THE AMERICAN LEGION

"For God & Country"

Dispatch Daily

Anaheim National Convention **September 6, 1999**

Legion Family celebrates patriotism

God and country were praised during a rousing worship service in the Convention Center Sunday morning.

National Chaplain Robert J. Sweeney reminded members of the Legion Family of the deep roots religion has in America.

"In 1787, the Constitutional Convention was deadlocked in Philadelphia," Sweeney said. "Then 81-year-old Benjamin Franklin quoted Psalm 187 and said 'If the Lord does not build the house, the work of the delegates is in vain.' He then led them in prayer. We have to keep God in our lives, to keep God in our country."

Department of California Chaplain Tom Sarciapone told the crowd, "I can find no better example of national patriotism than the (veterans of) World War II era...Their service to the country in World War II was no small effort. They not only saved the nation, they saved the world."

Sarciapone pointed out that next year marks the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War. He vowed, "We are finally going to bring to light the real forgotten war, Korea."

Sarciapone was just getting warmed up. "Now you World War II veterans take a good hard look at our flag. Do you see a rising sun? A swastika? I don't and it's your doing. For you vets after World War II - Do you see a hammer and a sickle? No. That was your doing.

"The American Legion Family and a grateful nation remember. God bless!" he concluded. Prior to the retirement of the colors, attendees joined in an inspirational chorus of "God Bless America."

Photo by Neil Jacobs

Home Buyer Beware

Veterans should be wary of banks that encourage skipping home payments

Dozens of form letters decrying efforts by VA to implement new rules regulating the Interest Rate Reduction Refinancing program have been pouring into the Washington office since last November according to the Economics Commission. Congress authorized this program as a way for veterans to refinance an existing VA guaranteed loan so as to obtain a lower interest rate, and thus a lower monthly payment.

At some point after the program was approved and initiated, some lenders began advertising a "money saving" method of refinancing. They advised veterans to begin skipping payments on the VA loan and when foreclosure was threatened, they offered refinancing at a lower rate with the refinanced loan containing the delinquent payments.

Some of these lenders also tacked on additional fees, late charges, service charges, etc. and rolled them into the principal of the new loan.

Frequently, this made the payments on the refinanced loan higher than the payments on the original loan. Many veterans then found themselves overextended and began missing payments.

"The rate of early foreclosures on IRRRL loans as compared with Non-IRRRL loans shows a steady rate of increase from 25 percent greater in '93 to 72 percent greater in 1997."
- John Brieden

"The VA Home Loan Guaranty Service noticed that a number of these refinanced loans were going into early foreclosure," said John Brieden, Chairman of the National Economics Commission. "The rate of early foreclosures on IRRRL loans as compared with non-IRRRL loans shows a steady rate of increase from 25 percent greater in 1993 to 72 percent greater in 1997. Indications are that this increase in foreclosure rates was the result of the lending practices described above."

The new regulation requires that any refinanced loan made to any veteran more than 30 days delinquent on a previous VA guaranteed loan would need VA approval, rather than allowing the lender to use the automatic approval authority.

This would allow the VA to screen refinanced loans for which an unscrupulous lender was advising veteran borrowers to skip payments. It would also allow the VA to approve those refinanced loans, which a veteran was using to actually lower payments, and prevent a foreclosure.

Conversations with HVAC staff, VA Home Loan Guaranty Staff, and Mortgage Bankers Association staff found no sentiment whatsoever for advising a veteran to skip payments.

Adjectives like "slimy," "sleazy," "dubious" and others were used to describe these lenders who use this technique. Even the mortgage bankers did not approve of the practice. It should be noted that the Mortgage Bankers Association commented on the proposed rule with a recommendation that the 30-day requirement be extended to 59 days.

The final rule was published with the 30-day requirement. House Veterans' Affairs Committee staff faulted the VA for not acting more expeditiously in promulgating the rule.

One lender affected by the rule orchestrated a letter writing campaign to the VA objecting to the rule as a reduction of veterans' benefits. The Home Loan Guaranty Service received over 12,000 letters.

That lender apparently orchestrated another campaign to try and get The American Legion and most probably other veterans organizations to intervene with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in an attempt to keep him from signing off on the regulation. The letters received by the Washington Office are apparently part of that effort.

The new regulation is not a reduction of a benefit, but rather, an attempt on the part of the VA to stop what is, at best, an unethical lending practice, which hurts veteran borrowers.

Ending the practice seems to be the most expeditious method of preventing the practice in the future while at the same time doing the least harm to veterans who are facing foreclosure for some legitimate reason.

On May 17, Mortgage Investors Corporation, the group who apparently orchestrated the letter writing filed for a temporary restraining order to prevent the rule from going into effect.

On May 28 the Department of Justice filed a response on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

On June 7 the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit denied the temporary restraining order and the new regulation went into effect. A trial on the merits of the regulation will probably be held early next year.

"I am hopeful to get enough people knowledgeable on the subject to address any concerns, which may arise on the floor of our Convention."
- John Brieden

On Saturday, September 4, the Economic Commission heard an address from Keith Pedigo, Director of the Loan Guaranty Service. He spoke on the subject of Interest Rate Reduction Refinancing and the reasons for the new regulations.

The Convention Committee on Economics recommended a resolution which will "support any legislative or administrative efforts that will improve and strengthen the Loan Guaranty Service's ability to serve America's veterans" for approval.

"I am hopeful to get enough people knowledgeable on the subject to address any concerns, which may arise on the floor of our Convention," said Brieden.

"I have been kept informed of the progress of this issue since early this year," Brieden added.

"I will be prepared to argue in favor of the Economic resolution and against any resolution calling for the VA to rescind the new regulation, should such a resolution be proposed during the Convention."

Children & Youth, Americanism parade champs

Legionnaires milling about the Hilton's lobby Saturday may have caught an interesting sight. Dr. Randall Lange, a veterinarian from Knoxville, Tenn., was accompanied by Josh - the star golden retriever of "Josh and Friends." The doctor and the famous dog were guests during the joint meeting of the Americanism and Children & Youth commissions and part of its parade of stars.

Along with the likes of Steve Young, quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers and Mary Lou Retton, Olympic gold medalist, Dr. Lange and Josh are part of the Children's Miracle Network "Parade of Champions."

During their presentation, they provided a brief overview of their program which is designed to help children overcome fears associated with surgery. A portion of the proceeds from the sales of their stuffed dog and children's book will benefit local children's hospitals.

CMN's Director of Associations LaMar Williams updated attendees on the Legion's contributions. Last year, the Legion family raised $250,000 for local children's hospitals.

"Our partnership with CMN is a natural for the Legion family," said Elmer Fuhrhop, Chairman of the Children and Youth Commission. "It allows us to help children who might not otherwise receive critical medical attention."

The Spinoza Buddy Bear knows a few things about soothing children who are in the hospital. Kristy Rockwell of the Spinoza Company, gave a presentation on the comfort the Buddy Bears have brought to terminally ill children. The cuddly bear has special cassette tapes which provide the child continuous companionship during their stay.

Posts were encouraged to continue to support this activity in promoting peace of mind for terminally ill children in their communities.

Continuing the parade, the Americanism Commission had their youth champions step up to the podium. Chad Opel, 1998 American Legion Baseball Player of the Year; Crystal Dove, Junior Shooting Sports Champion; Ryan Rippel, Boys Nation President; and Kevin Sladek, Oratorical Contest Champion.

Saturday's session concluded with the judging of the Regional Children & Youth Awards and the Regional and National Chairman of the Year Competition.

The winners are as follows:

National Chairman of the Year: Lou Dimmerman, Ohio.

Regional Chairman of the Year:

Region 2 - Clarence Walton, W. Va.;

Region 3 - Dennis Boland, Fla.

Region 5 - Lou Dimmerman, Ohio

Region 6 - Ed Gillund, Minn.

Region 7 - Dan DuMiller, Colo.

Region 8 - Charles Van Gordon, Mont.

Regional C&Y Awards: Region 1: Category II - Ramsdell-Roger Post 56, York Beach, Maine.

Region 2:Category II - Sussex Post 8, Georgetown Del.

Region 3: Category I - Delano Post 122, Bay Pines, Fla.; Category II - Wodworth-Webb Post 293, Interlachen, Fla.; Category III - Dena-Howard-Weekley Post 130, Labelle, Fla.; Category IV - Makinson-Carson Post, 10 Kissimmee, Fla.

Region 4: Category II-Claude Sims Unit 68, Brinkley, Ark.; Category III - Post 20, Russelville, Ark.

Region 5: Category III-Mt Carmel Post 72, Cincinnati, Ohio; Category IV - Harry Ollrich Post & Unit 4, Mount Clemens, Mich.

Region 7: Category II - San Diego Post & Unit 6, San Diego, Calif.; Category III - Perris Post 595, Perris Calif.; Category IV - Post & Unit 741, Camarillo, Calif.

Region 8 Category I - Pioneer Post 149, Salem, Ore.; Category II - Fredrick & John Ravin Post 134, Portland, Ore.; Category IV - Santiam Post 51, Lebanon, Ore.

Call to Action Rally

"Fight For What's Right: Duty, Honor, Country," a call-to-action assembly, will be held today from 11:30 a.m. to 1: p.m., in the Pacific Ballroom, Section B of the Anaheim Hilton.

There are three important issues which require the immediate attention of all members of The American Legion family national levels. Those issues are: passage of the flag-protection constitutional amendment; funding for increased readiness, improved benefits and other recruitment and retention incentives to make the U.S. military second to none; and increase funding for VA for fiscal 2000 to avoid the necessity of closing facilities or turning away veteran patients.

The entire Legion family is encouraged to attend. It will be an informative session, detailing what we can do to affect these vitally important issues with their state, local and national officials.

37th President analyzed

Executive director of Nixon Library addresses Legion National Historian's luncheon

The Vietnam War would have ended much differently had it not been for Watergate, one of President Nixon's former aides said at the Legion National Historian's luncheon Sunday.

John H. Taylor, the executive director of the Richard Nixon Library & Birthplace Foundation, said that Nixon believed the United States could arm and train the South Vietnamese to defend themselves.

"After the Communists violated the terms of the Paris Peace agreement, Nixon was unable to get the support he needed from Congress to bomb the North. What changed the complexion of the situation was Watergate," he said.

Taylor, who joined the former president's staff in 1980, was the guest speaker at the luncheon. He told the audience of about 70 that Nixon had inherited the failed Vietnam policy of his two predecessors.

"The second Richard Nixon lifted his hand off the Bible in 1969, he became responsible for 545,000 young Americans. Two prior presidents and four prior Congresses asked to fund this war. Richard Nixon stayed (in the war) for four years because he believed he could arm and train the Vietnamese to defend themselves." Taylor described Nixon as a "centrist Republican."

"He was a president who launched a war on cancer, started the EPA and desegregated society," Taylor continued. "He also gave us wage and price controls, a decision he later regretted and admitted it was a socially leftist policy."

John H. Taylor

Photo by Tom Strattman

Nixon, according to Taylor, often advised would-be congressional candidates to only run for political office 'because you want to do something, not be somebody.'

"Eleanor Roosevelt wrote a commentary which suggested that some of the wartime economic restrictions be kept in place after World War II.

"That was one of the things that inspired Nixon and other Republicans to enter politics. The Republicans believed in economic freedom and thought she was wrong."

Taylor also said Nixon recognized the serious threat posed by international communism.

"So many Americans hated Nixon because they believed (accused spy) Alger Hiss was unfairly prosecuted.

"A year after Richard Nixon's death, a new report proved that Alger Hiss was a notorious spy and Richard Nixon was right."

Taylor invited Legionnaires attending the Convention to visit the Nixon Library. "We are just 15 minutes from Anaheim and right now have a special exhibition about POWs who were held in Hanoi."

Robert L. Klipstine, National Historian for The American Legion, thanked Taylor for addressing the luncheon. "I told John that we didn't have a huge budget, but he came as a volunteer to be with us."

Donations gladly accepted

WWII Memorial funds will be collected

Excitement at the Convention is mounting as the number of donations increases to help The American Legion raise the needed funds to build the long overdue National World War II memorial.

During the Convention session on Wednesday, from 2 to 2:30 p.m., Departments will be able to come to the podium at the invitation of National Commander Miller to make their donations.

Many Departments have sizable amounts of WWII money "in the bank" aging and drawing interest, but the National Convention would be an ideal opportunity for every Department to step forward to let their delegates and all Legionnaires know how much money has already accumulated.

We will gladly take checks and pledges.

Get your *Dispatch*!

This year's subscription for 22 exciting issues of the *Dispatch* can be requested at the National Headquarter's Office, *The American Legion Magazine* cubicle, located in the Anaheim Room of the Convention Center. Those wanting to receive copies need only fill out an address card to receive the bill in the mail.