DISPATCH Daily

"For God & Country"

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Run it up the Flag Poll

The Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc.

CFA releases Gallup results confirming support for SJR 40

Lovers of Old Glory expect the latest Gallup Poll results will be a case of "third time lucky" for supporters of **Senate Joint Resolution 40**, the flag protection amendment before the Senate.

For the third time since 1990, the Gallup Organization learned a majority of the American people want their flag protected and don't believe such laws would endanger Americans' hard-won free speech rights. The latest numbers were taken in August and released Wednesday at a news conference on Capitol Hill, which Legionnaires at the 80th National Convention in New Orleans watched on huge monitors.

"The will of the people is unquestionable: They want the U.S. Senate to send to the states a flag-protection constitutional amendment for ratification," said National Commander Anthony G. Jordan. "The Gallup Poll shows three out of four Americans support an amendment that would, in effect, take the fate of Old Glory out of the hands of the courts and put it back in the hands of the American people.

"I'm confident that the required two-thirds majority in the Senate will respect the most important free speech of all: the voice of 'We the People,' and pass **Senate Joint Resolution 40** so that the people can decide this issue."

The Citizens Flag Alliance Wednesday rolled out its big congressional guns in announcing the poll results. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah introduced other supporters of **SJR 40**, including CFA Chairman retired Gen. Patrick Brady, entertainer Pat Boone and Bishop Carlton Pearson of Tulsa, Okla. Also in attendance were his Senate colleagues Sen. Max Cleland of Georgia, who with Hatch introduced the bill last February, Sen. Strom Thurmond, S.C., Sen. Charles Grassley, Iowa, Idaho Sen. Larry Craig and Sen. Lauch Faircloth, N.C.

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According to Dr. Debra Christian of the Gallup Organization, staff interviewed 998 American adults in August 1998 on various aspects of the flag-protection controversy. Seventy-six percent of the respondents favored allowing Congress authority to pass flag-protection laws, a notion 52 percent agreed with strongly; also, 75 percent believe the First Amendment right of freedom of speech is adequately protected already, while 74 percent perceive flag-burning as an inappropriate expression of free speech rights.

CFA supporters have long maintained that this fight is for the future since adults long ago formed their opinions on the matter one way or the other. Fifteen percent of respondents, or one in six, fear America's young people don't understand enough about the flag and what it symbolizes to care enough to protect it.

The poll is telling members of the Senate to trust the will of the people, and Hatch seemed optimistic his colleagues would heed that will.

"We are close to the number of votes needed to send the amendment to the states," Hatch said, and to "protecting the banner for our country and the world." ❑

West tells veterans not to sweat enrollment deadline

If veterans don't enroll in the VA Patent Enrollment System by the Oct. 1 deadline, they stand to lose their right to VA care and service-connected disability compensation.

Not true, according to VA Secretary Togo West, speaking Wednesday to fellow Legionnaires at the 80th National Convention. First of all, he said, any veteran in the system before 1996 already is enrolled. Second, the Patient Enrollment System was created to streamline operations, not deny access to health-care.

"No eligible veteran who comes to a VAMC for care will be turned away. We will enroll them then," said West, 56, a member of Post 113, Meridian, Idaho. Under the enrollment system, veterans are grouped in seven categories by priority of care. The first group comprises veterans rated 50 percent or more disabled, then descends through the rungs to non-service connected veterans whose incomes and net worth are above guidelines set by statute.

The American Legion, while supporting any effort that speeds medical care and claims processing services to veterans, believes the provisions in the Legion's proposed GI Bill of Health are the government's best shot of enacting comprehensive reform within VA, though VA already has implemented several provisions contained in the GI Bill of Health.

West claims VA is changing to meet veterans' needs, including growing number of women veterans. "We must be changing because we are improving." But he vowed not to close any veterans' centers providing veterans access to health care. "Not on my watch," West promised.

The secretary proclaimed he wasn't satisfied with the long delays in processing veterans' disability claims, saying VA is striving to not only speed up the process, but render quality decisions in line with rulings by the Board of Veterans Appeals and the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals. Legionnaires know by experience that too many veterans have seen their claims remanded to regional offices because evidence in their cases wasn't developed properly.

"Every day of delay in processing claims for benefits is a day that veteran is denied benefits," West said. "We must work to improve not only our timeliness but our accuracy because it does no good if we give a veteran a fast answer and that answer is wrong."

West praised The American Legion for living up to the principles espoused in its historic *Preamble to The American Legion Constitution and By-Laws*, particularly Legionnaires' "devotion to mutual helpfulness." And though the dictates of his office precluded an unqualified endorsement of the Legion's crusade to protect the American flag, West offered a personal observation:

"I will not criticize any organization that seeks to uphold the sanctity of our flag," he said, drawing applause from the partisan Old Glory crowd. ❑

Retton asks Legion to strike gold for kids

Olympic Gold Medal gymnast Mary Lou Retton knows what it takes to be a champion. These days, she's bringing her considerable skills to promoting the Children's Miracle Network, which benefit hospitalized kids at 170 non-profit children's hospitals in the United States and Canada.

"Nothing is more important than the health and happiness of our children," Retton told Legionnaires Wednesday. The mother of two said the importance of family led to her involvement with CMN in 1991. These days, she's busy promoting the "CMN Champions," the annual television special carried on 200 TV stations to an international audience of 102 million. The American Legion is among 60 corporate and association sponsors whose devotion to child welfare issues have benefited CMN's network of caring. In 16 years, CMN has raised more than $1.2 billion for children's hospitals, $172 million alone during its annual telethon in June.

The 170 hospitals treat children with medical problems ranging from cancer, lung and muscular diseases to birth defects and accident-related injuries. Thanks to Legionnaires and other caring groups, medical care is delivered without regard to the child's ability to pay.

"The great thing about CMN is that all donations stay in the local area served by the children's hospital," Retton said.

"CMN Champions" is broadcast live from Walt Disney World. The 1999 event is scheduled to begin at 9 p.m. (EDT) on Saturday, June 5 and continue through 6 p.m. Sunday, June 6, 1999. ❑

In Memoriam

PNC Albert Keller (1982-83) d. 11/12/97 Post 85, Department of Illinois

PNC Harry Wiles (1975-76) d. 6/2/98 Post 1, Department of Kansas

NVC Gerald L. Moore (1997-98) d. 3/24/98 Post 526, Department of Ohio

Nat'l Sgt.-at-Arms George Gagnon (1997-98) d. 3/15/98 Post 80 Dept. of Maine

Legionnaires honored these deceased comrades at Tuesday's opening session.

Joint chiefs chairman outlines dangers

"As a young man in North Carolina, I was aware of what veterans did for our country and communities," said Gen. Henry H. Shelton, chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, during his address Wednesday. "Sailors, Soldiers, Marines and Coast Guardsmen are carrying on your legacy, and I can assure you they are making you proud."

Many Legionnaires know today's military is facing challenges. Deep budget and personnel cuts have reduced America's armed forces by 40 percent—700,000 troops—since 1989. Yet, in the midst of these drawdowns, Shelton said, many ethnic and tribal conflicts have been revived, prompting U.S. forces to cope with an accelerated deployment tempo.

These regional skirmishes increase the workload of our reduced forces. Shelton cited the conflict in the Congo, Saddam Hussein and Bin Laden as three examples why 125,000 troops are currently deployed around the world. And America's commitment to stability is one constant in a volatile, hostile world. "By helping shape international environments," said Shelton, "we can help prevent conflicts from escalating."

Shelton's concerns register on the tactical level. While civilians have reaped the bounty from a booming economy, the military has had to struggle to keep attracting top recruits. Young men and women are weighing the military in terms of "life stream earnings." With unemployment down, jobs are plentiful and recruiting is competitive.

SHELTON

Retaining pilots also concerns Shelton. A booming airline industry, offering lucrative salaries, is luring many pilots who may have chosen the military as their career.

According to Shelton, the Legion figures into this equation. Young recruits review how veterans are taken care of. "That's why we need the Legion to keep fighting for vets," said Shelton. "For we must be able to offer a package with a strong commitment behind it."

Shelton commended The American Legion for making his job easier in other ways as well. "Many of you may have served in units which were not properly equipped," said Shelton. The assenting bluecap Legionnaires have their own memories of equipment shortages and appreciate first-hand the importance of readiness. Shelton also credited the world's largest veterans' organization for raising awareness on issues such as military preparedness and national security.

Maintaining this awareness is critical to Shelton. Especially since he foresees a major power that will challenge the United States by 2020. In this era of balanced-budget politics, continuing to modernize the military will be a challenge, one veterans have met and matched and must be prepared to do again, he said. ❑

Author Ambrose marvels at WW II generation

Steven Spielberg is not the only one chronicling history's most destructive conflict, World War II. Stephen E. Ambrose has authored over 20 books which have accurately preserved America's involvement in the wars of the 20th century.

"I make my living reading other people's mail and memoirs," Ambrose quipped during his opening remarks at Wednesday's convention session. Reading such personal writings has allowed him to produce such bestsellers as "Undaunted Courage," "D-Day" and "Citizen Soldiers."

According to Ambrose, 1945 was the most violent year the world has seen. Yet from those dark days, a bright light erupted—the rebirth of progress. At the turn of the 19th century, horses were the fastest mode of transportation, and the conventional thinking held that was the way it would always be. History, of course, disproved this notion as the industrial and technological revolutions inspired invention and advancement.

World War I, the Great Depression and World War II, however, effectively derailed the burgeoning advances. That is, Ambrose said, until 1945. Veterans returning from WWII wanted to build up themselves, their families and their communities. They went to school under the GI Bill of Rights, which Ambrose praised as, "The single greatest piece of legislation Congress has ever passed."

Their new politics supported DoD and NATO. "That generation allowed us to believe in progress again," said Ambrose. One veteran Ambrose talked to took the "big picture" view of his efforts: "I did my part to turn a century of darkness into a century of light."

Along with his prolific writings, Ambrose is showcasing the WWII generation's accomplishments by serving as president of the National D-Day Museum here in New Orleans. Some have asked, "Why New Orleans?"

Ambrose's answer: "Andy Higgins." The author was made aware of Higgins' contribution to the war effort by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower. "Eisenhower said, 'he's the one who won the war for us. If he had not designed those landing craft—Higgins boat—we wouldn't had been able to land on that beach,' " Ambrose maintained.

The strong endorsement later gave Ambrose the fodder to defend New Orleans as the premier location to erect the museum. If all goes to plan, the museum will open its doors June 6, 2000, the 56th anniversary of D-Day. To which Ambrose offered a hearty southern invitation, "Y'all come."

Ambrose also took the opportunity to enlist The American Legion in the fundraising effort. A familiar name to Legionnaires already made a large contribution to the museum—Steven Spielberg.

For more information call or write: The National D-Day Museum, **(504) 527-6012**, 923 Magazine St., New Orleans, LA 70130. ❑

Albright sketches strategy against terror, weapons of mass destruction

Countering terror and limiting weapons of mass destruction are both aspects of the struggle for peace, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told Legionnaires at Wednesday's session of the 80th National American Legion National Convention.

Albright noted Saddam Hussein's Iraq poses both those challenges while mounting politically calculated tantrums to divide the U.N. Security Council, isolate the United States and diminish support for the sanctions that keep Iraq in a strategic box.

Albright characterized the confrontation with terror movements as reason versus hate, of faith versus fear.

"It is not, as some suppose, a clash between cultures or civilizations. It is a clash between civilization itself and anarchy, between the rule of law and no rules at all," Albright said.

While international terror is not new, she said, the emergence of terrorist coalitions that do not answer fully to any government, operate across national borders and have access to advanced technology is a heightened threat level facing the United States and its allies.

"Our armed forces must remain the best led, best trained, best equipped and most respected in the world," Albright said to prolonged applause.

"But we also need first-class diplomacy. On most occasions, we rely on diplomacy to cement our alliances, build coalitions and find ways to defend our interests without putting our fighting men and women at risk.

"At the same time, our diplomacy is stronger because we have the threat of force behind it. In this way, force and diplomacy complement each other," Albright said.

Though it's not publicized, law enforcement is often effective in making life hard for terrorists, Albright indicated, citing efforts in the case of Pan Am 103, the World Trade Center bombing and the CIA murders. In the United States, laws forbid groups that espouse terrorism from raising funds, and authorizes expulsion of foreigners who support terrorists. More than 19,000 law officers from more than 90 countries have received anti-terrorist training in the United States.

ALBRIGHT

Albright thanked the Legion, "one of our country's truly great organizations," for its support when President Clinton ordered the armed forces to strike back after the embassy bombings.

Containing the threat of weapons of mass destruction will take more than arms control treaties, Albright told the convention. She prescribed "the best defense we can devise, the intelligence we can develop and the best emergency planning we can prepare...But we also need the best legal framework we can create to detect and diminish these threats and discredit those who brandish them."

To that end, Albright called for working with Russia to share data on missile launches world wide, quashing North Korea's dangerous nuclear program forever, implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention, strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention and ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

She also called for a bipartisan approach to the issue of ballistic missile defense, a doctrine Pentagon and State Department planners are revisiting.

"We are committed to developing and testing a National Missile Defense system by the year 2000 for deployment, if circumstances warrant, as early as 2003," Albright said.

"In this century, we have endured depression, prevailed with our allies in two global wars, defended liberty through decades of the Cold War, and answered the call in numerous other crises and conflicts. Now, we confront new dangers at a time of great turbulence and complexity....

"Notwithstanding all this, we are not weary. We are confident. We look to the future with optimism and faith," Albright affirmed. ❑

Jordan wires former Legion player Mark McGwire

National Commander Anthony G. Jordan Wednesday added his personal congratulations and that of all American Legion family members to Mark McGwire, the St. Louis Cardinals slugger who Tuesday broke Roger Maris' single season homerun record.

"On behalf of the men and women of my 2.9 million member American Legion, I congratulate you on your mammoth achievement. Your record is a testament to your talent, discipline and character," said Jordan in praising McGwire's feat in launching 62 home runs in 1998—and counting.

Maris, who played American Legion Baseball in his hometown of Fargo, N.D., hit 61 dingers in 1961. The record stood for 37 years, three years longer than Babe Ruth's mark of 60 home runs.

"I am impressed not only with your achievement, but with the class manner in which you pursued baseball immortality," added Jordan. "I am proud of you. The baseball world is proud of you. And thousands of young men playing American Legion Baseball today—many on fields on which you played—are proud of you. You are a tremendous talent, a good citizen and an ambassador for American Legion Baseball. McGwire played "Legion Ball" for the Claremont, Calif., Cardinals for three years, 1980-82, under Coach Jack Helber.

Since its beginning in 1925, more than 7 million young men have played American Legion Baseball, including nearly two-thirds of today's major leaguers. ❑