GI Bill of Health plan, a proposal that would open up the VA medical system to all veterans and their families and would derive revenue by collecting money for other programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, Tricare, CHAMPUS and private insurers.

"You're on the right track with this plan," he said. "Keep at it."

The Mississippi lawmaker also is known for the "Montgomery GI Bill," a post-service education program in which two million veterans have participated.

An in-depth interview with Montgomery will appear in the December issue of THE AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZINE. ❑

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Department of New York, Solomon was presented with The American Legion Public Service Award.

"I remember standing on the steps of the Capitol building on that cold, rainy day in February (1995), the day we introduced the amendment in the House," Solomon said. "Many of you in this hall stood with me that day and I know you continue to support protecting the flag.

"Eighty percent of the American people (in polls) favor the amendment and 49 state legislatures have petitioned Congress to send the measure back to the people," Solomon continued. "It is time to get this measure off Capitol Hill and let the states ratify it."

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abstract, constitutional argument. It involves our deepest commitments as a people," Dole told the cheering crowd. "If the American flag is not held sacred, then nothing is sacred in our society."

He congratulated the Legion for its work to pass a flag protection amendment, and also touched on other past accomplishments, including the *Enola Gay* exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution, achieving a final accounting of all POWs and MIAs, and more.

Some of Dole's strongest compliments for the Legion family, however, were directed at Elmer Fuhrhop, chairman of the National Children & Youth Commission, for that commission's programs serving youth. Looking to the future, Dole also clearly stated his support for **H.R. 3950**, also known as the GI Bill of Health, which would provide comprehensive reforms to the VA health-care system.

Tangible accomplishments aside, Dole looked beyond the surface at the root of all success, strong family values. "Family and God. Honor, duty and country. Let's face it, some ridicule these principles as relics of the past, but when our problems are at their worst, when our hope is strained, when drugs and crime and the abandonment of children challenge the very character of our country, we know where to turn. There is no bridge to the future not built on the foundation of these ideals," said Dole, a member of Post 99, Russell, Kan.

Most delegates seemed pleased by Dole's remarks—and displeased President Clinton didn't show up. The president declined an invitation to speak to the convention, citing a scheduling conflict. The third leading candidate for the nation's top job, Reform Party candidate H. Ross Perot, will speak to delegates later today.

"Senator Dole told us what we wanted to hear," said Francis Baugh of Logan, Utah. He and his wife, Bernice, were there as representatives of Utah State University Post 12. "Of course we were impressed with his knowledge of the Legion and its work, and what we have to offer for the future," he said. "And I particularly like his comments on the VA hospitals program. I don't want to see them destroyed," Bernice added.

Even the Legion's National Commander, Daniel A. Ludwig, couldn't suppress his enthusiasm for Dole's agenda. "What Mr. Dole wants for America is what Legionnaires want," Ludwig said. "Bob Dole served his country and still wears the scars of battle. He has not forgotten about veterans — young and old — who donned a uniform, sacrificed for God and country, and who expect their government not to abandon them and their families.

"He also understands that the unifying symbol of our nation, for which many men and women died, deserves protection from those who want to burn it just to make a point. The American Legion wants a president who stands for protecting the flag." ❑