

PROCEEDINGS
of the
115TH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS
OF THE UNITED STATES
(SUMMARY OF MINUTES)

St. Louis, Missouri
July 20 – 23, 2014



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**NATIONAL ENCAMPMENTS OF VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS;
PROCEEDINGS
PRINTED ANNUALLY FOR CONGRESS**

The proceedings of the national encampments of the United Spanish War Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Veterans of World War I of the United States, Incorporated, the Disabled American Veterans, and the AMVETS (American Veterans of World War II), respectively, shall be printed annually, with accompanying illustrations, as separate House documents of the session of the Congress to which they may be submitted.

[Approved October 2, 1968.]

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES,
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
May, 2015

Honorable John Boehner
The Speaker U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In conformance with the provisions of Public Law No. 620, 90th Congress, approved October 22, 1968, I am transmitting to you herewith the proceedings of the 115th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in St. Louis, Missouri, July 20-23, 2014, which is submitted for printing as a House document.

Sincerely,



John E. Hamilton
Adjutant General

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**COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS
OF THE UNITED STATES**

(Including societies that amalgamated to form Veterans of Foreign Wars)

The Veterans of Foreign Service and the Army of the Philippines amalgamated at Denver, CO, August 1913, forming the Veterans of Foreign Wars as it is today. However, the birth of the order dates from September 29, 1899, when the first national officers were elected and the eligibility clause adopted. The original chapter was granted October 11, 1899.

* indicates deceased

American Veterans of Foreign Service

1899-1900	James C. Putnam*	.....Elected at Columbus, Ohio.
1900-1901	Maj. Will S. White*	.....Elected at Columbus, Ohio.
1901-1902	Maj. Will S. White*	.....Elected at Columbus, Ohio.
1902-1903	James Romanis* ...	Elected at Washington Courthouse, Ohio.
1903-1904	James Romanis*	.....Elected at Cincinnati, Ohio.
1904-1905	James Romanis*	.....Elected at Cincinnati, Ohio.
1905-1906	George Metzger*	.....Elected at Altoona, Pennsylvania.
1906-1907	Charles H. Devereaux*	.....Elected at Cincinnati, Ohio.
1907-1908	David T. Nevin*	.....Elected at James Exposition Grounds, Virginia.
1908-1909	J. Alfred Judge*	.....Elected at Lebanon, Pennsylvania.
1909-1910	J. Alfred Judge*	.....Elected at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
1910-1911	Robert J. Woodside*	.....Elected at Jersey City, New Jersey.
1911-1912	Robert J. Woodside*	...Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1912-1913	Robert J. Woodside*	.....Elected at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**American Veterans of Foreign Service
(Eastern Branch)**

1903-1904	Capt. Robert S. Hansburg *	Elected at Altoona, Pennsylvania.
1904-1905	H.O. Kelly *	.....Elected at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
(The above two organizations amalgamated September 1905, at Altoona, Pennsylvania.)		

Army of the Philippines

1900-1901	Gen. Francis V. Greene *	.....Elected at Denver, Colorado.
1901-1902	Gen. Irving Hale *	.....Elected at Salt Lake City, Utah.

1902-1903	Gen. Irvin Hale *	Elected at Council Bluffs, Iowa.
1903-1904	Gen. Charles King *	Elected at St. Paul, Minnesota.
1904-1905	Gen. Wilder S. Metcalf *	Elected at St. Louis, Missouri.
1905-1906	Col. Alfred S. Frost *	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1906-1907	Gen. Arthur MacArthur *	Elected at Des Moines, Iowa.
1907-1908	Capt. H.A. Crow *	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri.
1908-1909	Maj. P.J.H. Farrell *	Elected at Galesburg, Illinois.
1909-1910	Col. Charles L. Jewett *	Elected at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
1910-1911	A. H. Anderson *	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1911-1912	F. Warner Karling *	Elected at Detroit, Michigan.
1912-1913	F. Warner Karling *	Elected at Lincoln, Nebraska.

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

1913-1914	Rice W. Means*	Elected at Denver, Colorado.
1914-1915	Thomas Crago *	Elected at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.
1915-1916	Gus Hartung*	Elected at Detroit, Michigan.
1916-1917	Albert Rabin*	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1917-1918	William Ralston*	Elected at New York, New York.
1918-1919	F. Warner Karling*	Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1919-1920	F. Warner Karling*	Elected at Providence, Rhode Island.
1920-1921	Robert G. Woodside*	Elected at Washington, D.C.
1921-1922	Robert G. Woodside*	Elected at Detroit, Michigan.
1922-1923	Tillinghast Huston*	Elected at Seattle, Washington.
1923-1924	Gen. Lloyd M. Brett*	Elected at Norfolk, Virginia.
1924-1925	John H. Dunn*	Elected at Atlantic City, New Jersey.
1925-1926	Fred Stover*	Elected at Tulsa, Oklahoma.
1926-1927	Theodore Stitt*	Elected at El Paso, Texas.
1927-1928	Frank T. Strayer*	Elected at Providence, Rhode Island.
1928-1929	Eugene P. Carver*	Elected at Indianapolis, Indiana.
1929-1930	Kezekiah N. Duff*	Elected at St. Paul, Minnesota.
1930-1931	Paul C. Wolman*	Elected at Baltimore, Maryland.
1931-1932	Darold D. DeCoe*	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri.
1932-1933	Adm. Robert E. Coontz*	Elected at Sacramento, California.
1933-1934	James E. Van Zandt*	Elected at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
1934-1935	James E. Van Zandt*	Elected at Louisville, Kentucky.
1935-1936	James E. Van Zandt*	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1936-1937	Bernard W. Kearny*	Elected at Denver, Colorado.
1937-1938	Scott P. Squyres*	Elected at Buffalo, New York.
1938-1939	Eugene I. Van Antwerp*	Elected at Columbus, Ohio.
1939-1940	Otis N. Brown*	Elected at Boston, Massachusetts.
1940-1941	Joseph C. Menendez*	Elected at Los Angeles, California.

1941-1942	Max Singer*	Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1942-1943	Robert T. Merrill*	Elected at Cincinnati, Ohio.
1943-1944	Carl S. Schoeninger*	Elected at New York, New York.
1944-1945	Jean A. Brunner*	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1945-1946	Joseph M. Stack*	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1946-1947	Louis E. Starr*	Elected at Boston, Massachusetts.
1947-1948	Ray H. Brannaman*	Elected at Cleveland, Ohio.
1948-1949	Lyall T. Beggs *	Elected at St. Louis, Missouri.
1949-1950	Clyde A. Lewis*	Elected at Miami, Florida.
1950-1951	Charles C. Ralls*	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1951-1952	Frank C. Hilton*	Elected at New York, New York.
1952-1953	James W. Cothran*	Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1953-1954	Wayne E. Richards*	Elected at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
1954-1955	Merton B. Tice*	Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1955-1956	Timothy J. Murphy*	Elected at Boston, Massachusetts.
1956-1957	Cooper T. Holt*	Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1957-1958	Richard L. Roudebush*	Elected at Miami Beach, Florida.
1958-1959	John W. Mahan*	Elected at New York, New York.
1959-1960	Louis G. Feldmann*	Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1960-1961	T.C. Connell*	Elected at Detroit, Michigan.
1961-1962	Robert E. Hansen	Elected at Miami Beach, Florida.
1962-1963	Byron B. Gentry*	Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1963-1964	Joseph J. Lombardo*	Elected at Seattle, Washington.
1964-1965	John A. Jenkins*	Elected at Cleveland, Ohio.
1965-1966	Andy Borg*	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1966-1967	Leslie M. Fry*	Elected at New York, New York.
1967-1968	Joseph A. Scerra*	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1968-1969	Richard W. Homan*	Elected at Detroit, Michigan.
1969-1970	Raymond A. Gallagher*	Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1970-1971	Herbert R. Rainwater*	Elected at Miami Beach, Florida.
1971-1972	Joseph L. Vicites*	Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1972-1973	Patrick E. Carr*	Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1973-1974	Ray R. Soden*	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1974-1975	John J. Stang	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1975-1976	Thomas C. Walker*	Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1976-1977	R. D. Smith Jr.	Elected at New York, New York.
1977-1978	Dr. John Wasyluk	Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1978-1979	Eric Sandstrom*	Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1979-1980	Howard E. Vander Clute Jr.*	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1980-1981	T. C. Selman*	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.

1980-1981	Arthur Fellwock.....	Succeeded T.C. Selman, Oct. 21, 1980.
1980-1981	Arthur Fellwock.....	Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1982-1983	James R. Currieo.....	Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1983-1984	Clifford G. Olson Jr.	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1984-1985	Billy Ray Cameron	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1985-1986	John S. Staum	Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1986-1987	Norman G. Staab	Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1987-1988	Earl L. Stock*	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1988-1989	Larry W. Rivers.....	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1989-1990	Walter G. Hogan.....	Elected at Las Vegas, Nevada.
1990-1991	James L. Kimery*	Elected at Baltimore, Maryland.
1991-1992	Robert E. Wallace.....	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1992-1993	John M. Carney	Elected at Indianapolis, Indiana.
1993-1994	George R. Cramer	Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1994-1995	Allen F. "Gunner" Kent	Elected at Las Vegas, Nevada.
1995-1996	Paul A. Spera.....	Elected at Phoenix, Arizona.
1996-1997	James E. Nier	Elected at Louisville, Kentucky.
1997-1998	John E. Moon	Elected at Salt Lake City, Utah.
1998-1999	Thomas A. Pouliot.....	Elected at San Antonio, Texas.
1999-2000	John W. Smart.....	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri.
2000-2001	John F. Gwizdak.....	Elected at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
2001-2002	James N. Goldsmith*	Elected at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
2002-2003	Raymond C. Sisk*	Elected at Nashville, Tennessee.
2003-2004	Edward S. Banas, Sr.....	Elected at San Antonio, Texas.
2004-2005	John Furgess	Elected at Cincinnati, Ohio.
2005-2006	James R. Mueller	Elected at Salt Lake City, Utah.
2006-2007	Gary L. Kurpius	Elected at Reno, Nevada.
2007-2008	George J. Lisicki	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri.
2008-2009	Glen M. Gardner, Jr.	Elected at Orlando, Florida.
2009-2010	Thomas J. Tradewell, Sr.	Elected at Phoenix, Arizona.
2010-2011	Richard L. Eubank	Elected at Indianapolis, Indiana.

VFW NATIONAL OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS, 2013-2014

Commander-in-Chief	William A. Thien
Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief	John W. Stroud
Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief	John A. Biedrzycki, Jr.
Adjutant General	John E. Hamilton
Quartermaster General	Robert B. Greene
Judge Advocate General	Harold M. Burke, Jr.
Surgeon General	Peter T. Buchanan
National Chaplain.....	Robert H. Dickerson
National Chief of Staff.....	David G. Havelly

REGIONAL NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATION MEMBERS, 2013-2014

Department of Alabama	George Jones
Department of Alaska	Robert Myles
Department of Arizona	Timothy Borland
Department of Arkansas	Michael Nuckolls
Department of California	Denis Wells
Department of Colorado	Ronald Lattin
Department of Connecticut	Richard DiFederico
Department of Delaware	John Morrow
Department of District of Columbia	Herman Salley
Department of Europe	Peter Mascetti
Department of Florida	Allen Hall
Department of Georgia	Dean Smith
Department of Hawaii	Norbert Enos
Department of Idaho	John Crottinger
Department of Illinois	Jules Spindler
Department of Indiana	Richard Faulk
Department of Iowa	Darrell Blasberg

Department of Kansas	James J. T. Plummer
Department of Kentucky	Brian Duffy
Department of Latin America/Carib.....	Jose Claudio
Department of Louisiana	Federico Arends, III
Department of Maine	Raymond Lupo
Department of Maryland.....	Eugene Stewart
Department of Massachusetts.....	George Murray
Department of Michigan	Jack Pray
Department of Minnesota	Donald Nix
Department of Mississippi.....	Johnnie Richard
Department of Missouri	Jessie Jones
Department of Montana.....	Timothy Peters
Department of Nebraska	Dan Petersen
Department of Nevada.....	Herman Hagen, Jr.
Department of New Hampshire	Paul Lloyd
Department of New Jersey	Manuel Almeida
Department of New Mexico.....	Allan Kuchinsky
Department of New York	James McNally
Department of North Carolina	James Goins, Jr.
Department of North Dakota	Dale Ronning
Department of Ohio.....	Richard Uzl, Jr.
Department of Oklahoma	Harlan Bjorgo
Department of Oregon.....	Bert Key
Department of Pacific Areas.....	Gerald Kraus
Department of Pennsylvania	Robert Eiler
Department of Rhode Island	Allen Wagonblott, Jr.
Department of South Carolina.....	Frank Fogner
Department of South Dakota.....	Russel Dramstad
Department of Tennessee.....	John Scott
Department of Texas.....	Dennis Barber
Department of Utah	Brent Neilsen
Department of Vermont	Ronald Tallman
Department of Virginia	James Martin
Department of Washington	Jerry Herker
Department of West Virginia.....	Charles Haney
Department of Wisconsin	Allen Kochenderfer
Department of Wyoming	James Pedersen
Immediate Past Commander-in-Chief.....	John E. Hamilton

NATIONAL CONVENTION COMMITTEE

July 20 - 24, 2013, Louisville, Kentucky

Convention Committee Chairman.....	Carl Kaelin
Medical - Health Fair Chairman	Martha Cassity
Meeting Halls, Signs & Flags Co-Chairman	Lewie Cooper
Meeting Halls, Signs & Flags Co-Chairman	Billy Garwood
Assistant Adjutant General, Administration Operations	Jerry Newberry
Manager, Meetings & Events	Vanessa Kane, CMP, CMM
Memorial Service Chairman.....	David Graetz
Patriotic Rally Chairman	Mike Whitfield
Registration Chairman.....	John Ranson
Transportation Chairman	Jerry Kayrouz

NATIONAL HONOR GUARD

	POST NO.
Ronald Servary, Captain.....	521 MD
Eugene Daisey	5118 MD
Barbara Floyd	521 MD
Raymond Glock	1858 MD
Gary Lee	609 VA
Charles McConville	521 MD
Stephen Olcott.....	9619 MD
Henry Servary	521 MD
Alfred Simmons	8509 MD
Clinton Slack	475 DE
Edward Smith.....	838 DE

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

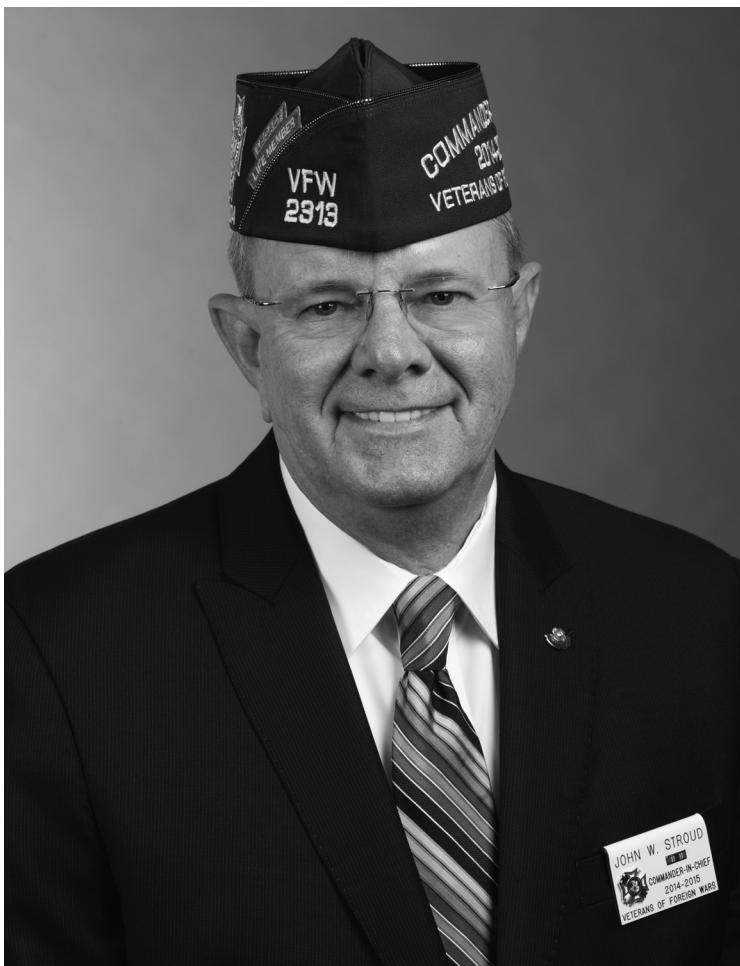
Bryan P. O'Brien.....	2394 MA
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NATIONAL ASSISTANT SERGEANTS-AT-ARMS

Joy Ausman.....	10043 ID
Gary W. Barringer.....	9134 NC
Lonnie Garza	7110 TX
George Lott.....	10152 NJ
Keith MacDonald.....	2275 CA
Joseph P. Schirmers.....	4847 MN



William A. Thien
Commander-in-Chief
2013-2014



John W. Stroud
Commander-in-Chief
2014-2015

VFW NATIONAL OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS, 2014-2015

Commander-in-Chief	John W. Stroud
Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief	John A. Biedrzycki, Jr.
Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief	Brian Duffy
Adjutant General	John E. Hamilton
Quartermaster General	Robert B. Greene
Judge Advocate General	Daniel J. Nail
Surgeon General	Robert Lane, Jr., DMD
National Chaplain.....	Charlene K. Cobb
National Chief of Staff.....	Merlin B. Hollinger
Inspector General	Raymond K. Thomas
Assistant Adjutant General &	
Executive Director, Washington Office	Robert E. Wallace
Assistant Adjutant General, Operations.....	Jerry L. Newberry
Assistant Quartermaster General	John R. Muckelbauer
Director, Administrative Operations.....	David Prohaska
Associate Director, Administrative Operations	Zach Schwenk
Associate Director, Administrative Operations	Johnathan Duncan
Director, Communications & Public Affairs, Washington	Joseph E. Davis
Director, Human Resources	Debra L. Anderson
Director, Membership	Robert A. Crider
Deputy Director, Membership	Rick L. Butler
Associate Director, Membership	Corey Q. Cornett
Director, National Legislative Service	Raymond C. Kelley
Director, National Veterans Service	William L. Bradshaw
Deputy Director, National Veterans Service	Gerald T. Manar
Deputy Director, National Veterans Service	Ryan Gallucci
Director of Operations	Patrick J. Botbyl
Director, Programs	Kevin C. Jones
Director, VFW Properties	Billy R. Weissend
Director, Publications and Editor-in-Chief, VFW magazine .	Richard K. Kolb

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATION MEMBERS, 2014-2015

Department of Alabama	George Jones
Department of Alaska	Robert Myles
Department of Arizona	Timothy Borland
Department of Arkansas.....	Terry Callahan
Department of California	Denis Wells
Department of Colorado	Ronald Lattin
Department of Connecticut.....	Richard DiFederico
Department of Delaware.....	John Morrow

Department of District of Columbia	Herman Salley
Department of Europe	Peter Mascetti
Department of Florida	Daniel P. Duffy
Department of Georgia	Pledge M. Cannon, Sr.
Department of Hawaii	Norbert Enos
Department of Idaho	John Crotinger
Department of Illinois	Jules Spindler
Department of Indiana	Richard Faulk
Department of Iowa	Darrell Blasberg
Department of Kansas	J. T. Plummer
Department of Kentucky	Claud Wyatt
Department of Louisiana	Federico Arends
Department of Maine	Raymond Lupo
Department of Maryland	Eugene Stewart
Department of Massachusetts	George Murray
Department of Michigan	John Pray
Department of Minnesota	Donald Nix
Department of Mississippi	Johnnie Richard
Department of Missouri	Jessie Jones
Department of Montana	Timothy Peters
Department of Nebraska	Dan Petersen
Department of Nevada	Herman Hagen
Department of New Hampshire	Paul Lloyd
Department of New Jersey	Manuel Almeida
Department of New Mexico	Allan Kuchinsky
Department of New York	James McNally
Department of North Carolina	Jason Schoolcraft
Department of North Dakota	Dale Ronning
Department of Ohio	Richard Uzl
Department of Oklahoma	Donald Fenter
Department of Oregon	Bert Key
Department of Pacific Areas	Gerald Kraus
Department of Pennsylvania	Robert Eiler
Department of Rhode Island	Allen Wagonblott
Department of South Carolina	Melvin Gunter, Jr.
Department of South Dakota	Russel Dramstad
Department of Tennessee	Darryl McPheron
Department of Texas	Lazaro Velasques, Jr.
Department of Utah	Brent Neilsen
Department of Vermont	Ronald Tallman
Department of Virginia	Kim DeShano
Department of Washington	Jerry Herker

Department of West Virginia.....	Robert Caruthers
Department of Wisconsin	Allen Kochenderfer
Department of Wyoming	James Pedersen
Immediate Past Commander-in-Chief.....	William Thien

NATIONAL CONVENTION COMMITTEE
July 19 - 23, 2014, St. Louis, Missouri

Convention Committee Chairman	James Mueller
Health Fair Chairman.....	Deborah Halter
Meeting Halls, Signs & Flags Co-Chairman	Lewie Cooper
Meeting Halls, Signs & Flags Co-Chairman	Michael Key
Assistant Adjutant General, Administration Operations	Jerry Newberry
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Memorial Service Chairman.....	Kenneth Allison
Patriotic Rally Chairman	James Malson
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Ronald Servary, Captain.....	521 MD
Albert Brown	3792 DE
Jay Cabacar.....	5471 DC
Eugene Daisey	5118 MD
Barbara Floyd	521 MD
Raymond Glock.....	1858 MD
Gary Lee	609 VA
Alfred Simmons	8509 MD
Clinton Slack	475 DE
Edward Smith.....	838 DE

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

Bryan P. O'Brien.....	2394 MA
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NATIONAL ASSISTANT SERGEANTS-AT-ARMS

Joy Ausman	10043 ID
Gary W. Barringer.....	9134 NC
James Galen.....	6802 MI
Lonnie Garza	7110 TX
George Lott.....	10152 NJ

POST NO.

Keith MacDonald.....2275 CA
Joseph P. Schirmers.....4847 MN

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE 115th NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, JULY 20-23, 2014

ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE
SUNDAY, JULY 20, 2014

(The Memorial Service of the 115th Annual Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the America's Center Convention Complex, St. Louis, Missouri, was called to order at 8:30 o'clock a.m., with Commander-in-Chief William A. Thien presiding. The Gold Star Parents, Gold Star Wives, National Officers and Past National Chaplains were escorted by the Sergeants-at-Arms.)

CALL TO ORDER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Sergeants-at-Arms, you will prepare the hall for the advancement and posting of the Colors, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and the National Anthem.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BRYAN O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief. Captain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Honor Guard, advance, post and salute the Flag of the United States of America.

ADVANCE OF COLORS

(Whereupon, the VFW National Honor Guard Advanced, Posted and Saluted the Flag of the United States of America.)

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrades, Sisters and friends, please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag followed by our National Anthem, and then the Posting of the Colors.

(Whereupon, the Assembly gave the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the National Anthem sung by Julia Price, National Soloist, Ladies Auxiliary, and the Posting of the Colors.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Please remain standing for the Invocation by Chaplain Charles A. "Harry" Thomas, III.

INVOCATION

CHAPLAIN CHARLES H. "HARRY" THOMAS, III: Our Most Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for the grace that you showered upon this land and we praise you for the liberty to worship. We thank you for our rich heritage and continued blessings.

We remember those who gave their last full measure of devotion. You remind us in your words that we are to give honor to whom honor is due. Help and instill in us to never forget the cost to maintain freedom and who is truly in control of our lives.

We ask this in the name of the Trinity, God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Please be seated. The Central Choir will sing "Freedom's Song."

(Whereupon, the Central Baptist Church Choir sang "Freedom's Song".)

MEMORIAL RITUAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Comrades, Ladies of the Auxiliary and friends, we have met at this time to commemorate our comrades of the United States Armed Forces who have answered the final call. The VFW Ritual provides that the audience shall refrain from applauding. The Chief of Staff will see there is no disturbance during the ceremony.

NATIONAL CHIEF OF STAFF HAVELY: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, your order will be obeyed.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I now request that the National Chaplain preside.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am at your service and I shall endeavor to humbly perform this solemn duty in the spirit of faith, hope and charity.

Before I begin, let me say that we are really happy to see all of you here this morning to support our Memorial Service, and for those of you who haven't had the opportunity to do so, please make sure that you view the Memorial in the hallway. They are of our fallen comrades. That is the reason we are here this morning.

Again, we thank you for coming. We are going to begin by having the lighting of our POW-MIA candle, the Armed Forces Vigil Candle by the Commander-in-Chief and the National President of our Ladies Auxiliary.

O, God Almighty, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, some of our comrades and companions are Prisoners of War, Missing in Action. Comfort them, we pray.

In their isolation from their homes and their loved ones, supply their needs and protect them from all want and deprivation; strengthen and sustain them that they may face discouragement with courage and hardship with resolution. Grant that they may find patience to endure and peace in the knowledge of your continuing presence.

O, God, we ask that You will strengthen and protect all of our members of the Armed Forces of the United States of America. In the day of battle, may they be courageous and strong, resourceful and capable, resolute and victorious. In the time of peace, may they serve with dignity and honor as effective emissaries of goodwill for this Nation.

May their devotion and loyalty to You, to their homeland, inspire them in moments of challenge. Comfort them in tribulation and long separation from their loved ones. And finally, we ask that they be returned safely to serve You and our Country in the days and years to come. Let us say Amen.

At this time in the Memorial Service we are going to proceed with our Ritual ceremony.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, to whom should the true soldier look for help in the battles of life?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Comrade Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, what assurance have we of a prolonged stay among the scenes and activities of earth?

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF STROUD: For we are strangers before Thee and sojourners. As with all our fathers, our days on earth are the shadow, and there is none abiding.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Comrade Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, have you a message of condolence for those bereaved?

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BIDRCYCKI: I have. The Book of Life tells us that, "Like a father pitith his children, so the Lord pitith them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: What message has the Chaplain of the Ladies Auxiliary?

LADIES AUXILIARY CHAPLAIN COLETTE BISHOP: I have a message of hope that should inspire our comrades at this solemn moment and all through life. The message is from the Captain of our Salvation. He says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Comrades, we are thankful for these inspiring thoughts. Let us learn the lesson of the hour, which is that we, too, are nearing the end of life's pilgrimage and sooner or later these services may be held in our memory.

Let us so live that when our summons comes we may depart with a good conscience, in the comfort of a sincere religion, belief in God, and a perfect charity toward all mankind. Let us pray.

This morning, our Heavenly Father, we are thankful to you, to be alive in the land of the living and granted this opportunity to remember those who have given their all in the service of our country.

This morning I am mindful of the words that you spoke written in the Gospel of St. John, the 14th Chapter, as a means of comfort to those of us who yet remain.

"Let not your hearts be troubled, may the living be afraid. If you believe in God, believe also in Me. For in my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you.

"I go to prepare a place for you, and where I am there you may be also. If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall return again and receive you unto to myself." Let's say all Amen.

Our National Soloist of the Ladies Auxiliary will now sing that familiar song to all of us, "Sleep Soldier Boy."

(Whereupon, Ladies Auxiliary National Soloist, Julia Price, sang at this time "Sleep Soldier Boy.")

SYMBOLIC TRIBUTE

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Comrades, in commemorating the virtues of our departed heroes, who served their country in a time of need, we now offer our symbolic tributes.

I place upon our sacred shrine these red flowers, which symbolize the zeal of our departed comrades in upholding brotherhood, truth and justice.

Comrade Past Commander-in-Chief, what tribute have you to offer?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: These white flowers I place as a token of the purity of affection we have for our departed comrades.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Commander-in-Chief, have you a tribute to place upon this sacred shrine?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: The blue of our national standard symbolizes truth and fidelity. Therefore, I place these blue flowers from nature's bosom in token of our sincere respect for all of our departed comrades.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Madame President, Ladies of the Auxiliary, will you offer a tribute to the memory of our departed comrades?

LADIES AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT "SISSY" BOREL: I place upon our sacred shrine this wreath as a symbol of eternity. Its color bespeaks life everlasting. Thus, do we say that the deeds of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, on land, on sea and in the air, are immortalized in the hearts of a grateful people.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: We are really glad to have the Central Baptist Church Choir doing marvelous singing. They are going to sing one of my favorite hymns which is "Then Sings My Soul." Maybe we can sing with them.

(Whereupon, National Soloist Julia Price sang "Then Sings My Soul" at this time.)

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Let's say Amen for the choir. At this time our Commander-in-Chief will introduce the speaker.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce our speaker, Chaplain Robert H. "Bob" Dickerson. Robert H. "Bob" Dickerson was elected National Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States at the organization's 114th convention in Louisville, Kentucky, on July 24th, 2013.

Chaplain Dickerson served in the United States Army from 1971 to 1972 at the Republic of Vietnam Headquarters and Headquarters Company 145th Combat Aviation Battalion.

He also was at the 1st Aviation Battalion Headquarters.

In recognition of his service, he received the Bronze Star, the National Defense Medal, Meritorious Service Medal and Army Commendation Medal, among others.

He joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1993 at Post 2451 in El Paso, Texas. He maintains his life membership in Post 9186 in San Antonio, Texas.

He served as Post, District and Department Chaplain.

Chaplain Dickerson graduated from Webster University. He was ordained by Bethel Second Baptist Church in Las Cruces, New Mexico. He served as Chaplain at the Brooks Community Church on Brooks City Base in San Antonio for one year. He was minister to active-duty military, veterans and their families.

He is a life member of the Vietnam Veterans of America and the Disabled Veterans of America. He and his wife, Marion, reside in San Antonio.

Please join me in welcoming Chaplain Robert Dickerson.
(Applause)

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: National Commander-in-Chief Bill Thien, whom I've had the privilege to service with this past fiscal year, Distinguished Guests, Officers, Comrades, Auxiliary Members and Friends: It is indeed an honor and a pleasure to stand before you today to memorialize our fallen comrades.

I would like to begin with a story that was told of an elderly man named Charlie, who worked as a "Greeter" each morning at Wal-Mart. Charlie just couldn't seem to get to work on time. Every day he was five, ten, fifteen minutes late. But he was a good worker, really tidy, clean-shaven, sharp minded, and a real credit to the company, and obviously demonstrating Wal-Mart's "Older Person Friendly" policies.

One day the boss called Charlie into his office for a talk. "Charlie, I have to tell you, I like your work ethic, you do a bang-up job when you finally get here. But your being late so often is quite bothersome."

"Yes, sir, I understand your concern and I will try harder." Seeming puzzled, the manager went on to comment, "It's odd, though, your coming in late. I know you are retired from the Armed Forces. What did they say to you there if you showed up in the morning so late and so often?"

The old man chuckled quietly, then said with a grin, "Whenever I was late in the Navy, they usually saluted and said, 'Good morning, Admiral. Can I get you a cup of coffee, sir?'"

We gather here today, not to draw attention to ourselves, but to perpetuate the memory of our dead in accordance with our Congressional Charter. Beyond that Congressional mandate, however, we memorialize them from our hearts. We memorialize them because we "want to remember them" and the sacrifices that they made to our country.

The poem penned by Al Senteno captures the spirit of remembrance of our fallen comrades in simple words: Listen carefully:

"Who are these among us.

Like strangers in a foreign land.

Confused. Angry. Hurting. Striving for what?

We do not understand!

"Some seem hungry, others homeless.

Bodies scarred and wracked with pain.

Haunted. Frightened. Lonely faces,

Etched with sorrow and hurt remains.

"Could these be the ones who saved us?

Fought our battles far away?
Could they be the ones who gave us
The freedoms we enjoy today?
"Some young and some older.
Many seem so weak in frame.
Yet they stand so high above us
We can't help but feel some shame.
"Shame for sharing not their burden.
For not standing by their side
Helping them to fight their battles
With our gratitude and pride.
"As we look to our Creator
Let us heed his words and pray.
Give us hearts to share their sorrow
And the will to act today.
"Let us stand today in honor of those who gave their best
With a pledge and a purpose
To fight their cause and let them rest."

Although the poem, "A Tribute to Veterans" captures the sufferings of war, an article written by retired Colonel Cedusky for all branches of our military captures the pride of serving in uniform. It is entitled, "I was a Soldier." Hear the words:

"I was a soldier. That's the way it is, that's what we were . . . are. We put it simply without swagger, without any brag, in those plain four words.

"We speak them softly, just to ourselves. Others may have forgotten.

"They are a manifesto to mankind; speak those four words anywhere in the world – yes, anywhere – and many who hear will recognize their meaning.

"They are a pledge. A pledge that stems from a document which said: 'I solemnly swear,' 'to protect and defend' and goes on from there, and from a Flag called "Old Glory."

"Listen, and you can hear the voices echoing through them, words that sprang white-hot from bloody lips, shouts of 'Medic' whispers of 'Oh God' forceful words like 'Follow Me.' If you can't hear them, you weren't, if you can, you were.

"Don't give up the ship! Fight her till she dies..."

Do you remember The Devil Dogs, the Red Ball Express, the Sand Box? Some do, many have forgotten.

"You can hear the slow cadences at Gettysburg, or Arlington honoring but a Soldier, perhaps forgotten by his Nation.

"You can hear those echoes as you walk in a parade, go to The Wall, visit a VA hospital, hear the mournful sounds of TAPS, or gaze upon the white crosses, row upon row.

But they aren't just words, they're a way of life, a pattern of living, or a way of dying.

"They gave us the right to choose who shall run our government for us, the right to a secret vote that counts just as much as the next fellow's in the final tally; and the obligation to use that right and guard it and keep it clean.

They provide the right to hope, to dream, to pray; the obligation to serve.

These are some of the meanings of those four words, meanings we don't often stop to tally up or even list.

"Only in the stillness of a moonless night, or in the quiet of a Sunday afternoon, or in the thin dawn of a new day, when our world is close about us, do they rise up in our memories and stir in our sentient hearts.

"And we are remembering Iwo Jima, Wake Island, Bataan, Inchon, and Chu Lai, and Benning, Great Lakes and Paris Island, Travis, Chanute, Bagdad, Kabul, Kuwait City, and many other places long forgotten by our civilian friends.

They are plain words, those four. Simple words.

"You could carve them on stone; you could carve them on the mountain ranges.

"You could sing them, to the tune of 'Yankee Doodle.'

"But you needn't. You needn't do any of those things, for those words are graven in the hearts of Veterans, they are familiar to 24 million tongues, every sound and every syllable. If you must write them, put them on my Stone.

"But when you speak them, speak them softly, proudly, I will hear you, for I too, I was a soldier. I am a Veteran."

As I progress now towards the close of my memorial message memorializing our departed comrades, Colonel Cedusky speaks to the pride of a solder, however, the Bible speaks to the humility of a soldier. That soldier was a centurion who ranked between an officer and a noncommissioned officer, somewhat equivalent to that of a modern day Sergeant Major.

The solder met a man whom the Bible portrays as one who performed many miracles. Listen to the account contained in the Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 8, verses 5 through 13:

"And when the (Miracle Worker) saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

"The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

"For I am a man under authority, I have soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

"When the (Miracle Worker) heard it, he marveled and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven.

"But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"And the (Miracle Worker) said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour."

As I close this morning, listen to the words of our memorial poem contained in our VFW Ritual Manual penned by Canadian Physician Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae who treated the wounded and dying soldiers in the Belgian Forest during World War I. Listen as he describes the explosion of poppies rising from the freshly dug graves where Soldiers slept:

“Behold; the spirit of a departed comrade
In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly.
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved and now we lie in Flanders Fields.
Sleep on, brave soldiers, sleep, sleep where the poppies grow,
Sleep on, brave soldiers, sleep in your places, row on row.
The lark’s still roaring in the sky
Still bravely singing, soaring high
Away above the cannon’s roar
Scarce heard amid the guns and yore, before you slept in
Flanders Fields.
The faith with you we’ve kept and battled with the foe
On crimson fields by you we’ve slept
Where poppies blow.
The torch you flung to us we caught;
With blistering hands we’ve bravely fought
To hold it high
To guard you through the night
And at the dawn to guide you to the light
When you awake from Flanders Fields.”
Let us say Amen.
I will be followed by Julia Price, who will come and sing our
final hymn, “I Will Find You Again.”
(Whereupon, Ladies Auxiliary National Soloist Julia Price sang
“I Will Find You Again.”)

BENEDICTION

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: In the close of our Memorial Service, I am going to invite the State Chaplain, Deborah Halter, to come and render the Benediction.

COMRADE HALTER: O, Mighty God, remember those today, all those that have gone before us. Their duty, their honor and their lives are precious gifts, given to the future of our country and our families.

The duty of our Veterans, past and present, is the fiber of the word freedom, and it is made stronger by our recognition of their service and sacrifice that we honor now.

Today we stand to remember those who have passed from us, and know we must continue to carry the burden of their sacrifices. Least we lose sight of what freedom is.

Today is for remembering. We stand and honor them. Walk in their path of duty and to remember the thoughts and to hold in our hearts the cost of freedom. We remember those comrades that have left our ranks and may hold up their memory to those who follow so they know and they honor.

For them and their families, we pray for strength and courage in the silence of this moment. We dedicate ourselves anew to our God and to our country. Amen.

RETIRING OF COLORS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: National Sergeant-at-Arms, please prepare the hall for the Retiring of the Colors.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Commander-in Chief. Captain of the National VFW Honor Guard, advance and retire colors of the Flag of the United States of America.

(Whereupon, the Retiring of the Colors was had at this time.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We want to acknowledge and thank all of the participants who contributed to making this program a success.

National Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the Gold Star Families, Past National Chaplains and Honored Guests from the room.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: National Sergeant-at-Arms, fall out and escort the Gold Star Parents and Families, and the Past National Chaplains from the hall.

(Whereupon, the Gold Star Families and Past Chaplains are escorted from the hall.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: This concludes our Memorial Service. Thank you for your attendance.

(Whereupon, the Memorial Service was concluded at 9:45 o'clock a.m.)

JOINT OPENING SESSION MONDAY, JULY 21, 2014

(The Joint Opening Session of the 115th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the 101st National Convention of the Ladies Auxiliary, held in the America's Center Convention Complex, St. Louis, Missouri, was called to order on Monday, July 21, 2014, at 8:00 o'clock a.m., by Adjutant General John Hamilton.)

CALL TO ORDER

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Joint Opening Session of the 115th VFW National Convention. I am John Hamilton, Adjutant General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

To kick things off this morning, I would like to start by thanking our sponsors as they are identified on the large screen. Without their generosity, this year's convention would not have been possible. Special appreciation goes to our primary supporters: Budweiser, Burger King, Defense Mobil, Heroes with Hearing Loss, Humana, Sport Clips and USAA.

With us this morning are representatives from the 2013-2014 Outstanding Community Service Posts. Please stand as a group and be recognized. Thank you very much for your service. (Applause)

This year, 238 Commanders have earned the right to be named All-American. There are 11 Department Commanders, 30 District Commanders and 197 Post Commanders to be honored, and those in attendance will be presented their awards later this morning. Commanders, please stand so we can properly thank you for the excellent work you so well performed this past year. (Applause)

I have a couple of brief announcements before we proceed. As most of you probably know by now, we have a new and exciting event planned for tomorrow night that will take the place of the Annual Patriotic Rally. It is a very special event for VFW and Ladies Auxiliary members, our family, friends and supporters only. In a huge display of support for veterans, Budweiser and the VFW have teamed up to host the Military Salute Parade and a Patriotic Celebration in honor of you, our Convention attendees.

So, as our special guests, we are asking you to join the parade lineup on the south side of the Convention Center tomorrow, no later than 4:30 p.m. From there, we will head to Soldier's Memorial, about a mile away, where we will have free food, drinks and entertainment for you all. I guarantee it's going to be a lot of fun. You won't want to miss it. Since the event is closed to the public, we will be distributing admittance wristbands during tomorrow's business sessions. Children will not need a wristband, but must be accompanied by an adult. Also, all meetings tomorrow will conclude in enough time to allow everyone to join us. Again, meet on the south side of the Convention Center no later than 4:30 p.m.

Also, once again this year, Humana has generously pledged to donate \$1.00 for every 200 steps we take at this Convention to VFW's

National Veterans Service. If we can hit seven million steps collectively, they'll donate \$25,000 to the program.

Be sure to stop by the Humana Booth No. 47 to get your free pedometer. Wear it, and then report your total steps back to Humana before you leave every day, but no later than 3:00 o'clock p.m. Tuesday afternoon.

And finally, I received a call from a good friend to the VFW last night, and he asks that I share a message with you. Please dim the lights.

(Whereupon, greetings from Lou Diamond Phillips was shown at this time.)

Now, please join me in welcoming this year's Convention Chairman, James Mueller.

REMARKS BY JAMES MUELLER, CHAIRMAN OF THE VFW 115TH NATIONAL CONVENTION COMMITTEE

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MUELLER: Good morning, Comrades and Sisters. I am pleased to welcome you as this year's Convention Chairman and not only welcome you to the Convention, but also to my home state, the great "Show Me State" of Missouri.

We sincerely hope that the time you spend with us here this week is enjoyable and that you leave here with a great sense of pride in belonging to our wonderful organizations.

Our Conventions serve to reinforce our commitment to America's veterans and military, and bring new excitement to our work as members of the VFW and its Ladies Auxiliary.

Please rise as we officially open the Convention with the advancing of the Colors.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Captain of the Honor Guard, please advance, post and salute the flag of the United States of America, the Colors.

ADVANCEMENT OF COLORS

(Whereupon, the Colors were advanced at this time by the Honor Guard.)

INVOCATION

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MUELLER: For this morning's Invocation, we will have the National Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, Robert Dickerson. Please, then, remain standing as we recite the Pledge of Allegiance, led by the Sergeant-at-Arms, and the National Anthem will be sung by Julia Price, the Ladies Auxiliary National Soloist, and for the posting of the Colors.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for allowing us to convene our National Convention. We realize that without you, we can do nothing. We thank you for the safe arrival of our members and friends. We ask your continued blessings upon our President, elected officials, troops, veterans and our country. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

(Whereupon, the Pledge of Allegiance was given, followed by the singing of the National Anthem by Soloist Julia Price and then the posting of the Colors.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Commander, your orders have been obeyed.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MUELLER: Thank you. Now, please dim the lights for a special presentation.

VIDEO PRESENTATION

(Whereupon, a video on the 2014 year was shown at this time.)

INTRODUCTION OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MUELLER: I now have the distinct pleasure of introducing a gentleman who has served veterans for many years, as well as this organization in a multitude of responsibilities, and is now our Commander-in-Chief.

William A. "Bill" Thien was elected Commander-in-Chief of the VFW on July 24, 2013, at the VFW's 114th National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky.

Comrade Thien served in the United States Navy from 1969-1974, and served five years in the Indiana National Guard. His decorations include the Vietnam Service Medal with three stars, the Vietnam Campaign Medal with 1960 bar, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal-Korea, National Defense Service Medal, and several from National Guard.

He joined the VFW in 1971 at Post 3281 in New Albany, Indiana, where he maintains his Gold Legacy Life Membership. He has served the VFW in many leadership positions, including All-American Post Commander, All-State District Commander, and All-American State Commander.

He has also held positions on numerous National committees, including Vice Chairman of Citizenship Education and Community Service, and as Chairman of National Scholarship and Recognition. Commander-in-Chief Thien attended Indiana State University Southeast, and retired from Duke Energy.

He is a member of the American Legion, DAV, Veterans of Vietnam War, Incorporated, the National Rifle Association, Patriot Guard Riders, Military Order of the Cootie Pup Tent 51, and the VFW National Home Board.

Please welcome our National Commander-in-Chief, Bill Thien.
(Applause)

(Whereupon, the Convention badge, bell and gavel were presented to Commander-in-Chief Thien by Past Commander-in-Chief Mueller.)

REMARKS BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you so much. Good morning.

Before I get started, I want to say that as I look out among all of the Comrades and Sisters in attendance today, I am humbled. Having had the tremendous opportunity to lead you and serve you over the past year, I can say that without a doubt, you are all among the most selfless and generous people that I have ever had the privilege of meeting.

I look out among you, veterans, supporters, loved ones and friends, I'm filled with a renewed sense of pride in you all and in our organization.

It's because of your service, your sacrifice, that we're able to conduct this Convention. You know the cost of freedom, and I thank each of you for all you have done to ensure our freedom lives on.

And to those currently serving, away from family and friends, I would like to publicly thank you for the sacrifices you are making, and please know that the VFW is here to support you.

What we do on behalf of veterans, service members and their families is nothing short of awesome. Time and time again, over the past year, I have heard directly from those that we've helped when they needed it most, and certainly those who deserved it most. And, Comrades and Sisters, I couldn't be more proud of our VFW.

I owe each of you my gratitude for all you do. There is not enough time to thank each of you individually and personally for what you have done for me over the past year, but you should know that I am especially grateful to all who encouraged me, allowed me to succeed, served as role models and inspired me, those who welcomed and befriended me, those who reminded me of my purpose as VFW Commander-in-Chief.

Comrades and Sisters, as evidenced by the video we just watched a few minutes ago, we have accomplished much together this year.

I am extremely fortunate to have had the distinctive honor of being entrusted with your confidence. I have valued the responsibility you placed upon me and the level of accountability to which you have held me.

This leadership experience has taught me much and will stay with me for the remainder of my life.

In a few days, I will pass the mantle of leadership on to our esteemed Comrade, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief John Stroud. I am confident that under his leadership, the VFW will continue to succeed in its mission.

I have many people to thank for helping me to lead all of you in our success this year.

First and foremost, my lovely wife Linda. I couldn't have done this without her strength, compassion and love. Last year I made a promise to her during my acceptance speech after being elected to this office.

I promised that when my term was up, in just one more year, I would finally get around to cutting the grass and fixing the broken stuff around the house. I didn't realize this year would go by so fast. We may need to renegotiate this deal.

I want to thank my children and grandchildren, who have certainly made me so proud to be a father and a grandfather.

To Adjutant General John Hamilton, thank you for your loyalty and dedication to keeping me on the correct path. To the Eubank, DeNoyer and Hamilton team, thanks for showing me the way. Also to Past Adjutant General "Gunner" Kent for your support and guidance you gave me through all the chairs.

I thank Senior Vice Commander John Stroud and Junior Vice Commander "Big" John Biedrzycki for their unwavering comradeship and support, the 2013-2014 State Commanders for their tireless work on behalf of this great organization, with special thanks to the Department of Indiana. Without their support I wouldn't be standing here today.

To Madam President "Sissy" Borel and her Ladies Auxiliary to the VFW for their many courtesies throughout the year and for allowing me the privilege of addressing them at many of their meetings, thank you. 100 years we have stood side by side with our great Ladies Auxiliary.

I also want to thank three of my mentors who are no longer with us, former Indiana Department Commander Dave Cole and Wes Farnsley, Post 3281 Commander, and 8th District Commander Joe Yost. And to another mentor of mine, Past Commander-in-Chief Art Fellwock, who couldn't be here, I sincerely hope I have made you proud.

And finally, to all of the Comrades and Sisters in the Post, Departments and Districts I have had the honor of visiting during my years in the Chairs, thank you for what you do for this organization, your hospitality, gifts, and most importantly, your friendship.

I will continue to be an active member even out of office, and will figure out different ways to serve the VFW in the years ahead. The need for the VFW will be in its highest demand going forward.

With the war in Iraq over and that of Afghanistan winding down, more and more veterans are entering into the VA system, a system in dire need of improvement. We must remain steadfast in our mission to help fix the broken VA system. It's our responsibility and our obligation. America's veterans are depending on us.

We must continue to support our National Veterans Service Program that's proved so vital over the years. The work our VFW Service Officers do is simply amazing. Our nationwide network has made such a positive impact in the lives of countless veterans and their families.

In the last two years alone, we have assisted 209,000 veterans, recovering \$5.9 billion from the VA. That's \$5.9 billion, an astonishing figure.

To ensure this program and others live on, we must continue to avidly reach out to our youngest veterans who have served in our country's longest war. Whether they realize it or not at this point, they are the future leaders of the VFW. That is why mentorship is so important.

We must reach out to our returning women veterans and explain to them why they are valued within our organization. They face a unique set of challenges, and though the VFW is already playing a vital role in women veterans legislation and programs within the VA, their voice within the VFW will add even greater credibility to our demands from government to care for our female service members.

As my term in this administration ends and a new one begins, please know that I have the utmost confidence that the VFW will continue to thrive in its quest to serve America's veterans and their families. I know this because I know all of you, I know your dedication, your selflessness, and your steadfast commitment to service has made us the nation's leading veterans service organization, a reputation that was hard earned and we, together, must never let it be tarnished.

Again, I thank all of you for giving me the honor and privilege to serve as your National Commander. Along with each of you, I wish our next Commander-in-Chief John Stroud, the best and every success. Thank you for all the memories you've given me over the last three years.

God bless you, God bless America, and God bless all the men and women who serve so proudly today, and the families who support them.

Now, let's have a great convention. (Applause)

(Whereupon, the Assembly extended a prolonged standing ovation.)

PRESENTATION OF VFW GOLD MEDAL OF MERIT AND CITATION TO ARMITHEA "SISSY" BOREL, NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE LADIES AUXILIARY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: You all thought I was done. I had to get a drink of water.

It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce my esteemed counterpart, the National President of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Armithea "Sissy" Borel is a life member of Starks Memorial Auxiliary 4759 in Starks, Louisiana. She began her participation in the organization in 1993 on the eligibility of her brother, a Purple Heart recipient, who served in the U.S. Army, and she now has three sons who give her eligibility as well.

Since joining, she has served in a number of capacities for the organization, including Auxiliary State President. She has also been National Assistant Conductress and National Chairman for the Southern Conference on the Membership and Buddy Poppy programs. I am very proud to have served with her over the past year.

I am now pleased to present the VFW Gold Medal of Merit to my wonderful counterpart, a person of great integrity and devotion to those we serve, National Ladies Auxiliary President, Armithea "Sissy" Borel.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Gold Medal of Merit and Citation awarded to Armithea "Sissy" Borel, National President, Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars 2013-2014.

"In esteemed recognition and sincere appreciation of her loyal and benevolent concern for America's veterans as the National President of the Ladies Auxiliary to the VFW. Her theme, 'Keeping America's veterans and families strong,' reflects her outstanding dedication and unique vision and will forever serve as the true and honorable legacy of her Presidency.

"Her wealth of experience and longtime commitment to the objectives of the VFW and Ladies Auxiliary to the VFW have justly earned

her the highest level of admiration, respect and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 21st day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General.

RESPONSE BY NATIONAL PRESIDENT ARMITHEA BOREL

LADIES AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT BOREL: Commander-in-Chief Thien, National VFW, Ladies Auxiliary Officers, Past Commanders-in-Chief, Past National Presidents, Comrades, Sisters and Guests:

I am so very honored to receive this award from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I thank you most sincerely.

It is humbling to accept this award just as it has been humbling to represent my Auxiliary Sisters all year long and work with our VFW counterparts. The VFW and Ladies Auxiliary set high goals this year. To Commander-in-Chief Thien and all the members of the VFW, job well done. And to my Auxiliary Sisters, you make me proud.

This has been the 100th year of service for the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. 100 years, I can hardly grasp the breadth of our organization's impact on this country and even those abroad. Our 100th Anniversary Book "100 Years For Our Veterans" is an eye-opening look at the mission we have taken on to serve veterans, their families and our communities. From orphans of veterans, to drug abuse, to a teen charm program, to military suicide awareness, we have engaged our culture on every level.

This medallion I wear is a promise from every National President before and all those to come after me: we will continue 100 more years for our veterans!

To every veteran here today, thank you, thank you for answering the call. Thank you for your sacrifices. Thank you for serving our country! God bless our service members and God bless America! (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I can tell you she is a great lady and we are proud of her.

I am not sure if I will have to do a little tap dancing. We have a guest coming, and I will do the introduction.

INTRODUCTION OF THE HONORABLE JAY NIXON, GOVERNOR OF MISSOURI

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Hailing from DeSota, a small community in southeast Missouri, our next guest is currently serving his second term as Governor of Missouri.

The Honorable Jay Nixon earned his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Missouri and returned to his home town to practice law.

He was elected to his first term in the Missouri Senate in 1986 where he served until 1993. He was elected Attorney General of Missouri

in 1992 and was re-elected for the next three terms. He became the 55th Governor of Missouri in 2008.

Since taking office, Governor Nixon has been dedicated to the well-being of Missouri's veterans. In 2010, he launched the "Show-Me" Heroes Program to encourage employers to hire veterans. More than 3,000 employers have taken the "Show-Me" Heroes pledge and more than 5,000 veterans have been hired.

In 2009, he signed a law to phase out the State tax on military pensions, and the tax will be completely eliminated by 2016.

In 2012, Governor Nixon worked to dedicate substantial funding to Missouri's seven veterans homes ensuring that Missouri's veterans will have access to high quality, modern care for years to come.

Please join me in welcoming a true American patriot, the Honorable Governor Jay Nixon. (Applause)

GREETINGS BY THE HONORABLE JAY NIXON

GOVERNOR JAY NIXON: Thank you, Commander Thien. Congratulations, "Sissy", congratulations to all of you on behalf of the six million citizens of our great state, including 490,000 veterans. I want you to know how delighted we are that you are here in St. Louis, Missouri, for your National Convention.

Missouri is a state that has always prided ourselves on being a great place to live, work, raise a family and retire. But we are especially welcoming military veterans and their families. Missouri has, throughout time, in the tradition of our great country always stepped up when our Nation called, whether it is the General of the Army, Six Star General Pershing, Omar Bradley, or the Commander-in-Chief at the end of World War II and the Korean War, Harry Truman.

As a State we are trying to take concrete actions to take that bit of patriotism and turn it into practical economics and values for our great State.

Let me give you just a few examples. As was mentioned by your Commander, we are phasing out the State tax on military pensions, and in two years they will be eliminated. We are not kidding ourselves.

Here is why we are doing it. Not only do we want to show our respect, but also we believe in this State that folks after they retire 5, 10, 20, 25 years, whatever it is, we all know another career starts and we want that career to start here in Missouri. These are the best workers in America.

We passed laws to help military members and their spouses to retain their professional license after they move here. The spouse may need a job because of military relocation, and we now provide unemployment benefits up to 20 weeks, or until they find a job.

Veterans leaving the military qualify for in-state tuition rates at our public institutions and colleges, and the dependents of military members who are deployed are given special consideration for in-district school residency.

Now, I want to take just a second here. Your Commander talked about the "Show-Me Heroes" for a second. Last week at the National Governor's Association, I chaired the committee involved with these

issues, and we held a National hearing to talk about the employment of veterans.

At that time we highlighted a number of programs around the country and one of the companies before you, Enterprise, a company named after the aircraft Enterprise, I should note. I just want to tell a very quick story before I turn it over to others.

In 2010, I was in Kuwait and Iraq, and then in Afghanistan. When in Afghanistan, one evening we were going to meet with a patrol that was going out on evening patrol and to deal with folks and hunt down the folks who had placed and blown up IED's.

So, we were in a pretty small room, and these folks were getting ready for their nighttime shifts of 7:00 to 7:00. It was getting dark outside and they were putting on their gear, their vests, night vision goggles, and pulled them down.

I felt like I was in a locker room back in football. Folks were getting kind of fired up. I turned to a guy that was from Missouri, and I asked him, in this kind of asymmetrical war, where you are not exactly sure where the shots are going to come from, and you are dealing with IED's, and you are not sure on who is on your side sometimes and who are not, where you can't tell exactly what is going on, especially at night.

I said, "What scares you the most and what concerns you the most for your safety and the safety of your patrol?"

He lifted up his mission goggles and he looked me in the eye and he said, "God, you know what scares me is when I get home not having a job. That's what scares me."

I took that and came back here and sat down with our leaders, and we formed that "Show-Me Heroes". Today, just four years later, over 4,000 employers in Missouri have taken the pledge, over 6,700 veterans who have served our country, the vast majority of which have served on foreign soil in either Afghanistan or Iraq are working right now.

Our legislature has been helpful to give training dollars so we can have the closest tie between the skillset unit in the military and the skillset to be economically independent at home.

We had such an outpour of support from employers that we decided to put together some sort of an award for them. We call them our "Flight to Freedom Awards." We tried to come up with something that was unique, very unique.

So, what we have done over the last few years is we have asked folks from Missouri, who are serving, if they are in a dangerous situation, they are in a war zone, to take one day, and at the end of that day, to take off their subdued American night patch, write a story about what they did, and send it back home to us. Those are the awards that we give to employers.

So, when you see the CEO of Enterprise later today out here, their company got one of those. I will tell you it is the most prized award they got. They get all kinds of crystal balls, but when they take that award off the wall in their corporate headquarters and turn it over, and there is handwritten a story, somebody who stood on foreign soil to defend us in our way of living, and to make the world safe and peaceful in a more dangerous and difficult world, it really means something.

We, as a State, are committed to making sure we do our part for veterans' healthcare. That's why we are one of the few states that now operates seven veterans homes. I invite you to tour any of those. We have worked extremely hard to make sure they are not only bright, clean and fun, but that they are places in which a community is part of that home.

We have also worked extremely hard to make sure that funding sources are stable, predictable, and immune from the multitudes of budgeted entitlement, shall we say.

I will finish by telling you something that you already know. I think as Governor of the State where you are having this national meeting, it is important to note that the VFW was formed as a manager of soldiers, sailors and marines who were returning from fighting on San Juan Hill in the Manila Bay.

Our veterans, the latest generation of Americans to answer that call of duty, are returning from posts all across the world to be reintegrated at home in a society that respects what they have done and their commitment to our way of life.

The uniforms and weapons, and the technology are all very different than they were 115 years ago. What has stayed the same and will always stay the same is a sense of duty, the courage and the total commitment to those who are fighting alongside.

Those of you in the room lived that commitment. What you and your fellow veterans have done over the past 115 years to keep America free, and many other nations as well, will never be forgotten. What I can tell you from firsthand experience from traveling overseas and visiting memorials dedicated to Americans who gave their lives is that the people of South Korea, who are free, have not forgotten. The people of France, who are free, have not forgotten. The people of the United States have not forgotten, either.

One year ago, on D-Day, we went -- actually the day before D-Day -- to Normandy, and we laid a wreath on the grave of a Missourian who had died two days after D-Day.

A group from a local town appeared on a misty day for that emotional moment. An eight-year-old girl from that town asked if she could read to the Governor of Missouri in French a poem of thanks. Of course, I said yes.

She then read this poem of thanks which I later had turned into English, and it struck me then as it strikes me now, 69 years after American and International blood hit Europe to guarantee that the future of the world would be free.

Four generations later, this young girl was living a life of freedom and democracy, and was free to be what she wanted us to be, not knowing any of those who died there or, quite frankly, their fathers, their grandmothers and their great grandmothers. She wouldn't have known them, nor their kids, grandkids or great grandkids because a lot of them were born where she lived.

She had not forgotten, and we have not forgotten, and what is essential is this organization continue in its vital role to pass that torch of responsibility to the next generation of eight year olds in America and around the world.

I know your programs, your outreach through your efforts in communities; you are doing that each and every day. For that, the people of America and the people in Missouri are, in fact, eternally grateful. Thank you and God bless you. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF THE HONORABLE CLAIRE McCASKILL, UNITED STATES SENATOR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Our next guest is well known for her integrity, strength and no-nonsense approach to politics.

She has long been a friend to veterans and the VFW. In fact, her father was a World War II veteran and Bronze Star recipient, so to her, veterans are not just friends, they are family, and her work shows it.

Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill won a seat to the Senate back in 2006, a seat once held by former President Harry Truman, making her the first woman to be elected as a Missouri Senator.

She truly understands the issues veterans face and fought hard to improve rural veterans' access to healthcare by improving mileage reimbursement rates for veterans traveling for VA care.

She is a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a founding member of the Senate Veterans Job Caucus.

She was a force behind the vow to Hire Heroes Act, co-sponsored and helped to pass the Post 9/11 GI Bill, and has overhauled alcohol and drug abuse treatment programs for veterans.

Senator McCaskill worked to establish a suicide prevention program for Reservists and National Guard members and fought to pass the Veterans Healthcare Budget Reform Act and Transparency Act.

She was the first to introduce legislation to address the 2007 Walter Reed scandal and ultimately won the resignation of top officials that were responsible for the unacceptable living conditions for our wounded warriors and, after disclosure of mismarked grave sites, she led the successful effort to reform management of Arlington National Cemetery.

She has written legislation to help protect victims and expand DoD's sexual assault and prevention program, and worked to improve veterans' access to mental healthcare.

Comrades and Sisters, the list of support from our friend in the Senate goes on and on, but our Convention only lasts a few days. So, without further ado, please give a warm welcome to the Honorable Claire McCaskill. (Applause)

GREETINGS BY THE HONORABLE CLAIRE McCASKILL

SENATOR McCASKILL: Thank you, thank you. Good morning. We are so glad you are here. I am so proud that you chose Missouri and St. Louis for this important meeting. We welcome you to our great State. We know that you will be treated with honor and dignity as you all so richly deserve.

Before we go any further, is there anybody out there from Missouri? (Applause) Fine. It is good to see my friends here from Missouri

who have been my partners working to try and improve everything that we need to be doing for our veterans in this country.

It is dangerous right now for a member of Congress to stand up here and lecture anyone about anything, but we are a mess.

Besides my father teaching me a love of the military, he also taught me a love of history. I do take some comfort from looking back in the history books and realizing that more than 150 years ago it was about this ugly.

It got so bad that a member of the House of Representatives walked out of the House chamber, walked straight down the length of the Capitol into the Senate chamber, grabbed a member of the Senate by the neck and proceeded to beat him into a coma with his cane. We are not that bad yet. We have no caning going on.

Our divided government is good news and bad news. The good news is that it shows we have a full and flourishing democracy. The bad news is it makes it very difficult for us to get to the compromises we need to solve our difficult problems that we face in this Nation.

What has not fallen out of fashion, however, are politicians lining up to give lip service to you as veterans. Everyone wants to be known as someone who is helping a veteran. But there is a big difference between lip service and actually making changes happen and there is one place that compromise is not appropriate.

There can be no compromises. We must fully fund the promises we made to you period. End of the discussion. (Applause)

While your Commander went through some of the things I have worked on in Washington, I thought I would just take a couple of minutes to talk about two things that I think are important in light of the current situation with veterans' care. Two things we must always do. First, we must listen to you. We must listen to you, not to bureaucrats, not to administrators, not to secretaries, but to you.

Number two, we have to pull out all the stops to make sure a new day dawns in the VA where whistleblowers are protected, not punished.

As to the first, we figured out a few years ago in Missouri we had a way we could do that. We devised along with the help of the VSOs, including the VFW, and we began a survey, a secret survey program. If you are a veteran in Missouri and you go to get care at a VA facility, you have an opportunity, either through your VSO or on our website, or even available at the facilities, a survey form. You fill out that survey and you don't turn it into the VA, you turn it into my office.

At the end of the year we take all those surveys, we compile the information and we confront the VA with what we have found.

Because there were problems here in St. Louis at the Cochran facility, we began this four years ago. We launched this effort, and even after public attentions switched to other places, even when the headlines were not about the problems at Cochran or VA care at all, we kept up this sustained effort to listen to veterans directly through these surveys.

We now are in our fourth year and have completed nine surveys that ask eight basic questions from the ease of scheduling appointments to wait time.

Veterans groups meet with us to review each survey before we present it to the VA for feedback. We had over a thousand veterans

participate in our survey efforts in 2014, which was a record response in every region of our State.

We think these surveys are the most reliable and valid information we can get because it comes from you. No one is sugar coating anything. They serve as independent and transparent voice for you and amplify the changes that you think need to happen.

I want to commend your organization for undertaking a similar effort and encouraging your veterans to call in to the VFW hotline to share when they experience problems with their medical care.

I also want to talk briefly about protecting those individuals who act similar to people participating in the survey. In a way, everyone who does the survey is a whistleblower, because it gives them an opportunity to call out bad behavior. Whistleblowers are really critical to our effort to reform the VA and guard against misconduct in the VA.

In the case of this audience, it is very important to guard against compromising your care. We have now uncovered increasing retaliation against these brave VA employees who, for example, made sure that the world knew about the fake patient appointment list at Phoenix.

I'm focused now is on drilling down to the scope of the retaliation problem. Last month I asked the Office of Special Counsel for details to show the breadth of retaliation. At the time I wrote a letter to the office of the Special Counsel, we knew they were investigating at least 37 cases of whistleblower retaliation. Nearly a month later, that number has now grown to 70, and the Special Counsel has told Congressional hearings that the number of those cases is growing daily.

The daily expanding number of whistleblower retaliation signifies the cultural problem that has existed for decades within VA.

As we continue to look at this issue, I think we will find a calcified middle management of government is the biggest problem area. These managers stay in administration from administration and wait out any changes that try to come from the top. They burrow in and say this is the way we do things.

People at the bottom of the ladder and at the top of the ladder really get captured by this middle management of government, and these managers stick in these agencies at very high salaries.

I have worked on this area for a number of years and continue to do so. Just a week ago, I introduced legislation that would require the firing of any VA employee who retaliates against a whistleblower. I think that is what Harry Truman would do.

Right now, retaliation is punished by reprimand or fine, not by firing. I think a reprimand or a fine for someone who has retaliated against a whistleblower at the VA is like what Harry Truman would say, that it is like kissing your sister.

It doesn't work. They need to be gone and they need to be gone immediately. I will not rest until that happens.

And finally, many of you are aware of the work that I have been doing reforming the command that is charge of the most sacred command in our country, and that is recovering the remains of our fallen. As I began to look at the POW-MIA recovery effort, I saw redundancy, I saw turf wars, I saw conflicts, I saw an inability to figure out exactly what they were doing and why, and what the money was being spent on.

I saw ceremonies that were trumped up for photo ops that weren't even genuine in terms of remains coming home. I went to work, and we are now, I believe, on the precedent of the kind of reform we accomplished in Arlington where we will have one command, one command in charge, who will answer to you, to this important community in our country about how well we are going about the difficult, the incredibly important task of making sure we leave no one behind, ever. (Applause)

Seeing all of your faces make my week. I will carry this vision with me for many weeks to come. You are the best that this country has. You have fought for us and now it is our turn to fight for you. I will go back to Washington today with renewed enthusiasm to get the things done that we must do.

You fought bravely, you fought courageously, and at a very minimum we owe you bravery and courage as we make sure you get the very best care that any American could ever receive for whatever your medical needs might be.

I am honored to be here. Thank you for who you are and what you have done for our country. God bless you and have a blast this week in St. Louis. Thank you very much. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We thank you so much, Senator. I can tell you that the VFW is in there for the long haul.

INTRODUCTION OF THE HONORABLE ROY BLUNT, UNITED STATES SENATOR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Our next guest was elected to the United States Senate in 2010 to represent the "Show Me" State of Missouri.

Senator Roy Blunt serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee; the Senate Appropriations Committee; the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee; and the Senate Rules Committee.

Before being elected to the United States Senate, he served the people of southwest Missouri in the U.S. House of Representatives for seven terms.

Senator Blunt is a strong supporter of America's veterans, grateful for the sacrifices that have been made to protect the American people. He knows America owes our way of life, our safety, and our freedoms to the bravery and dedication of these men and women. Since coming to Congress, he has been committed to ensuring that the needs of our military veterans are met to the fullest extent possible.

One of Senator Blunt's proudest accomplishments as a member of the House of Representatives was fixing the system that denied veterans the ability to receive both military retirement and veterans' disability benefits, known as "Concurrent Receipt." He will continue to identify areas where changes are needed in our veterans' support system and work toward making life easier for veterans and their families when troops return home.

He admires the courage shown by our veterans as they work to keep our country safe for democracy and freedom. In the Senate, he is an advocate for veterans in every part of Missouri, and he has taken

opportunities to visit with Missouri veterans recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Senator Blunt understands that those who return from war deserve not only America's gratitude, but also modern, efficient, and effective care for the physical and psychological challenges that they confront when they return.

And he has had veterans' backs as the problems plaguing the VA healthcare system have come to light. I know we can count on him to continue fighting for our veterans as solutions to these problems are proposed and implemented.

Ladies and gentlemen, Comrades and Sisters, please join me in welcoming United States Senator Roy Blunt. (Applause)

GREETINGS BY THE HONORABLE ROY BLUNT

SENATOR BLUNT: Thank you all. Commander Thien, it is great being here with you and this great group of veterans today. I saw some of the skill of the Commander when I was back watching earlier, and I just heard it again today, just a moment ago, when he was able to say Missouri and "Missoura" both in the same sentence. That shows a man who knows how to bring people together.

I was telling Senator McCaskill, when we were waiting back stage, I had a chance a few years ago at the re-commissioning of the Battleship Missouri to introduce Margaret Truman, President Truman's daughter, as she had been the sponsor of the ship both times.

By the time we got to my introduction of her, it was very obvious there was a lot of confusion about how to say the name of our State. I talked about that a little bit, but when she got up she in no uncertain terms said her dad never said anything but Missouri. The battleship was commissioned with her as sponsor the first time, the battleship Missouri, and it would be the second time as well.

As you can tell from listening today, our rules are a little more flexible now about how we say the name of our State.

I will tell you our State is glad that you are here. Welcome to Missouri, welcome to St. Louis. We are honored to have you here.

There are 36,000 VFW members in Missouri. There are 14,000 Auxiliary members in our State, and they continue to do such a great job.

Like the Governor, I was at the Normandy American Cemetery, not at the same time, but in the same year, on the 69th Anniversary of D-Day.

I had my youngest son and my oldest grandson there with me. We went through the cemetery. We went to the place where the two brothers were buried together, where a father and son were buried together, where people from our State were specifically looking for those graves of those individuals who were buried there.

Then the guide we had that day, this was a Belgium guide, and this summer he is working at the World War I Memorial in Kansas City, he took us over and sat us down on a rock wall, and we were looking at 8,000 graves that were there. The English Channel was to our back.

Those gravestones were in front of us, and then he opened his computer and he had Walter Cronkite and General Eisenhower sitting there on that exact same spot in 1964, the 20th Anniversary of D-Day.

And my take away moment from that visit to the cemetery that day was listening to General Eisenhower saying to Walter Cronkite something like this. He said, you know, my son, John, graduated from West Point on D-Day. He said many times over the last 20 years I have thought about the life he has been able to live, the four children he and his wife have, and the many things he has got to do. I have thought about these young men who didn't get to do those things because of what they were asked to do.

The guide didn't go on to point out, as I knew being a history teacher and not a lawyer, that after we got out of Korea, in the first six months of the Eisenhower administration, not a single man or woman is killed anywhere in the world in a uniform except in the training accident for the next seven-and-a-half years.

Probably no coincidence that that President, who clearly led a strong America, had had to give the order that those 8,000 graves and many thousand others in this country, and other places in Europe, were in because of his order thought about many times over the last 28 years, the things that these young men didn't get to do because of what they were asked to do.

I would just like to say to all of you, all the veterans here today, thank you for being willing to do whatever you were asked to do. Thank you for being willing to stand for our country, to defend our country and what we stand for in so many ways. Also to bear the burdens of service, both in mind, body and your families.

I talked to a Vietnam veteran the other day who said just a couple of years ago did I figure that I had post-traumatic stress. He said, "I didn't know I had it when I got out of the service and I don't even know if I had it right after I got out of the service, but I have it now." He said, "my family knows I have it now, too."

You have helped. The veterans here today and all the veterans you represent have helped to stabilize the world and create for a better future for a long time.

The few World War II veterans that are probably here today, the equally small number of Korean veterans who are probably here today, the much bigger number of Vietnam veterans and Kuwait veterans, and Iraq veterans that are actively today, all were willing to serve.

The mother that I called on a couple of weeks ago in Fenton, Missouri, just a few miles from here, to talk about the loss of her 20-year-old son in Afghanistan. None of that service should be in vain. We need to continue to stand strong and we need to continue to do what we do to bear what has been the outsize load that America has borne during the lifetime of everybody here.

You know the fact is, when the United States of America leaves a vacuum in the world, and a world where we live in today, and things rush to fill that vacuum.

I was in Germany as a member of both the Defense Authorizing Committee, the Armed Services Committee, and the Defense Appropriations Committee for a very quick two-day security conference in Munich, at the Munich Security Conference. The German President, not

the Prime Minister, but more the head of state, the President made the announcement at that conference. He said Germany is a powerful country and it is time we started acting like it, not just economically but time we started bearing more of our share of the responsibility in the world.

Everybody agreed with that, but that doesn't mean it is necessarily going to happen. In Iran, in Syria, in the Ukraine, all over Africa, I think we see today what happens when the United States steps back and waits for somebody else to step up.

When we are strong, we usually don't have to show that strength. When we show that we are not willing to use the strength we have, that's when we most likely to have to use it.

For those who served, President Lincoln said at the end of the Civil War in his second inauguration, "We now need to care for those who have borne the burden of battle. We need to care for their widows; we need to care for their orphans. We have a special responsibility."

As the Commander mentioned, after President Lincoln is gone and in the years immediately following the Civil War, we had this problem called "Concurrent Receipt."

For literally well over a century, veterans fought for what would be the fair solution of the "Concurrent Receipt." Of course, your organization, more than any other, in my view, that made it clear that we had to get this straightened out.

There are very few things in the Congress that I think wouldn't have happened if I had not been there, but I actually think this would be one of them. Mike Bilirakis, the Congressman from Florida, and I just decided we are going to solve this problem. I happened to be the Majority Whip in the House at the time, and we got it done.

125 years or so this had been a problem. We worked to solve it. Survivor benefits, from 35 percent to 55 percent. I suppose every state has somebody who is their legislative chairman, but not every state has a Dewey Riehn, who is our legislative chairman. He does such a great job.

In fact, Dewey Riehn does such a great job; he sometimes now lets me think the things I am working for for veterans were my ideas and not his. The truth is that he is there as this organization is there time and time again.

Veterans healthcare, you are all too familiar with the statistics, you are too familiar with the numbers. The numbers are shameful. The response has been shameful. The breach of faith to our veterans is unacceptable. The breach of faith to their families is unacceptable.

Let me tell you something else that is often not mentioned that I think is unacceptable, the breach of faith to the many people in the VA system who are doing everything they can to provide the best coverage they can possibly provide, only to find out that somebody in an office somewhere is dropping veterans' applications in a bottom desk drawer so they don't get dealt with; only to find out that the hospital they work at is the fifth worst in the country in terms of backlog; only to find out that veterans who have an immediate behavioral health problem are not being seen that day. There is no backlog that is acceptable if you're having a heart attack. There is no backlog that is acceptable if you are a veteran that feels like you just want to end it all.

The only possible response for that moment is to see both of those veterans immediately. We can't accept less than that from the Veterans Administration.

You know, this has been happening. You know there has been no greater advocate for the Veterans Administration than the VFW, but I expect because of that no greater level of disappointment in some of the things that have happened.

It turns out that competition may not be a bad thing at all to have somebody provide services better than you can. The veterans who deserve the best service in the best possible way, that is something that ought to happen.

Senator Stabenow from Michigan and I had some bipartisan legislation we got passed this year which was the Excellence in Mental Health Act, where people would have more opportunities to get their mental health problems solved, just like their physical health problems.

We are looking at an eight-state pilot program to see if that works. Some of the biggest groups were the veterans, and particularly the younger veterans, some from Afghanistan and Iraq veterans made this their number one priority, more flexibility, more choices, more things that work with their families, their career, their job. We need to see what we can do to be sure that we are dealing with veterans the way they need to be dealt with in 2014 and not 1914.

So, let's look at what we can do and do it in a better way. The Caring for America's Heroes Act that I introduced, just as the retirees and dependents get the same care for mental health at a veterans facility or a base Hospital as they do for physical health. The VA should really be good in a few things. Nobody should be better than the VA in dealing with post-traumatic stress.

Nobody should be better than VA facilities in dealing with the results of IED accidents. Nobody should probably be better than the really great success with prosthetics. But the VA is not necessarily the best place to have your heart stent put in. It is not necessarily the best place to get your blood pressure checked. There is no particular reason, it should be.

What we need to be doing is not thinking about what is best for the Veterans Administration; we need to be thinking about what is best for veterans. We have a deep debt of gratitude for those, as President Eisenhower mentioned, and by the way, congratulations on the award you are giving, the Eisenhower Award to Ryan Crocker, who served our country so well. We have a deep debt of gratitude for those who did what they were asked to do.

There were those that were not only willing to serve, but were willing to serve in any way they were asked to serve. This is a time when we can show how we are going to pay them for this debt of gratitude. That's why we are glad to welcome everybody at this podium from our State.

We are glad to welcome you to Missouri, to welcome you to St. Louis, and say these need to be times when we appreciate the freedom, we appreciate the service, we appreciate the example of the world that American veterans have sent. Thank you to the VFW, thank you for letting me be here today. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF AWARDS TO 2014 ALL-AMERICAN DEPARTMENT, DISTRICT AND POST COMMANDERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Certainly, the most prestigious recognition earned as a Commander in the Veterans of Foreign Wars is to be named a member of the All-American team. We have 11 Department Commanders, 30 District Commanders and 197 Post Commanders who have earned that distinguished title and most are with us today.

I will now be joined by Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief John Stroud and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief John Biedrzycki to present the All-American Commander Awards as the Adjutant General John Hamilton announces this elite group.

(Whereupon, as Adjutant General Hamilton called the names of the All-American Award winners, the awards are presented by Commander-in-Chief Thien, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Stroud and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Biedrzycki.)

PRESENTATION OF ALL-AMERICAN TRIPLE CROWN AWARDS

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: The term "Triple Crown Winner" is universally applied for an extraordinarily exceptional accomplishment.

Winning all three major thoroughbred horse races, the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness Stakes and the Belmont Stakes, is considered the greatest accomplishment of a racehorse and on the very infrequent occasion it occurs, it was last accomplished in 1978 by the race horse "Affirmed". The thoroughbred is thus known as the "Triple Crown Winner."

In major league baseball, a player earns the Triple Crown when he leads a league in three specific statistical categories.

For batters, a player must lead the league in home runs, runs batted in and batting average; pitchers must lead the league in wins, strikeouts, and earned run average.

Again, this is a very rare occurrence. Although the Detroit Tigers' Miguel Cabrera accomplished this feat in 2012, he is the first batting Triple Crown Winner since 1967. Pitchers Justin Verlander of the Detroit Tigers and Clayton Kershaw of the Los Angeles Dodgers each accomplished the feat in pitching 2011.

The VFW has its own class of elite Triple Crown Winners as a result of their distinctive membership recruiting achievements at the Department, District and Post levels.

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure in recognizing this year's select group of VFW's Triple Crown Winners who are here behind me.

From the Department of California is Jack Turner.

Next is Herbert Schwartzkopf from the Department of Kansas.

Next is Frederico Arends from the Department of Louisiana.

Next is D. Harvey Cunningham, Jr. from the Department of Maryland.

Next from the Department of Oklahoma is Ronald Slowik.

Next is Bert Key from the Department of Oregon.

And Terry Scarbro, from the Department of West Virginia.

Commanders, congratulations for attaining such a notable record of accomplishment, and thank you for your hard work and dedication this year. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF STREAMERS TO TOP CONFERENCE DEPARTMENTS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: As you are all aware, we have honored individual members for their recruiting efforts at Convention for years. This year, we are also recognizing VFW Departments that have excelled in this area.

I would like to recognize the Department in each Conference that has had the largest numerical increase in members since the last membership year.

Those departments are: Illinois from the Big Ten.

The District of Columbia from the Eastern Conference.

Louisiana from the Southern Conference.

And from the Western Conference, Nevada.

Ladies and gentlemen, please give these Departments a hand as their Department leaders join us on stage to accept these streamers in honor of their hard work and dedication. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF NATIONAL RECRUITER OF THE YEAR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: As Commander-in-Chief, I wanted to emphatically stress the critical importance of recruiting, as well as reward those individuals who work so hard to perform this vital mission.

This year, before announcing the National Recruiter of the Year and the Certified National Recruiter of the Year, I would like to take a moment to recognize three Elite Recruiters, each of whom recruited more than 250 new or reinstated members.

From the Department of Texas, Thomas R.L. Glover had 259 recruits.

Paul Kallembach, from the Department of Illinois, had 269 recruits.

And George Foy, also from the Department of Illinois, had 303 recruits.

That was a job well done, gentlemen.

Now, I want to recognize the VFW National Recruiter of the Year, Stephen Ward, from Post 27 in the Department of Europe, was honored as an Elite Recruiter at last year's Convention when he recruited 282 new or reinstated members. Stephen followed that achievement up with a phenomenal 367 recruits this past year.

Stephen, it's a pleasure to now present you with the National Recruiter of the Year Award. Let's all give him a warm welcome for a job well done. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: National Recruiter of the Year Award, 2013-2014, presented to Stephen A. Ward, Department of Europe.

"In special recognition and sincere appreciation of your exceptional efforts in recruiter training as well as recruiting new or reinstated members for this membership year, your outstanding

performance has earned you the designation as the most distinguished National Recruiter of the Year.

"You are commended for your professional achievements and recognized for your dedication to the goals of the 'Serving the deserving' team.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 21st day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF CERTIFIED NATIONAL RECRUITER OF THE YEAR AWARD FOR 2013-2014

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Now, I have the pleasure of presenting the Certified National Recruiter of the Year Award to an individual who's no stranger to performing this vital VFW mission. In fact, this is a repeat award for him.

Last year, this individual recruited 313 new or reinstated members and was named the 2012-2013 Certified National Recruiter of the Year. This year he followed that up by recruiting 508 members. By any measure of recruiting success in recent memory, this is an outstanding accomplishment and fully deserves to be well recognized by all of us.

From Post 2866, located in St. Charles, Missouri, please welcome once again, Dennis Flynn, the 2013-2014 Certified National Recruiter of the Year. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Certified National Recruiter of the Year Award, 2013-2014, presented to Dennis Flynn, Department of Missouri.

"In special recognition and sincere appreciation of your exceptional efforts in recruiter training as well as recruiting new or reinstated members for this membership year. Your outstanding performance has earned you the designation as the most distinguished Certified National Recruiter.

"You are commended for your professional achievement and dedication to the goals of the 'Serving the deserving' team.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 21st day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LEGACY LIFE WINNERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: The VFW's Legacy Life Membership provides an opportunity for life members to leave their mark on the nation's largest combat veterans' organization. Membership in this fraternity of distinguished and committed VFW members not only offers expanded and exclusive benefits, but also helps ensure that the VFW's good work will continue for generations to come.

This is, accordingly, the true meaning of the word "Legacy" in this most notable and important program.

The winners of the Commander-in-Chief Legacy Life contest deserve to be fully congratulated for their efforts and achievements, and they are:

John Gilbert, Commander of Post 2485 in the Pacific Areas.
Sean Farrell, Commander of Post 8385 in Georgia.
Greg Bashaw, Commander of Post 3848 in Nevada.
Manley Tiffany, Commander of Post 3107 in Montana.
Donald Hughes, Commander of Post 9143 in Georgia.
Dennis Dreyer, Commander of Post 276 in Montana.
Russell Marsden, Commander of Post 369 in New York.
Clyde Rizzutto, Commander of Post 3452 in Oregon.
Armando Alvarez, Commander of Post 1013 in California.
Carlon Perry, Commander of Post 6311 in California.
Kenneth McCarter, Jr., Commander of Post 12124 in Mississippi.
Larry Perser, Commander of Post 4858 in Louisiana.
And William Bradford, Commander of District No. 6 in the Pacific

Areas.

Comrades, please stand and be recognized. (Applause)

Also, this year for the first time, we are honoring Posts that have at least 25 Legacy Life members. Today I am pleased to honor Fort Peck Post 3107 in Glasgow, Montana, with a Legacy Society Post Proclamation Recognition of having 26 Legacy Life members.

I also would like to honor Angeles City Post 2485 in Angeles City, Philippines, for having 50 Legacy Life members.

Accepting these honors today are Manley Tiffany from Post 3107 and accepting on behalf of John Gilbert of Post 2485 is Bob Zaher, Past Department Commander of the Pacific Areas.

Comrades, please join me in giving them a warm welcome.
(Applause)

PRESENTATION OF THE DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER AWARD TO AMBASSADOR RYAN C. CROCKER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is now my honor and privilege to introduce the recipient of this year's Dwight D. Eisenhower Award, a career Foreign Service officer who for four decades served our Nation's diplomatic interests abroad in some of the most volatile regions of the world.

He served four United States Presidents as the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, then to Kuwait, Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, and finally as the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012.

He is fluent in Persian and Arabic, and has been stationed in Iran, Tunisia, Qatar and Egypt, and is a survivor of the 1983 U.S. Embassy bombing in Beirut.

The 2004 VFW Eisenhower Award recipient and former Secretary of State Colin Powell called this year's Eisenhower Award recipient "One of our very best Foreign Service officers."

Retired General David Petraeus said, "It was a great honor for me to be his military wingman."

And former President George W. Bush called him, "America's Lawrence of Arabia," citing his courage, integrity, and his unwavering commitment to strengthening our Nation.

Comrades, Sisters and distinguished guests, please welcome the recipient of this year's Dwight D. Eisenhower Award, the current Dean of the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, Ambassador Ryan Crocker. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Dwight D. Eisenhower Distinguished Service Award and Citation awarded to Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker.

"In special recognition and sincere appreciation of four decades of exceptional service as an American statesman ensuring the advancement of the safety, security, ideals and interests of the United States of America abroad.

"As the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, and finally to Afghanistan, he succeeded in many rigorous and demanding Foreign Service assignments, carrying out the Nation's diplomatic policies within some of the most volatile regions of the world.

"His absolute dedication and commitment to the mission are in keeping with the highest values of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 21st day of July, 2014."

Signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John Hamilton, Adjutant General. (Applause)

RESPONSE BY AMBASSADOR CROCKER

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Howdy. I was just checking to see if there was anybody from Texas out there. I knew there were.

Commander Thien, thank you from the bottom of my heart for this most prestigious award. I am honored and I am humbled. It is well beyond my merits.

I am also honored and humbled to stand here today in front of all of you, a diplomat among warriors. As your Commander-in-Chief noted, I served as Ambassador six times, three times for Republican administrations, and three times for Democratic administrations.

Like all of you who wore the uniform, we in the Foreign Service have to be able to serve with full loyalty and commitment, no matter which party is in power. The Foreign Service is a dangerous service, like the services you so courageously represented.

Of those six Ambassadorships that I held, in three of those countries, half of them, a predecessor of mine as an Ambassador, was assassinated. For those of you who served in World War II, from Korea, twice in Lebanon, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, Iraq, I stood with you in Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan, and I was very proud to do so, because, the truth is, in this complex world that we now face, there are no more purely military conflicts and there are very few purely diplomatic engagements in the tougher spots.

Diplomats and warriors must work together for the National interest. Never has that been more important than it is today. (Applause)

I have seen a lot of bad things during almost four decades in the Middle East, but I have never seen a situation that is as frightening to me as the one we look at today in Iraq and in Syria.

A group that I call al-Qaeda Version 6.0, now controls significant territory inside Iraq, and for the first time since 9/11 they have the space, the security and the opportunity to plan their next set of operations. This is the time of enormous National threat.

A new generation will meet that threat in ways that we cannot yet predict. The lead needs to be diplomatic, but as the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State and others carry out their endeavors in Iraq and elsewhere, I know that they appreciate very much that those political efforts are backed up by 100,000 tons of diplomacy, the USS George H. W. Bush in the northern Gulf as we speak.

Again, we are joined together, and we will be far, far into the future. Wars don't end just because we withdraw our forces. They often go on. And with us no longer in the field, our adversaries have more space and more opportunity to take actions that do threaten our security.

So, this is the time when Americans must stand up as you stood up, when government has to stand up, as other governments have, to face down this threat before it comes home to us. And however we confront it; we will confront it in the spirit that you brought to your brave and noble endeavors over so many years.

So, once again, I am incredibly proud to receive this award. I am incredibly proud to be here with all of you. You are the reason we are the "land of the free." This is your home, the home of the brave. So, thank you. (Applause) God bless all of you as veterans, God bless the VFW, and God bless the United States of America. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF AND NATIONAL PRESIDENT SPECIAL PROJECT AWARDS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: At the beginning of our terms, "Sissy" and I got together to create a project to show what a positive impact our VFW and our Ladies Auxiliary can make in the lives of veterans when we work together on a large scale. So, we launched a nationwide initiative, encouraging our Departments to raise as much money as they could to go toward helping a veterans' home in each Department.

All of the money collected at National would be pooled, then evenly divided and redistributed to each Department. At that point, the Department Commander and President together would choose how best to support their State veterans' home.

Comrades and Sisters, you all stepped up raising nearly \$60,000 for veterans. I commend each of you for your generosity.

Today, I would like to present the top VFW and Ladies Auxiliary contributors, determined by per capita, on the National and Local levels with a trophy to show our appreciation for their efforts.

Here to accept these awards are the 2013-2014 Commanders and Presidents:

Representing the VFW Department of Massachusetts, Ronald Smith.

Representing VFW Post 10087, Vincent George, Jr.

LADIES AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT "SISSY" BOREL:

Representing the Department of Wyoming, Ladies Auxiliary Lori Norby.

In addition, what Bill and I decided on was to honor the top donations by an Auxiliary or Post. Receiving that award would be Auxiliary 6873, Texas, Susie Carter. (Applause)

Accept these trophies with our sincere gratitude for your efforts in helping veterans across the Nation. Let's give them a big hand. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: At this time we know the Vice President has landed and is in route. We have got to rearrange the stage and get everything that needs to be done. If you leave this room, you will not be allowed back in. So, we will take a break and do this. You people can visit among yourselves.

(RECESS)

INTRODUCTION OF VICE PRESIDENT JOSEPH BIDEN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is my great honor and a privilege to introduce a very special guest who returns to the VFW's National Convention stage for a second time. He served our Nation honorably as a United States Senator for the first state of Delaware from 1973 to 2009, where he would Chair the Senate Judiciary Committee and then the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

He was well known to be tough on crime and even tougher on domestic violence. He considers his Violence Against Women Act as the most significant piece of legislation he has crafted in his 36 years in office.

Today, his position enables him and his wife, Dr. Jill Biden, who we are very pleased can join us today, to shake the hands of our magnificent men and women in uniform at home and abroad, and their equally outstanding families who also serve and sacrifice so much.

They do it to say thank you, and as proud Blue Star parents of an Iraqi war veteran themselves, their handshakes and hugs truly come from the heart.

Comrades, Sisters and distinguished guests, please welcome the 47th Vice President of the United States of America, Joe Biden. (Applause)

REMARKS BY THE HONORABLE JOSEPH BIDEN, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: Hello VFW! It is great to be with you. Thank you. Commander, thank you for the introduction, and the incoming Commander-in-Chief John Stroud, thank you, who I got a chance to meet back stage, and also Bob Wallace, the Executive Director, who I have worked with, and so many of the dignitaries on the stage.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to say a special thanks to the VFW of Delaware. They have been my friends for 40 years. Stand up, guys. I am proud of you. (Applause)

I want to introduce you to another Delaware veteran, the Attorney General of the State of Delaware. My son has spent a year in Iraq, Major Beau Biden, United States Army.

I said, "Beau, come with me." He said, "Dad, I should be home in Delaware." Thanks, Beau, for coming. I want to say a point of personal privilege. My grandson, Hunter Biden, is here also. Stand up, Hunter. Hunter came not last year, but the year before last.

I had the great honor to be the commencement speaker at West Point. As we left, he got a hat, they threw their hats up, and he got a hat, and he said, "Pop, I am going to go to West Point."

So, I don't know, man. I think it is in his blood.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honor to be with you today. It is an honor to be back with so many friends. All of you veterans of foreign wars, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo. There are so many of you that served as Beau did in Iraq and others in Afghanistan, and many of you in both.

You are all part of a fabric that is stitched together, generation after generation of women and men who risk their lives and shed their blood for this Nation. You are the muscle, the sinew, the heart of this great country.

The way I look at it, you are America's spine and you always have been. You are truly an exceptional group of Americans, and thank you for having me with you today. I appreciate it. (Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, before I board Air Force II and head back to Washington, the President will be awarding the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Ryan Pitts.

On the edge of a small Afghan village, he faced the pre-dawn attack of more than 200 heavily-armed insurgents.

Even as nine of his fellow soldiers were killed around him, even after he had been wounded by grenade shrapnel and was losing blood, even when he realized he was alone in the fight, Sergeant Pitts, like some of you in this audience, stayed and fought to protect the troops at the nearby base and held off the enemy until reinforcements arrived.

When they found him, unable to stand but still fighting, Sergeant Pitts was lucky to have survived. This afternoon he will receive the Nation's highest military honor.

But Sergeant Pitts will be the first to tell you that he is just one representative of a remarkably resilient generation, many of whom are in this audience today.

Just since 9/11, 3.5 million men and women joined the military with near certainty that they would be deployed to a war zone. There were over 2.6 million deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of you have been deployed multiple times to both places.

This 9/11 generation took on a responsibility that extended far beyond the base or the battle field. They were prepared to follow Osama Bin Laden to the gates of hell in order to get him, and you and they did get him.

Never before, as Americans had so much over such a sustained period of all volunteer force. Like so many generations before them, this generation of 9/11 has paid the incredible price.

I keep a card in my pocket. Every morning my staff contacts the Defense Department about 5:00 a.m., and they put on my card my daily schedule, and there is a little box, "Daily U.S. troop update."

It is a specific update as to the exact number, not general, but the exact number of women and men that are wounded or killed in the service of our country in Afghanistan and Iraq. Because for every one of these warriors, there is an entire family, extended family back in America that has bled or is bleeding.

Today, 6,688 fallen angels, 51,931 wounded; 32,000, as we speak, still in harm's way in Afghanistan.

I know them, I know you, I have been with you. I have been in and out of Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq over 40 times. I have been from Kabul to Kandahar, and in the fogs of the mountains high above, the Kunar Valley. I have seen how incredible this generation is.

When I go, the only regret I have is the American people, although supportive, I wish they could see up close in person the incredible capability, devotion and courage of these young women and men, and some not so young.

I was in Iraq not too long ago, just a couple of years now almost, and I was in one of those God awful palaces that Saddam had built, gaudy marble palaces, and we used one for a mess hall.

When I did end up standing on a chair and answering questions to a couple of hundred soldiers, sailors, marines, I said, "All you young people", and one guy from way back said, "Hey, Joe, 54 years old, second tour." They are not all young but they are all the same. They are made of the stuff that all of you are made of.

Because of the training, the commitment of the generation of warriors, the one before this 9/11 generation, they are the best trained, most capable group of warriors the world has ever known. So, I am here first and foremost to tell you how much I admire you all, how grateful we are for all you have done, this generation and every generation, what you have done for this country and as evidenced today which you continue to do, after you leave the military.

I also want to speak with you about where we find ourselves at this moment in Iraq and Afghanistan, countries where many of you have made great sacrifices.

In Iraq, thanks to you, we gave the Iraqi people a chance to cease control of their own destiny. However, we have learned over the years, you have taught me, we know from Vietnam that while our military can provide you the opportunity, it cannot solve the problems for the society. That rests upon the people and the leaders, of countries that you liberated.

In Iraq, endearing sectarian divisions have lingered. Today, Iraq faces a tough fight against the terrorist organization, the prodigy of Al-Qaeda seeking to establish a fight at the point of a gun, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, better known as ISIL.

That fight is embedded in a larger challenge of ethnic and sectarian strife that these extremists have thus far been able to exploit. The conflict that does not respect and now seeks to erase the border between Iraq and Syria.

Iraq today is confronting a mix of violent extremism, sectarianism, legitimate grievances, plus peaceful competition for political power in the wake of an election that brought many Iraqis to the polls.

Our strategy has been to deal with each one of these. First, we have and we continue to provide weaponry, advice, military expertise and coordination to help Iraqi's security forces to defend their country.

Second, we have been tensely involved to support the Iraqi political process, because forming a new government that they unite with different communities, is the only way to hold Iraq together. And I and others have been in constant contact, I mean hours and hours a week, with the Iraqi leaders representing all segments, urging them to make the difficult political compromises, to form this new government, not just to form a new government but to chart a new path, toward inclusive politics that gives all the Iraqi communities a greater stake in the future of a federal Iraq.

That's what their Constitution provides for. Let me say something counterintuitive. I believe that the threat posed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, ISIL should and actually can be the issue that causes the Iraqis to finally come together, because ISIL is a common enemy of Sunnis, Kurds, Shias, Turkmen, Christians, and the enemy of every one of the communities.

Third, we are working to get the countries in the region from Turkey to Saudi Arabia to pull the same direction, to a stability, build a genuine compromise of power sharing rather than a zero sum sectarian competition.

The fourth, to bolster stability beyond Iraq. We continue to support modern forces that already are dealing with these same inter-connected challenges. Groups like the Jordanian and the Lebanese armed forces, and the vetted moderate Syrian opposition.

Finally, our intelligence and law enforcement agencies are intensely focused on a threat, posed by foreign fighters, many coming from Europe and this region, because each of these fighters coming from Europe has the universal passport from Europe that allows them to get on a plane if undetected and to come to America.

So folks, thanks to you, Iraq still has a chance in the future to find by peaceful politics under a constitutional system that envisions more local control under a federal system as some have spoken to before.

We cannot want peace more than the Iraqi people do. Thanks to you, they still have a challenge, but a real opportunity.

The same can be said in Afghanistan. With 32,000 American warriors are still on the ground, where America's longest war in history is coming to an end, and the Afghans are being told and made clear that Afghans are rightly beginning to take the lead.

The Taliban decision to harbor those who attacked us at 9/11 compelled us to use military power. Now, we have been in Afghanistan almost 13 years, longer than, I dare say, than most any American predicted.

Thanks to you, and the bravery of our warriors, we struck devastating blows against al-Qaeda in the region, and prevented Afghanistan from re-emerging as a launching pad for attacks against our homeland.

The people of Afghanistan, we helped those people in the difficult work of building effective institutions capable of security forces and a capable brighter future for their children.

At the beginning of next year, no one should make any mistake about this. Assuming when they get their new government they sign a bilateral security agreement. Without that, we will not stay because we cannot protect our troops.

Assuming they sign the bilateral security agreement, we will have no more than 9,800 troops in Afghanistan and our mission will be different. They will be there to support Afghanistan troops, training and equipment.

They will support counterterrorism operations against remnants of Al-Qaeda. They will continue to partner with the Afghan's government people, but we will no longer be patrolling villages as many of you did, mountainsides or cities as many of you did. That will be the sovereign responsibility of the Iraqi national security force.

Critical transition is also underway as Afghanistan attempts the first democratic transfer of power in its entire history.

As I said, millions of the Afghanistans defied the Taliban threats and cast their votes in two rounds of Presidential elections. Transfer of power can be tough and disruptive, especially the first time it happens in a society, but especially so when you are in a country so susceptible to corruption.

Allegations of fraud and misconduct of the second round of elections threatened to derail all the Afghans had achieved and you provided for them, built on your sacrifice over the past 13 years.

The work of Secretary of State John Kerry last week, the two candidates, Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai showed courage and leadership that took a step forward.

They had agreed, surprising to some, to a comprehensive internationally supervised audit of the second election, and they agreed to form a government of national unity in a country that has known little else but conflict in the past 13 years and before, and they chose peace.

There is much work to do in the coming weeks as the audit continues to ensure that both sides honor this deal, but the sacrifices of our sons and daughters that created the hope for future generations of Afghans should not be squandered by them.

Going forward, the United States will help, but it is up to the Afghans to chart and forge their own future, because America's troops in Afghanistan are coming home, and as they do they deserve the best from our government. All of you do, all of our veterans do, and we are determined that you get it.

I know that tomorrow Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan Gibson is going to speak in depth about the difficult stage of the VA and about the work underway to set things right.

Let me say parenthetically, I want to thank the VFW and every other organization, every other veterans organization, for weighing in and insisting, insisting, there be no compromise. Know this, we will not rest until it gets fixed, and all vets, including the 80,000 vets of my generation, who were finally covered recently, till all vets get the care they were promised. Because as a government, and I know you've heard me say this

many times, and my friends in Delaware know I have been saying it for the last 40 years, your government has many obligations to the poor, the disadvantaged, the elderly, the children, but it has only one sacred obligation only one truly sacred, that is above all, and that is to care for and equip those who we send to war and care for them and their families when they come home from war. That is the only sacred obligation that we have.

As we now painfully know, there are many, many things that need to be done to meet that obligation.

I want to talk to you today about how to harness, and you will hear in detail this from the Acting Secretary tomorrow. I would like to ask you about how do we harness awesome talents of the veterans coming home, helping them find jobs, not just for themselves and their families, but helping them strengthen America's economy just as they have strengthened the military.

We are talking about the single best American trained generation of warriors in the history of the world. They are qualified to do everything from construction workers to chief executive officers. As I have said many times before, if you can keep the supply lines open through insurgent territory, you can manage a business supply chain. If you can command a platoon, you can manage a staff in a business. If you can drive a cargo truck along roads in Afghanistan and Iraq, you are able to drive any vehicle across the States of Iowa and Arkansas.

I am proud to say that after years of work, in every state in the union, now, if you show a military's truck driver's license, you automatically are able to get a commercial license to drive trucks in transit in any state in America.

So far 6,000 of you have done that, earning a good living and saving time and money. We want the same thing for every other single categorization for which you are qualified in the military. You are qualified in every state in America to be a welder if you are qualified, and the list goes on. As a nurse, you are qualified in every state in the Union to be a nurse and need not take additional tests.

I need not tell the spouses, both husbands and wives, the military personnel transfer how difficult it is for them making a living in occupations they serve as they move from state to state. When it comes to hiring from the Federal Government, President Obama and I make no apologies for insisting on the veterans' preference.

Since 2009, we have had a 30 percent increase in the share of veterans hired by the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. We are leading by example, and we are challenging all businesses to do the same. Today, overall, finally veterans' unemployment is actually lower than our national average, and the national average is lower than any time since before the great Recession. That is because of veterans.

Too many veterans in too many places are still being denied the dignity of work. My dad, he used to have the expression, "Joe, jobs are a lot more than a paycheck. It is about your dignity, it is about respect."

If any group of Americans deserves being afforded dignity, it is those who fought and shed their blood for this country. That's why we are going to target specific communities for veterans. Veterans' unemployment is the highest and we will bring companies and human resources

professionals into those communities, to connect with veterans, with employers and jobs.

By the way, nobody does this as a favor, far from it. I view this as a favor to American businesses. We are doing American business a favor.

Our veterans are the best employees a business can ever ask for. The challenges we face is translating their skills and experience in the military to civilian life.

In his State of the Union Address, President Obama asked me to lead a comprehensive review of job training programs to ensure that we have the best trained workforce for the future, the most highly sophisticated workforce in the world. This week I will release a report, after over six months of study and thousands of interviews, that no part of this mission, though, is more important than connecting with the talented pool of veterans which is available.

There are not many skills in greater demand than those of the high tech professions.

Whether it is healthcare, banking, construction, business, these skills are mission critical. There will be, for example, 1.4 million new technology jobs needed to be filled in the next five-and-a-half years. That's why we work with Sysco and other partners in the Silicon Valley, in a public/private partnership where thousands of service members will get certified in high demand, high tech professions, even before they transition out of the military.

If you can run a computer and our most sophisticated weapons systems today, if you can manage billions of dollars' worth of equipment, you are clearly intellectually and educationally qualified to take the next step to learn a new language, whether it is a job or whatever it is to learn the language business needs.

We are going to use accelerated training programs. There are a number of them out there, now. They are specifically designed to meet the needs of employers, to help fill jobs here at home.

Ask yourself the rhetorical question. Why do we have to issue 480,000 to 500,000 H1B visas, visas to allow people from other countries, which I will welcome, but people from other countries to come the United States to fill high-tech jobs in the range of \$70,000 a year starting to \$268,000 a year in high-tech industries because we don't have enough qualified people here at home?

We are going to increase the number of programs like the one that Microsoft has called Microsoft Vet Boot Camp, where you can learn an IT skill, a program in new computer language that will give you a good paying job. The range of those jobs start at \$70,000 a year.

We are not talking about going back to school for two years, or a year. We are talking about programs that range from 10 weeks to 16 weeks. We already have the skilled workforce there waiting to fill those jobs.

There are a number of accelerated training programs that are hiring, incomes above 85 percent with good paying jobs in the ranges I just have spoken of, not minimum wage plus jobs. We want to find out what are the best of all these programs and make them available to vets directly at first.

Toward that end, today we are announcing a \$10 million competition to find the best accelerated learning programs to produce the best employment programs. We are cutting the red tape to make it easy for the businesses to get these apprenticeship programs approved for the GI Bill.

Not everybody is going to go back and take the G.I. Bill and go back and get another degree, but many want to continue in a generic line of work where they can make \$70,000, \$80,000, \$90,000 a year to begin with.

But they have to have it paid for. We want Congress to change the law to allow for people to use the G.I. Bill for the jobs that are available and the skills that they have.

We created an online veterans' employment center, a single authoritative, easy to use, government source connecting job seekers with employers. I am pleased to announce that the Department of Labor is launching, it sounds like a lot of gibberish, but it is called A New Jobs Development Unit to match national regional companies looking to hire vets with jobs.

There are job centers on the local level that will put that to work. Right now there are 100,000 high-tech jobs going unfilled in America, high-tech manufacturing jobs, only because someone doesn't know enough about photosynthesis, or photo holding technology. This can be acquired in a program that is two months.

Many veterans are looking for these opportunities. I might add parenthetically, I believe this is true, we are talking about the ranking of universities in America. Just to show you about the military, if I am not mistaken, there are more chief executive officers of Fortune 500 companies today who graduated from one of our military academies than graduated from Harvard, Yale, Princeton or anywhere else.

The point is that the military training that you all have had equips you to compete better than almost anybody in today's job market.

We have got to connect and place those warriors to those opportunities. As you know, it is not just the forces on the front line that are asked to sacrifice and serve; it is all your families. No one knows that better than all of you sitting here today.

John Milton, the English poet, wrote those famous words, "They also serve who stand and wait."

These spouses, women and men, know what we are talking about. When your son and daughter, husband or wife is in a war zone, not once, not twice, 10, 12 times a day, as long as they are gone that thought flashes through your mind, are they all right, are they going to be okay?

My son, Major Beau Biden, hates it when I say this, his mother is with us so she will take care of this if I get in trouble. Every morning when Beau was deployed for a year, and many of his colleagues in the Delaware National Guard, I would walk in, since she is a professor in a community college and leaves before I do on, Tuesdays and Thursdays, she'd be standing over the sink in the submarine kitchen in the Vice President's apartment upstairs, and I'd walk in and she would be saying a prayer that the wife of our Adjutant General gave her a copy of.

You all know what it is like. You all know what it is like. So, we owe all of you, not just the warriors, we owe all of you. I am incredibly

proud that Jill has joined together, a little over three years ago, with the First Lady, Michelle Obama, to try to make it clear to the American public, although unlike the Vietnam generation coming home to jeers, and sometimes worse, that every American returning from the battle front over the last 20 years comes home to an embrace.

As Jill points out, only one percent of America's population serves in uniform, but 99 percent of all Americans owe that one percent, 99 percent owe you.

Again, as a point of personal privilege, never forget, Jill joined an outfit in Delaware called "Boots on the Ground," spouses are employed in the military. I will never forget how she felt so good when in the middle of a snowstorm, the first year my son was gone, that the next-door neighbor came over and shoveled my daughter-in-law's driveway. She is a teacher. I will never forget, and that started Jill talking about just one act of kindness. Most of these kids and young people deployed who found themselves, their neighbors thought everything was normal, everything was fine. They were not looking for any special recognition, but sometimes the feeling of being all alone, unless you are on a military base and the other is going through the same thing. It is pretty devastating.

The Joining Forces initiative was started. With Michelle's leadership, they called on Fortune 500 companies to make a commitment to hire 1,000 veterans and their spouses, and they not only got 100,000 hired by these companies, but now it is 540,000 and growing.

One of the reasons why for the first time in my career after war, veterans' unemployment is lower than it is for the rest of the population. In addition to that, there has been \$100 million committed by philanthropists to make sure that we don't forget these veterans. So, folks, they are making it easier for working military families, easier for nurses, their spouses, that is moving from Fort Benning to Fort Bragg to transfer the license and to keep working, easier for her son to transfer his grades and test scores and extracurricular activities without a lot of rigmarole.

I don't need to tell you, the spouses, all these things matter. They matter to the quality of life. So, there is a tremendous amount of work to do, and there is no doubt about that. There is a lot of work underway. There is a lot underway to fight for those who fought for us.

That's why I am pleased that President Obama nominated Bob McDonald to head the Department of Veterans Affairs. He is a man that gets it. Bob's father used the G.I. Bill to become the first person in his family to go to college. His wife's father was a prisoner of war and his uncle was exposed to Agent Orange.

Bob graduated from West Point, and he used his G.I. Bill to go to business school. He rose to become the CEO of one of the largest companies in the world, Procter & Gamble.

If there was ever an example of how the finest military training, coupled with successful support for veterans benefits, can elevate a man or a woman and family, a company in the country, this is Bob McDonald.

Over three decades in business, he has served many years abroad. He learned how to make organizations deliver. He learned how to hold them accountable.

For all the challenges we have had, for the Veterans Affairs Department also has thousands of hard working dedicated patriotic Americans, many of them veterans working overtime to do the right thing.

But Bob McDonald, the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, will be a great leader for them because he knows how to handle things of this scale or scope, and he has the heart, committed to veterans being one himself.

Congress has a job to do. We encourage them to quickly confirm Bob McDonald and finish the work of the veterans legislation currently in conference.

The President and every major veterans service organization, including yours, supports legislative action for veterans, and it is time to get it done now. Stop fooling around and get it done now. You all deserve nothing less. You are the best and it is not hyperbole, you are the best of what the country has to offer. You have been in every single generation.

As I said at the beginning, the sacrifices of those in this most generation has made is a lesson learned from the previous generation in Vietnam, that we can do everything in our power militarily to provide a country in chaos the opportunity to put itself together. That's what is left to be done now in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Let me close with a story. One of my many trips to Bosnia and Kosovo, before 9/11, my son, Beau, volunteered as a Federal prosecutor to go to Kosovo to help them set up a criminal justice system.

On one of those multiple trips, I saw him there. They were building Fort Bondsteel in Kosovo. I was riding around the whole day trying to bring Kosovars and Bosnians together, and my driver was a Kosovar, a Muslin Kosovar. As we were riding, I was going up to Fort Bondsteel. As we were riding up this little muddy road, ruddy road, it was in the winter. We were spinning, not a lot but just going through the ruts, and we were two-thirds up the mountain and there was a pike, red and white pike that was across the road, to stop for identification.

So, we stopped and as we stopped my driver spoke a little bit of English, but he looked up and said, "Senator," I was a Senator then, "look, America, America." I knew what he meant. He meant that the credible capacity of America taking the top of a mountain off.

We had all this equipment, and in a matter of weeks we are putting in an airfield, we are putting in living quarters. He said, "America."

To my right, standing by this little guard shack, if my memory serves me, there were five military officers, five military personnel standing and saluting. The first one, if memory serves me correctly, was a Hispanic woman who was a Sergeant. The second one was another Sergeant, an African-American. The third one was a Captain, a woman, Caucasian. The fourth one was a Colonel, who was an African-American. And then there was, if memory serves me correct, a one-star, who was Caucasian.

I tapped my driver on the shoulder, and this is a true story, I said, "No, no, there is America. Take a look.

"Until you figure out how to live together, until you figure out that that is why America is great, you will never make it."

It is time for those we liberated to stand up and put themselves together, and with our continued help put together a nation that represents everyone in Iraq and everyone in Afghanistan so your sacrifices will bear the fruit that was intended.

God bless you all, and thank you for your service. May God protect our troops.

(Whereupon, the Assembly extended a prolonged standing ovation.)

PRESENTMENT OF THE ARMED FORCES AWARD TO UNITED STATES NAVY HOSPITAL CORPSMEN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is now my honor and privilege to present the 2014 VFW Armed Forces Award.

Will all the Navy Corpsmen in the audience please rise, and make your way in front of the stage and face the audience, please.

Back in 1898, with the Spanish-American War looming, Congress passed a bill authorizing the establishment of the U.S. Naval Hospital Corps, a bill President William McKinley signed into law in June of that year.

During World War I, this courageous group of Hospital Corpsmen served throughout the fleet, earning particular distinction with the Marine Corps on the western front.

During World War II, Hospital Corpsmen hit the beach with the Marines in every battle in the Pacific. Affectionately called "Docs" at sea and ashore, they accompanied Marines into battle during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, also.

They served with honor and distinction in Granada, Panama, Desert Storm, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and in Iraq and Afghanistan, and today they accompany our POW-MIA search and recovery teams as they scour the earth for the 83,000 American service members who are still listed as missing and unaccounted for from our Nation's wars.

The rating of Hospital Corpsmen is the most decorated in the United States Navy, with 22 Medals of Honor, 174 Navy Crosses, 31 Navy Distinguished Service Medals, 946 Silver Stars, an untold number of Purple Hearts, and 20 Naval Ship Commissionings.

Their motto is "Semper Fortis", for always courageous, and there is no argument from those in this room who owe their lives to a Corpsmen who accomplished his or her mission.

The bond that exists between a Navy Corpsman and the Marines and sailors they serve is one of strength and admiration.

Accepting the VFW Armed Forces award on behalf of all Corpsmen is their top "Doc", Fourth Master Chief Sherman Boss, assigned to the U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, and the Director of the U.S. Navy Hospital Corps.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Armed Forces Award and Citation awarded to United States Navy Hospital Corpsmen.

"In special recognition and sincere appreciation of more than a century of faithful and dedicated service to putting the lives of others first, from their founding during the Spanish-American War, through the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsmen have kept the faith at sea and ashore, and continue to live up to their motto of 'Semper Fortis' as the most decorated career field in the Navy.

"For 116 years, those who have earned the rating of U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman represent the very best of military medicine at home

and abroad, and in times of conflict and humanitarian assistance, thus earning them the utmost respect and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 21st day of July, 2014. Approved by the National Council of Administration."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General. (Applause)

RESPONSE – MASTER CHIEF SHERMAN BOSS

MASTER CHIEF BOSS: Thank you to all of you. It is not every day that you have the Vice President to open up for you.

I will not take a lot of your time, but I certainly want to thank Commander-in-Chief Thien for these 1.9 million members of the VFW. If you could take any one of the services and pick apart a body who represents the greatest name in our United States, and that is its people. I want to thank those that stand before me here, my brothers here and those Corpsmen.

You paved the way for me, and I am standing here today because of you. More importantly, I am standing up here because of each one of you that are in this audience.

So, on behalf of Sherman Boss and his family, I want to thank you because you are pretty important in carving out history, whether you served in the Second World War or just coming home from Afghanistan or Iraq, the Hospital Corpsman stands watch all over the world.

Today they stand watch on the submarines, under the sea and on surface ships above the seas. And the Naval aviation that fly high above the earth. We serve alongside the Marine Corps.

I have to remind my shipmates that the Hospital Corps have all been involved in over the past 13 years. This land war we have been in in the last 13 years is uncommon for the United States Navy, because we are an expeditionary task force, but because of what Hospital Corps does, and the unique mission it serves with the United States Marine Corps. We are all in together.

For the past 13 years, one half of the sailors injured during the war, one-half have been Hospital Corpsmen. Of all those that were killed in action, one-third have been Hospital Corpsmen. So we're all in it.

So, on behalf of the 26,900 or so that make up the United States Navy Hospital Corps, I am humbled, honored and privileged to accept this award. Thank you very much. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF THE AMERICANISM AWARD TO TOM CLARK

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is now an honor and a privilege to introduce this year's recipient of the VFW Americanism Award.

Mr. Tom Clark, a fellow VFW member, served in the Army from 1976-1979 in Germany, and then worked briefly for the VA before becoming a teacher. In 2005, Clark rejoined the service as a member of the Indiana National Guard and deployed to Afghanistan in 2006.

While his dedication to serving our Nation is remarkable, he is being recognized today for his unique teaching style in the classroom.

In his early days of teaching, Tom Clark noticed that students were disengaged from the military. In an effort to change that, he created the "Gold Star Honor Roll Project," requiring students to conduct extensive research on fallen heroes exclusively from Indiana with the ultimate goal of profiling every service member from Indiana who perished in the line of duty during war.

The research done by Mr. Clark's students isn't typical of your average high school history class. It's not uncommon for his students to reach out to the fallen service members' families, and students have gone as far as Ireland and France in the name of their projects.

Since he began the program in 1986, his students have completed more than 1,100 profiles of fallen Vietnam service members, hundreds of profiles of service members from the Korean War and World War II, and some 170 service member profiles who were killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mr. Clark has gone above and beyond to instill patriotism and appreciation of service in today's youth. The American principles his students are learning and applying contribute to the betterment of American society as a whole.

Comrades and Sisters, I present to you the recipient of this year's VFW Americanism Award, Mr. Tom Clark. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Americanism Award and Citation awarded to Tom Clark, Lake Central High School History Teacher.

"In special recognition and sincere appreciation of faithful and dedicated service to the United States of America and most especially to the fallen service members from the State of Indiana.

"As a high school history teacher, he works tirelessly to instill patriotism and appreciation of military service in America's youth. His lessons go beyond the classroom as he brings America's fallen heroes to life for his students. This commitment to continue serving his Nation is true to the ideals, traditions and values of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 21st day of July, 2014. Approved by the National Council of Administration."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General.

RESPONSE – COMRADE TOM CLARK

COMRADE CLARK: First of all, I would just like to say I am overwhelmed. Thank you very much, everybody. I come from Post 717, in St. John, Indiana. They are the ones that nominated me. It is hard to accept this award because this award is not for me, this is for my students and this is an award for you.

I am so proud to be a veteran and you are veterans and thanks to you, you are me and I am you.

I was lucky to be born in Indiana and I had a father in World War II and Korea. I was born in the mid '50s. He brought me up to love

America. Going through high school in the '60s and seeing the conflicts that were going on with our involvement in Vietnam was very disturbing to me.

After the war was over and after I was out of high school, I joined the military and was sent to Germany in '76 through '79.

After that, I became a teacher, because of the G.I. Bill. I used my G.I. Bill. I used every cent of it, and I worked in the VA office at Purdue University.

After getting the job as a teacher in 1982, I noticed that in 1983, after the Beirut Bombing, after that my students were disconnected with this event, and I thought what better way to get them involved than to have them write letters to the soldiers that had survived, or the ones that were taking their places.

To my amazement, hundreds of letters started coming back to my students, and my students started making connections with these soldiers, and we started to learn things from these soldiers we were not seeing in the news. I thought this is going to be one of the high points of my career as a teacher. I had just started. In 1986 and '87, and my students decided to honor the five individuals from our high school that gave their lives in Vietnam.

I had a young man in my class, who one day approached me, and said, "Hey, Mr. Clark, why haven't we ever honored the Vietnam vets from this school that died?" I said, "I don't think anybody from this school died."

I am a teacher at Lincoln Central High School, St. John, and he came in with two names, to my amazement. Then it was summer. Over the summer I found two more names, and then we started on a project with seven students to honor those four. But then we found the fifth boy, a boy who had received the Navy Cross, was killed on May 8, 1968. His name was Gerald Trent.

It was incredible that a community as large as ours, had a school as large as ours, had no idea that these five young heroes had given their lives for this country.

So, what we did, we decided to find all five families. We decided to get a piece of the wall that was left over, and to do a plaque. We had a wonderful ceremony with over 500 people.

If it had not been at that time for the VFW members that attended or helped me, I would never have been able to complete that. I thought once again this has to be the high point of my career.

The next year, I was approached by numerous students saying that they wanted to do the same thing. I am from northwest Indiana. I thought, when they approached me, there would be maybe 40 casualties from Gary, Indiana, and Hobart and Highland, Lake County. To my amazement, our county lost 261 young men.

I thought what have I got myself into, because we started going out and we started interviewing the Gold Star families.

I will never forget the first one I went out to, who was a lady named Ina Kyusia, and she had lost her first son, Fred King, in 1968. He had served 365 days in Vietnam, and he was coming home.

She kept on watching for him, watching for him, and a young friend had gone down to meet him at the airport, and somehow his

paperwork had been messed up, so they told him you'll have to go back to your unit and wait for two more days.

In those two days, the young Fred and another individual, being the type of people they are, volunteered to go get all of the combat uniforms that were in the laundry point of the guys that still had to serve.

They hit a landmine. Mrs. Kuyisia told us that on that day she was watching down the street and she saw the Army car pull up five houses down from hers on Montana Street in Gary, Indiana, and that the officers came up and she told me and told my students that she fell to the ground, and she thought she said, "As long as I don't answer the door, my son is still alive."

Her husband was a Korean War combat veteran, told her she had to get up. She advanced to the door, and the horrible news came.

On that afternoon, I will have to tell you that we sat with her and we cried with her and we laughed with her about Fred and his life; what an incredible young man he was.

I thought, wow. This touched these two students that I took up there so much that we had to continue on. She is the catalyst that has kept me going, that interview, and we continued more and more and more, and we almost finished the county, 261, and then we heard the State of Indiana was building a memorial for Joe Kernan, former Governor from Indiana.

Before he was Governor, he was put in charge, and he is a POW from Vietnam, was put in charge of heading the committee and making it work. I approached him and I told him, I said, "My students want to do the research." And this is something we should all take with us.

A lot of people there didn't think these young people could do it, but there is a lot of power out there in young people, and they did it. Now, 1,621 names are on the Indiana War Memorial in downtown Indianapolis. They also requested that we do the Korean War at the same time, and three years later they approached us about helping them out with the 14,000 that gave their lives in World War II. It is just a continuously going on and on and on.

My classroom looks like a garage sale. There is stuff everywhere. It is like a museum. These kids love this kind of stuff. They love hands on. They love touching these families, because we have had Vietnam vets come in, we have had survivors from the Holocaust come in, and we have World War II veterans come in.

I could have retired three years ago, and I just decided after 9/11, that I wanted to go back in. They kept on saying, "You are too old, you are too old." Every year I would ask again, and they would say, "You are too old."

Finally in 2005, they said I could go. I said, "I thought you said I was too old."

General Umbarger from Gary, Indiana was able to get me back in. I served one year in Afghanistan. I am so proud of that. I can't begin to tell you how proud I am of serving this country, and that gave me eligibility to be in the VFW, and I say to you, "Thank you, thank you." I mean, I just can't begin to thank you.

My daughter has served two times in Iraq. My grandson is down here. My daughter, Melissa, is over here, and my wife. My wife, who put

up all these years with all of my crap. I mean, without her, how many wives would put up with this?

The people at my school thought it was crazy to go away for a year, to leave the school and go away. But, as Mr. Stroud said something in a speech that I heard a couple of months ago. He said, "It is the right thing to do." And that's why I did it. Thank you very much. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF THE NEWS MEDIA AWARD TO STARS & STRIPES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: What a great youth project that is. Since 1978, the VFW News Media Award has been presented to an individual or organization in appreciation for their candid and forthright news coverage which contributes, with integrity, a greater understanding of our American way of life, our institutions and our interests.

The Stars and Stripes publication has been delivering original news to the defense, military and government communities since 1861, when Union soldiers from three Illinois regiments decided to use a vacated newspaper office to print stories about their activities.

This developed into a publication that covers every American overseas action and boasts a readership of more than 400,000 people.

Its exemplary military reporters deploy to war zones, providing readers with insight through first-hand accounts of what they witness, not what they are told to tell. While the publication operates within the Department of Defense, it is editorially separate and protected by First Amendment freedom of the press protections.

They consistently display commendable ethics in journalism through their portrayal of reality and fact in an uncertain world.

In honor of its reliability, credibility and realistic approach to bringing readers the truth, please join me in recognizing Stars and Stripes with the VFW's News Media Award.

Let me introduce the Stars and Stripes publisher, Max Lederer, who is here to accept the VFW News Media Award on behalf of Stars and Stripes. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: News Media Award and Citation awarded to Stars and Stripes.

"In recognition and appreciation of its 153 years of journalistic excellence and innumerable contributions to American society through objective, unbiased reporting, news analysis and an untiring pursuit for the truth regarding military affairs.

"Its dedicated and committed efforts toward providing indisputable insight and its ability to convey the facts with accuracy, absolute credibility and lucidity, has earned the utmost respect and admiration of the military community as well as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 21st day of July, 2014. Approved by the National Council of Administration."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We present you with this honorarium of \$2,500 to the Stars and Stripes. We are sure you will put it to good use. (Applause)

RESPONSE – MR. MAX D. LEDERER, STARS & STRIPES

MR. LEDERER: You bet. Thank you, Commander. Thank you for the membership of the VFW. The Stars and Stripes has been around a long time, as it was mentioned earlier. It only exists because of the stories of you, your best friends, your family members, your dedication and courage that you provide to the military community.

It is an interesting job, because we live within the DoD, but we criticize the DoD and how they do things, but we also tell the positive story.

We tell the story of the dedication and the courage of the individual. Technology today allows us to tell that story in a lot of different ways, but also allows us to continue to tell the story after one leaves uniform or after one leaves the military base and becomes a veteran.

We have a dedicated veterans' rapport on the Congressional level today. This person goes on and covers other events and covers stories that you are interested in that you follow on through your careers and your lives after you have left uniform.

The Stars and Stripes exists to tell the story of the military back to the military and back to people who are interested in the military. I encourage all of you to tell us what you want to know, and to tell us if you think we have got it wrong.

We exist to tell your story and so we want to tell it right, and we need you to help us tell that story.

Again, thank you for your recognition. I accept this on behalf of the entire staff and their dedication to you, and to your story. Thank you. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF “CONSECUTIVE YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP” CITATION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARIZONA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have come to realize that we can count on one thing that consistently remains the same at the Convention: The Department of Arizona increasing their VFW membership.

For a remarkable 47 years, the members of the Department of Arizona have come together as a team to consecutively increase VFW membership throughout the state.

What this Department has accomplished is truly amazing. I commend each and every member of the Department of Arizona for their years of devotion and tireless efforts that has gone into reaching this momentous achievement.

Now, in honor of their hard work and dedication, I would like to call on Anthony Mangine, immediate Past Commander of Arizona, to accept this “Consecutive Year of Membership Growth” citation.

Congratulations to all in the great Department of Arizona.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Certificate of Commendation awarded to the Department of Arizona.

“In recognition of the remarkable achievement of 47 consecutive years of membership sustained by a Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 21st day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General.

INTRODUCTION OF MAJOR GENERAL JASON KAMIYA, USAA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: The VFW is fortunate to have a longstanding relationship with the truly outstanding company, the United Services Automobile Association, or perhaps better known as USAA. USAA has been a friend to our veterans, service members and their families from its beginning back in 1922.

Through our partnership, the USAA provides banking and financial advice to VFW members and has supported numerous VFW endeavors over the years.

Major General Jason Kamiya, Senior Vice President of Financial Foundations for USAA, joined the company in 2010. He and his team are responsible for four of five USAA regional offices and over 6,500 employees, the majority of whom are bank and insurance sales and service member representatives. Jason's team enables member service representatives to be at their best every day to provide outstanding service to their customers.

Prior to joining USAA, he served over three decades in the Army in a variety of leadership and staff positions and retired as a Major General. Earlier career assignments included service in the Executive Office of the President of the United States as Executive Assistant to the Director of National Drug Control Policy, a Cabinet-level official, and in related work on Capitol Hill, the Cabinet and the White House. His last assignment prior to retirement was as a principle representative to the offices of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff for all joint training matters in the Department of Defense.

Remarkably, he is also the son of a World War II veteran of the All-Japanese American 100th Infantry Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

Comrades, please give a warm VFW welcome to our esteemed guest, Major General Jason Kamiya. (Applause)

REMARKS BY MAJOR GENERAL JASON KAMIYA, USAA

MAJOR GENERAL KAMIYA: Thank you. In the history of this great country some 40 million Americans have served in the Armed Forces. About 21 million of them are alive today and making their mark on the world. Every single veteran has his or her own story, his or her own experiences, jobs, hopes and dreams for their families. That is why organizations like the VFW are so indispensable.

It is also why I am very proud to wear this cap representing VFW Post 76, the oldest VFW Post in Texas.

I bring warm greetings from 26,000 employees of USAA, an organization whose mission is to facilitate the vital security of the military

community. For more than three years, USAA has been privileged to be the preferred provider for the VFW.

In that time, we have been pleased to welcome thousands of VFW members to our family. We know that every veteran has his or her own story, because we share them every day.

More of those stories belong to Stacy Pearsall. Pearsall was an Air Force Staff Sergeant and a combat photographer, who retired after being wounded in convoy ambush north of Baghdad in 2007.

Her path to recovery was not easy and to a District Reporter, she explained that, "After being wounded in combat, my struggle to find my place in the world, it was my fellow veterans who looked at me, who lifted me up, and to them I owe a sincere gratitude."

Surrounded by veterans in each and every organization and in every generation branch of the services, Pearsall said she was compelled to honor and thank them for their sacrifice through her calling of photography.

So, she created the Veterans Portrait Project. She told the stories of the veterans and thanking them for their service, taking their photographs and listening to their stories.

Last year USAA brought Stacy Pearsall to the VFW Convention. She is here again this year. Maybe she will listen to your stories, maybe she took your portrait.

You can see some of her work and some faces you might recognize. Millions of veterans, millions of stories.

My own father's story illustrates how military service can redirect your force in life. Sometimes it is struggling to figure out just what is next.

My father was raised on a sugar cane plantation in Hawaii among Japanese and Philippine immigrants. He was a man of simple means with only limited formal education, but he responded when his company mandated it in World War II.

He rose to receive his rank of Private First Class, and was awfully proud of it. After being wounded in combat and medically discharged, dad worked as a busboy at Tripler Army Medical Center to save enough money to pay for something his family members never imagined, and that was business school.

First, though, he had to get in. Nervous, shy and uncertain about the path he was committing himself to, my father tells of pacing up and down in front of the business school for three straight days with the application in hand. Finally, on the fourth day, he had the nerve to submit his paperwork.

After he gave that application, he began a 30-year career of underwriting, selling and servicing insurance and investments. Despite his financial success, my father wishes that there was someone there to help him, someone to guide him in his life decisions.

I am sure that post 9/11 veterans who are now returning to civilian life want someone to help them, those veterans between 2011 and 2016 will express similar sentiments.

Many of them need reintegration and reorienting in their lives. At USAA, we talk to these veterans every day, and help them with their financial challenges. We know their brothers and sisters, in their VFW we are also there to offer help and support.

What we are hearing is the transitional events, set for three primary reasons, better careers, not just jobs. Major vets need more help to become more financial literal and soldier vets need an occasional helping hand to the community.

What are these needs all about? More importantly, what can we do to help them?

Thanks to institutions like the Chambers Hiring our Heroes, Hiring America, supported by the VFW, overall employed veterans have come down on our National average. What the truth is, unemployment figures don't tell the whole story. Underemployment of veterans is also an issue.

The veterans returning to civilian life will take any job they can to make ends meet. That means two or three jobs before they find the right career. Transitioning veterans don't just need help finding jobs, they need help finding careers.

What that means for employers is that we not only have to commit to hiring more veterans and military spouses, we also have to focus on what happens after they come on board. We connect them to veterans and professional mentors, colleagues who have made the successful transition into civilian life.

They have been trained, all these veterans, to leverage their military skills and experiences. In short, employers can help out by hiring veterans, connecting with them and developing them.

Let's face it, no one comes out of the military rich. Many transitioning vets have not had to manage household budgets in a civilian world with all of its variables and surprises.

So, the level of financial literacy is not always the highest. In 2012, a survey of 1,000 military service members, on a test of five basic financial questions, the military respondent answered an average of only three correctly.

We are not terrible, but many younger veterans could benefit from learning more about the essentials of financial management. The USAA team that I am in charge of has the largest number of professionals on hand to give basic financial advice. We espouse principles like spend less than you earn; save for emergencies; and build a financial plan.

What is more, the USAA Educational Foundation helps promote financial literacy of military families. If knowledge is power, then we need to do everything we can to empower returning vets to have a strong financial foundation. Often, however, there are gaps in that foundation.

The communities with heavy concentration of military families, many are already using Social Services agencies. In San Antonio, the United Way has a program called "Military 2-1-1", a telephone help line for military families and veterans. Coordinators help connect callers to services like mental health counseling, emergency job care, or other emergencies, even financial assistance for paying utilities or rent.

Even though they were not asked for, service members and veterans just might need a helping hand from time to time. The VFW recognizes this and your Unmet Needs Program has distributed \$5 million in financial assistance grants, with more than half going directly towards basic housing needs.

Every life has highs and lows, challenges and successes, and veterans are no exception. As I mentioned earlier, Stacy Pearsall is helping

to tell her stories in photographs. All of those stories, all of those photographs are a part of a bigger picture. They have the big picture. Our latest generation of veterans have sacrificed so much for our country. Many of them surviving combat, and suffering wounds, both seen and unseen.

Now, it is our turn, the employers, the public sector, the veterans organizations and community agencies to serve them.

Thank you very much and have a great Convention. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF ANDY TAYLOR, EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, ENTERPRISE HOLDINGS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Each year we invite guest speakers from businesses who we believe uphold the highest standards of the military and align with those of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

This year, I am proud to introduce you to Andy Taylor, the Executive Chairman of Enterprise Holdings, the largest car rental service provider in the world.

Enterprise Holdings was actually started right here in St. Louis by Andy's father, Lieutenant Junior Grade Jack Taylor, who served as a pilot in the Navy during World War II.

Jack Taylor applied the same values he learned in the military. Integrity, hard work and team spirit, to his business. He founded Enterprise, naming it after the aircraft carrier he had served on, the World War II USS Enterprise. In fact, the USS Enterprise was the most decorated vessel in the Navy fleet before its decommission two years ago. Founded in 1957, the company continues to thrive and grow today.

Andy Taylor joined his father's business at the ripe old age of 16, washing cars on his summer and holiday breaks. He learned about the ins and outs of the business from the ground up and he has held a number of positions within the company, including: General Manager, President and Chief Operating Officer, Chief Executive Officer, Chairman, and most recently Executive Chairman.

Mr. Taylor has been highly successful in his career with Enterprise. In 2009, he was inducted into the U.S. Travel Hall of Leaders as one of the 81 professionals who have been inducted since 1969. Automotive News Magazine named him as one of the "Electrifying 100," key players driving vehicle electrification.

Enterprise Holdings currently supports our Nation's veterans by providing superior service to military agencies, volunteering for and hiring veterans.

It is great to see a homegrown company built on military values performing so well. Comrades, please help me welcome our esteemed guest, Enterprise Holdings Executive Chairman, Andy Taylor. (Applause)

REMARKS – ANDY TAYLOR, EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, ENTERPRISE HOLDINGS

MR. ANDY TAYLOR: Well, thank you very much for that introduction, and let me just say it is one of the larger conventions here in St. Louis, and we are thrilled to have you all here in town, so many veterans and family members. We do have military roots as has just been

discussed. That relationship is part of the reason why we have a strong ongoing commitment to veterans, military families, and something I want to touch on in just a minute.

But my most important message to you today is to say thank you, thank you for your service. We owe you a big debt of gratitude for the fact that we have the freedoms that we have today here in this United States.

First, let me give you a little bit of background about our military blood. You heard a little bit about that. My father-in-law is a retired Air Force General, but our military heritage starts with my father, Jack Taylor, who was just mentioned. He started the company here in 1957 after serving in the Navy in World War II. The Taylor family owns Enterprise, National and Alamo, and our privately held family business is still here in St. Louis.

For those of you who have befriended our three brands, thank you so much for the business. We really appreciate it.

As a bit of history, my father named our company after one of the aircraft carriers which he served, as has been mentioned, the USS Enterprise, (CV-6). He enlisted in the United States Navy in 1943. My father became an F6F Hellcat pilot. There are a lot of experts in this room that know what Hellcats are, I bet.

He was on duty in the Pacific area from the depths of the USS Enterprise and the USS F-6 Enterprise. He was a member of the renowned Carrier Air Group 15, led by the top warriors with 34 victories include with Wing McCampbell and was twice decorated with the Flying Cross.

I don't have to tell you, but they were recently named, the World War II veterans, as the greatest generation.

I am proud to be his son and proud to introduce to you Lieutenant Jack Taylor, who is here with us today. (Applause)

He will be the first to tell you the lessons he learned in the Navy really helped mold his character with such things as value, hard work, team work, fun, mission, honor. Those things have made our business very, very much more successful.

We really just want to thank the Navy, the U.S. military for their contributions, which lives today in our business.

We know that military service doesn't just celebrate skills but instills great values, which is why we actively recruit military veterans for careers, to follow upon the General's comments, and Reservists who join our organization.

Last year alone, nearly 2,000 military veterans and Reservists launched new careers with our company.

As you can see from the next few slides, we have drawn recruits from all branches of the service and they are terrific teammates. In addition, we are active members of coalitions designed to boost veterans' employment.

Enterprise has been part of the 100,000 jobs mission, which was mentioned by the Vice President. We have been a partner in that since the beginning. We have worked with a coalition of about a hundred companies that made sure to have a policy and an action plan, if you will, to get those jobs to those veterans.

As the Vice President said, it has really been working. We have partnered with other companies in the travel industry to form the Joint

Forces Travel Industry Coalition. It is one more important way to highlight workforce potential and expand employment at career development opportunities for our heroes.

We have undertaken these recruiting efforts because we believe in them as an organization, and it is the right thing to do, plus it is just the right thing to do for business.

We are proud that a number of our important organizations have recognized our efforts. We have been honored to receive the Secretary of Defense Employer's Support Freedom Award, the highest recognition given by the Department of Defense to employers for supporting their employees who served in the National Guard and Reserves.

Our strong commitment to the military has also earned us the USAA Supplier Recognition Military Community Supporter Award — that is a long word for an award — which is given to USAA suppliers who support the military through programs and initiatives, and community involvement, activities and policies that focus on veterans. I don't mind saying that I consider that particular award a special honor.

We have long admired USAA as a well-managed terrific company in its support of veterans and military, and also a great customer of ours.

In addition, we are partnering with several organizations to extend our support to military families further, and the Enterprise Foundation supports the Fisher House Foundation. I think many of you have heard of that.

It is a not-profit organization that provides free or low-cost lodging to the families of veterans receiving treatment at military medical centers. It is a really great organization.

We also serve the military through rental locations on bases throughout the world. So, I invite you to visit with members of our team here at the Convention to learn more about the car rental benefits for the VFW members, as well as our improvement of supplier diversity efforts with veterans.

Just one more thought. As I was preparing to speak to you, I took a look at your website, and I was impressed all over again by the way VFW is mentioned of the three areas of focus, camaraderie, services and advocacy. I am even more impressed by how exceptionally well you fulfilled that mission.

The camaraderie that you foster among U.S. veterans is not just visible here in this room, but I have been out in other areas of the Convention Center, and on the streets of St. Louis, and you can see that camaraderie.

For more than a century, your spirit of service to veterans, the military and our community has been strong and unflinching, and there is no better example of the VFW's advocacy role than the way this organization has stepped up to be a voice for all veterans, including for some of the serious issues with the Veterans Administration.

I am optimistic that my friend, Bob McDonald, will help make the VA an efficient and effective resource for our veterans, who it serves. He is a terrific executive, I can tell you that, and a great patriot.

One reason for that optimism is I know the VFW will continue to play a vigilant and vocal role in moving us forward on that front. I know it will.

Thanks for the opportunity and thanks for all that you all do for our Nation's veterans and our country. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF JOSH HALPERN, ANHEUSER-BUSCH IN BEV

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you so much for that.

I am sure that we all familiar with the St. Louis based company our next guest represents, maker of "The King of Beers", Anheuser-Busch.

Anheuser-Busch is an American brewing company and a wholly-owned subsidiary of Anheuser-Busch In Bev, with headquarters for the North American Unit based here in St. Louis.

Anheuser-Busch In Bev is the leading global brewer and one of the top five consumer products companies in the world. The company was named first in the beverage industry on Fortune Magazine's "World's Most Admired" companies list.

Anheuser-Busch's military support dates back to its beginning. The company's co-founders served in the Union Army as members of the Missouri Volunteers during the Civil War.

During World War I and World War II, diesel engines for Navy submarines and amphibious recon vehicles for the Army were produced by the company. More than 1,500 employees served, and they all had jobs when they returned, which remains the same today for all its employees currently serving in the United States military.

For more than 150 years, Anheuser-Busch, its employees and family of wholesalers have supported America's Armed Forces. In 2009, in recognition of the company's history of service to the military, our Nation's veterans and the families of fallen soldiers, the Department of Defense presented Anheuser-Busch with the Secretary of Defense Outstanding Public Service Award.

We are honored to have forged a new relationship with this storied and patriotic company. In fact, together with Anheuser-Busch, we have planned a real treat for us to take place tomorrow night. It's going to be a lot of fun, I can tell you that.

Without further ado, please join me in welcoming Josh Halpern, Board member on the VFW Foundation and Vice President of National Retail Sales for on premise and military accounts for Anheuser-Busch In Bev. (Applause)

REMARKS BY JOSH HALPERN, ANHEUSER-BUSCH IN BEV

MR. HALPERN: I can now say good afternoon. On behalf of the 55,000 U.S. based employees of Anheuser-Busch and our wholesalers, we are proud and honored to be here with you today to celebrate the VFW Convention coming to St. Louis, Missouri, our home.

As Commander-in-Chief Thien said, for more than 150 years we and our family of wholesalers have supported America's Armed Forces through numerous programs and philanthropic efforts.

We have raised resources. We have raised funds for veterans and we have assisted the dependents and military families. As like was just said, in 2009, we won the Secretary of Defense Outstanding Public Service Award.

Our history with the U.S. military goes back to our co-owners, Adolphus Busch and his father-in-law, Eberhard Anheuser. Both Anheuser and Busch were both in the Union Army as members of the Missouri Volunteers during the Civil War.

In 1944, our employees raised over \$879,000 in War Bonds, enough to purchase two B-17 bombers, which the Army named "Miss Budweiser" and "Miss Buschwhacker", which is how Budweiser was introduced to Europe.

More than 5,500 Anheuser-Busch employees here served in World War I and World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Iraq Freedom, and other military campaigns.

Employees upon serving in the U.S. military have jobs waiting for them at Anheuser-Busch, when they finally come home. Today, our military team under my direction, is led by someone who is extremely well known to our veterans here in Missouri.

Sergeant Rocky Sickmann was a Marine, who was stationed in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979. A mere 15 days after his arrival, Islamic militants stormed the Embassy and Rocky was held hostage for the next 444 days. As all America and especially here in his beloved hometown of St. Louis, watched with bated breath for his release.

Upon Rocky's return home in the spring of 1981, he was greeted by hundreds of well-wishers at the airport and became a local celebrity.

He was asked to throw out the first opening day pitch in 1981 at Busch Stadium. August Busch, the patriarch of the company at that time, was on hand and asked for Rocky to be brought up to his suite. The rest of this story is obvious.

Rocky entered our organization ensuring that Budweiser and the military would forever be linked, and that we would serve the good corporate citizens in supporting our troops and our veterans.

Today, the USO at Lambert Airport is named in Rocky's honor. In honor of Rocky's service and in honor of the VFW to meet in St. Louis, Budweiser will donate \$4,444, \$10 for every day Rocky was in prison in Tehran to the VFW Foundation in Rocky's name to go towards the St. Louis mainstream of going to college. Furthermore, we believe in honoring our troops and our veterans as they come home from foreign wars.

In January 2012, Budweiser joined the community-based effort to hold the nation's first ever parade honoring our returning veterans from Iraq. We also paid tribute to America's heroes with the patriotic float in the Rose Parade, which was horse drawn, by the Clydesdales, honoring the veterans service organizations and Anheuser employees that served in the military.

Last year we partnered with the VFW to do something extraordinary, like throwing a surprise parade for one soldier returning home to Florida from his tour of duty in Afghanistan. A footage from this parade became the basis for a Super Bowl commercial, which was just nominated for an Emmy Award.

We would like to now show the extended video, which shows the behind-the-scenes look at his story coming home, which Chuck Nadd, Winter Park, Florida, that experience every soldier should receive when he comes home. And, yes, some of the characters in this video will look familiar. Please roll the video.

(Whereupon, the video is shown at this time.)

Thank you. I have seen that over a hundred times at this point, and I still get choked up every time.

I would like to thank Adjutant General John Hamilton, Assistant Adjutant General Jerry Newberry and the VFW Post in Florida that made this happen. It was a great effort.

It was mentioned in the video that so many soldiers don't get that type of warm welcome when they come home. Let me say for some of you in the audience today, that is still not right. You defended and continue to defend our country, our freedom, and our values. That's why it gives me great delight to say tomorrow Budweiser will honor all of you, each and every one of you, with your very own welcome home parade just like the one we gave Chuck Nadd in the commercial.

The great people of St. Louis will be on hand sharing this event. Dozens of businesses are letting out early tomorrow so they can come down here to give you the proper recognition and honor you have all earned.

As they say, the best thing comes to those that wait. Although we don't know what your personal circumstances were when you returned, Budweiser is committed to doing all we can to ensure from this date forward that you know that you are our heroes.

On our military team, we have a toast that we say, "We are having a beer together." That toast appears to the heroes, but first to you. We salute you.

Finally, since 1987, Anheuser-Busch and its Foundation have donated over \$25 million to military charities, including the USO, Fisher House, Trip and Fallen Heroes Fund, Pentagon Memorial Fund, America Supports You, Color Heritage Foundation, Hispanic Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Korean War Memorial, the Vietnam Wall, and the Folds of Honor Foundation.

In honor of the VFW being here in St. Louis, I am proud to announce that Anheuser-Busch has donated \$100,000 to the VFW. (Applause)

Thank you for letting me come in and spend brief moments with you today for the third consecutive Budweiser patriotic packaging in the summer months as a tribute to our Armed Forces and our veterans.

Hopefully, you will be able to join me tomorrow for one of these baseball Budweisers for your very own welcome home parade. Just for the heroes, cheers. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF GENERAL RUSLAN AUSHEV, WAR VETERANS COMMITTEE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is now my privilege to introduce from the Commonwealth of Independent States the President of the Committee for Warrior Internationalists, Retired General Lieutenant Ruslan Aushev.

General Aushev is a combat-wounded veteran of Afghanistan who received the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union. After the war, he

was elected to the Soviet Parliament, and he was a member of the Upper Committee Council of Military Affairs.

In February 1993, he was elected as President of the Russian Republic of Ingushetia, a position he held throughout 2001.

In September 2004, in the Russian town of Beslan the General made worldwide news by successfully negotiating the safe release of 26 nursing women and their children before the Chechen terrorists blew up the school with more than 300 hostages inside.

The VFW has traveled to Moscow since 2004 to meet with the General and his Committee to discuss very important POW-MIA issues that are vitally important to American families from World War II forward, as well as Russian families who have missing loved ones from their war in Afghanistan.

We are very pleased that he and his fellow Committee members, plus a representative from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, can join us here in St. Louis.

They are helping to break down barriers to aid our full accounting mission, and for that, the VFW is eternally grateful.

Please welcome the President of the Committee for Warrior Internationalists, General Aushev. (Applause)

REMARKS BY GENERAL AUSHEV

GENERAL AUSHEV: Honorable Commander-in-Chief, distinguished delegates and guests of the Convention, esteemed veterans, on behalf of the combat veterans of the Commonwealth of Independent States, I warmly welcome all Convention delegates, and I wish its participants success and fruitful work.

A committee which I have chaired since 1992 coordinates the work of the veterans organizations in the Commonwealth of Independent States. One of our main tasks is a search for those missing in action and prisoners of war, particularly from 1979 to 1989 Afghan War.

This work involves great difficulties arising from the complexity and severity of the internal political situation in Afghanistan. Despite these difficult days, the Committee's staff continues to search for and find limit witnesses of the immense of those years included former prisoners of war whom we know never returned home.

Our experience has shown that the most important factor in this activity is to work with those who once fought against us, and it is precisely those people that possess information that is of interest to us and has aided in the search activities.

As a result of this work, the Committee has found 30 surviving Soviet POW's. With our assistance, 22 of them were repatriated, and the others, for various reasons, wanted to stay in Afghanistan and other countries.

In recent years, we have identified the remains of five soldiers who were found in Afghanistan. All the soldiers were buried with military honors in their countries of origin. Currently, there are special investigations ongoing to identify the additional 14 sets of remains, two of which were brought to Moscow in June of this year.

Recently, we were able to clarify the fate of yet another of the missing soldiers. He was killed in Helmand Province after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. We found his adult son in Afghanistan.

Over the years, the Committee has created a central amount of base genetic material, collected almost 200 DNA samples from relatives of the missing, and arranged for DNA analysis of remains.

With this work, it presents certain challenges. The fact is that experts have to work with the remains which have long been exposed to the effects of precipitation and temperature fluctuations. There are also issues with the technical qualifications of specialists conducting these tests. Sometimes they lack knowledge and modern methodologies.

A few years ago, with the help of your organization, we managed to organize training for Russian forensic pathologists at U.S. DoD laboratories. I fondly still remember this brief training.

Unfortunately, for various reasons, we have not been able to set up further training of this type, and we would be grateful to the U.S. for assistance in doing so.

I want to emphasize that we are ready to cooperate in this with all interested parties and organizations. For example, our cooperation with the U.S. side of the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission on POW-MIA's.

On several occasions, the Committee has provided the Moscow office of the Commission with lists of Russian veterans who fought in Korea and Vietnam, and whom might have information about American servicemen killed or missing during those conflicts. Several meetings with such veterans took place in Moscow and other cities.

It is my great pleasure to inform the Convention participants that by decree of the President of Russia First Deputy, General Bonita Lusthom has been appointed as the Chairman of the Commission on Prisoners of War, internees and those missing in action. He also heads the Russian side of the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW-MIA's. In particular, he is ready for cooperation and meaningful work with our American colleagues.

Esteemed veterans, within the framework of humanitarian cooperation between our countries, we are ready to continue to develop comprehensive ties between our organizations in the spirit of the Joint Declaration of Cooperation signed between the two organizations in 2007. We are ready to work together with our American colleagues to develop and strengthen the international veterans movement.

I want to wish all veterans of the United States of America and their family's good health, longevity, prosperity and success, and to the peoples of our Nations, peace, friendship and mutual understanding. Thank you for your attention. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF VOICE OF DEMOCRACY WINNER MADISON HALEY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, General Aushev. For more than 65 years, the VFW National Voice of Democracy Program has been in place.

This program provides students the opportunity to speak clearly about their values and give voice to how they perceive our Nation and the many liberties afforded to them.

What is reflected in this program is an extension of America's values and its ideals. This premier scholarship program helps ensure our Nation's heritage will never be lost.

Student interest is what keeps the program going, and in time, that interest will be manifested in the form of leadership, and that leadership will help guide our Nation for future generations to come.

Education and knowledge are the best weapons against any type of tyranny, and these young people are well-armed to face the challenges of America's future. Clearly, they will be contributing to not only America's future, but writing their own chapter in the history books.

Of all our VFW programs, none provides a better perspective of what the future holds than the submissions made to the program by our Nation's young people, all communicating pride, patriotism and love of country.

Miss Madison Haley's outstanding entry based on the selected theme, "Why I'm Optimistic about our Nation's Future" correctly earned her the esteemed title of 2013-2014 National Voice of Democracy Winner.

Madison graduated this past spring and plans to pursue a career in athletic training. Madison is representative of the many thousands of young people who participate in the scholarship program annually.

She and her peer group are the future of our country. What they are today, America will be tomorrow.

Please join me in welcoming and celebrating Madison Haley's achievement as the 2013-2014 Voice of Democracy Winner. (Applause)

SPEECH BY VOICE OF DEMOCRACY WINNER MADISON HALEY

MISS HALEY: Good afternoon, everyone. Before I begin, I want to thank the VFW and everyone here whose efforts not only lead to the construction of this beautiful Memorial Service, but also gave me an opportunity to speak to you today. My decision to enter the Voice of Democracy competition was based purely upon finances. I'm off to North Central College in the fall, and I was searching for any and all avenues to help pay for it.

Along the way though, I was inspired. However, I'm not talking about my speech. I was inspired by men and women just like those in attendance today and those we've come to honor. Traveling to Washington, D.C., was a blessing and the experiences I received will stay with me the rest of my life but the souvenir I brought back home cannot be found in a gift shop and its value far exceeds any scholarship.

I brought with me a newfound respect for our veterans I must admit was lacking when I started the journey. The quality of people, veterans I met, their profound love for this country, their sense of honor, duty and sacrifice. They, not this competition, have changed my life and so I thank you.

Day in and day out they work tirelessly for the safety and security of this country. Without a second thought, they risk their lives so that I can sleep soundly at night. So for all of those who have fought, are fighting, and will fight one day, I would like to say thank you and God bless.

(Applause)

Why I am optimistic about our Nation's future. Benghazi, illegal spying by the NSA, the targeting of conservative Americans by the IRS, I watch the news, and it seems that our country is plagued by turmoil and strife. Trayvon Martin, the Fort Hood massacre, the Boston bombing, I watch the news and it seems that our Country is overwhelmed by hate and division.

It would be easy for me, a high school senior, to be pessimistic about the Nation's future and fearful of my own, and yet I'm not. I'm just the opposite actually.

Why may you ask? Let me tell you the story of the USS America, and you will clearly see why, like me, you, too, should be optimistic about this Nation's future.

Inspired by architects such as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, the blueprints of a vessel unlike any the world has seen before were crafted. Held captive by tyrannical English moorings, thousands of people willfully sacrificed their lives to release her binds while yelling in unison "In God we trust!"

Following the command of her Captain, George Washington, they raised the red, white and blue sails adorned with stars and stripes as they set sail for history with the Constitution to guide the way.

She was constructed from freedom and liberty, and in over 200 years, she has never sunk. On her hull, the following words are emblazoned, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their single Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

She's only run aground once on the rocky shores of the Civil War. During this time, she was torn in half as the current of slavery pulled her to and fro against the jagged rocks. This is the closest she has ever come to sinking. That is until Abraham Lincoln guided her to deeper waters using the tide of emancipation to break her bondage while freeing all.

The winds of time carry her to lands of prosperity and through storms of adversity that riddled her to the core, but the crew never withers and her body never breaks from the strain. Facing tsunamis such as the Great Depression, two World Wars, and two fallen towers, she sails onward, constantly and consistently moving forward. She may bend, but she never breaks and though she sometimes loses her way, she is eventually led back on course by her unwavering compass, the Constitution.

This is why I am optimistic. I am a crew member of the USS America, and because of her history, I know this ship will always cut through murky waters and weather all storms. When I look behind from where we have come, I am no longer afraid to look ahead to where we are going. It's not that the ship is unsinkable, but rather her crew refuses to allow it to sink. Yes, we have strife, and the love of many grows cold, but when the winds roar and the waves threaten, we pull together. The eradication of slavery's evil was supplanted by the triumph election of our Nation's first black President. The carnage of two World Wars birthed our Nation's greatest generation who freed millions from German oppression, and the heart of mankind rose from the rubble of two fallen towers as evidenced by the courageous firemen and policemen who thought nothing

of their own safety while rescuing others. But mostly, I'm optimistic because this country is still the Land of the Free, the Home of the Brave, one Nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

I know that when the skies grow dark and the waves threaten, we will resolutely stand on the bow of the USS America while reciting the same words our forefathers did before us: "In God we trust." (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Thank you so much. We are going to break now. We are going to come back at 2:20. We will resume at 2:20 this afternoon.

FIRST BUSINESS SESSION
MONDAY AFTERNOON, JULY 21, 2014

(The First Business Session of the 115th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States was called to order in the America's Center Convention Complex, St. Louis, Missouri, at 2:20 o'clock p.m., by Commander-in-Chief Thien.)

CALL TO ORDER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: May I have your attention, please. We will now call the delegates into session at this time.

PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION
TO THE 114th NATIONAL CONVENTION COMMITTEE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is now my distinct pleasure to present a Certificate of Appreciation to the 114th National Convention Committee for their work in planning and conducting last year's very successful National Convention in Louisville.

Here to accept the award on behalf of the Committee is Carl Kaelin, the Convention Committee Chairman for the 114th National Convention.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Certificate of Appreciation presented to the 114th National Convention Committee.

"In extraordinary appreciation and esteemed recognition of its outstanding dedication and persistent drive to ensure the success of the 114th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States held in Louisville, Kentucky, July 20-24, 2013.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 21st day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General.

RESPONSE – COMRADE CARL KAE LIN

COMRADE CARL KAE LIN (Department of Kentucky): On behalf of the Department of Kentucky, I am proud to accept this Certificate. I will not say too much, because we are so far behind. Thank you. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF THE FRED C. HALL MEMORIAL OUTSTANDING
POST SPECIAL PROJECT AWARD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: The VFW has a rich tradition of community service, as evidenced by our members' nearly 12 million hours of volunteerism each year. Those hours are spent in a variety of ways, covering everything from maintaining veterans' memorials to teaching a classroom of children proper flag etiquette. Our work instills a sense of patriotism and pride in our communities.

Community service is a founding VFW tenet, benefiting education, the environment, health sciences, civic projects and the military.

Today, we honor West, Texas' VFW Post 4819 for their heroic hard work and tireless dedication following a disaster in their hometown.

On the evening of April 17, 2013, an ammonium nitrate explosion occurred at the West Fertilizer Company storage and distribution facility. Tragically, 15 people were killed, more than 160 were injured, and more than 150 nearby buildings were damaged or destroyed.

Town residents reported the blast felt like an earthquake. The State and the Federal Governments would declare the area a major disaster.

Amid all of the chaos, members of VFW Post 4819 proved to be the steady hand the town could rely on.

Immediately after the explosion, Post Commander Rob Buchanan, Post Quartermaster Bobby Jones and several other Post members opened Post 4819 to assist the injured and provide a place to sleep for those who had lost their homes.

The next morning, the Post began preparing food for victims and hundreds of volunteers. For the next three-and-a-half weeks, using donated food and beverages, the Post prepared three meals a day for those working in the disaster area and even delivered food to those who could not come to the Post. Before all was said and done, the Post would prepare and serve over 30,000 meals, all free of charge. (Applause)

Their efforts extended beyond food, though. The Post also set up 40 cots each evening to allow anyone needing shelter a place to sleep.

In addition to this, clothing, toiletries and other items were collected at the Post and victims were able to get any items necessary. Post members even built clothing racks and shelves to sort and display all of the items. The Post estimates 1,200 men, women and children entered the Post and "shopped" at the store. And, of course, everything was provided at no cost.

The selfless efforts of this Post are truly an inspiration. Disasters happen, unfortunately, and when they do, people need a steady hand to turn to. And that's exactly what Post 4819 was.

So, please join me in presenting the Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project Award to West, Texas VFW Post 4819.

Accepting the award on behalf of the Post is Post Commander Michael Driscoll.

RESPONSE – MICHAEL DRISCOLL, POST COMMANDER

COMRADE MICHAEL DRISCOLL (Post 4819-Texas): On behalf of everyone in West, we want to thank you for this award. We did what needed to be done and was expected of anybody. Thank you so much. (Applause)

REPORT OF CONVENTION CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I will now request that Betty Gripp give us the initial Credentials report. Betty.

COMRADE BETTY GRIPP (Department of Arizona): Good afternoon, Commander-in-Chief, Council Members and Delegates:

The opening Credentials report for the 115th National Convention, at the close of business 4:00 p.m. yesterday, July 20, 2014, the total delegates registered at the Convention, 12,552. Total Commanders, 43. Total Past Commanders-in-Chief, 23. Total National Officers, 49. The grand total is 12,667. Total registered for the 115th National Convention, 1,992. Commander-in-Chief, that is my report.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you for a good job. At this time we will have the report on Convention Rules by Chairman John M. Carney.

REPORT ON CONVENTION RULES

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF CARNEY: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. I am Jack Carney, a delegate and Past Commander-in-Chief, Florida. I would like to recognize those serving on the Committee with me, Past Commander-in-Chief George Cramer, and Staff Assistant David Prohaska.

Our Committee met on Sunday, as directed by the Commander-in-Chief, on July 20, 2014, and agreed on the following recommendations, which are respectfully submitted for your consideration:

1. That, in accordance and conjunction with the National By-laws and Manual of Procedure, and with any exception noted here, Demeter's Manual shall be recognized as parliamentary authority for this Convention.

2. That when a registered delegate desires to make a motion or address the Convention, he shall rise, address the Chair as "Comrade Commander-in-Chief," and after being recognized shall state his name, Post number and Department before proceeding.

3. A registered delegate shall be permitted to speak but twice on any one subject or any pending resolution for a period not to exceed five minutes each except by consent of two-thirds of the voting strength of the Convention present, provided that the Chairmen of Convention Committees may speak as frequently as necessary in connection with reports of their Committees. In the event of controversy, the Presiding Officer shall not entertain any motion which will curtail further debate without affording the maker of the motion or a member of the particular group presenting the resolution an opportunity for five minutes of final rebuttal.

4. All resolutions offered by individual registered delegates must bear the endorsement of the Department Commander, or, if absent, the Department Adjutant. All resolutions must be submitted to the office of the Adjutant General for numbering and referral to Committee no later than 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 22, 2014, and must be accompanied by a written explanation as to why the resolution was not presented to the Department Convention for consideration.

5. All resolutions offered on the floor at the Convention, shall initially be in writing, and shall automatically and without reading, be referred to the Adjutant General for assignment to the proper Committee.

6. Committee Chairmen in reporting on resolutions referred to their Committee shall first read those resolutions on which favorable action is recommended. Specific resolutions may be set aside for individual action at the request of any delegate, the others being voted upon

collectively. After action has been taken on all such resolutions, the Chairman shall read the number and title of those resolutions which the Committee has disapproved. A resolution disapproved by the Committee shall be automatically rejected unless a motion is made and seconded that it be approved in which case it shall be brought up for debate and Convention action.

7. This Convention will not consider any resolution dealing with race, creed or religion or endorse anyone for public office. No resolution will be considered on the expenditure or appropriation of organizational funds.

8. The Convention will not consider any resolution endorsing legislation sponsored by any other veterans organization, or requesting us to join with any other organization in sponsoring legislation not expressly proposed by the members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

9. No person not a duly registered delegate or member of the National Convention shall participate in debate, directly or indirectly, on any subject before the Convention.

10. Unit rule of voting is not allowed.

11. Voting strength shall be determined by those delegates registered as of the close of the credentials registration booth the previous day and as reported to the National Convention. The Department Commanders will receive, prior to the beginning of each Business Session, a list of Posts that have properly registered delegates. Only delegates representing those Posts listed on the report will be allowed voting privileges.

12. On roll calls, the Department Commander of each delegation shall poll his delegation's registered delegates on the floor and shall announce the vote of his delegation.

13. Registered delegates of a delegation may arrive at a vote in any manner, but shall announce it in terms of full units and not in terms of a fractional part of a vote.

14. Reconsideration of a motion or resolution upon which final disposition has been made shall not be allowed after the session at which it was acted on has been recessed or adjourned, unless the body is notified of such contemplated action prior to the close of that session.

15. When the report of the Department Commander of the delegation is not acceptable to all registered delegates of the delegation and a poll of the Department registered delegates is demanded by three registered delegates of said Department, the Adjutant General shall poll the registered delegates, without discussion of question.

16. In accordance with Section 621 of the National By-Laws, voting shall be by acclamation, except when a roll call may be demanded by ten registered delegates representing Posts in ten separate Departments, or by order of the Commander-in-Chief.

17. Nominating speeches for the National Officers shall be limited to five minutes each. The time allocated to encompass all seconding speeches shall be limited to four minutes total. Nomination and election of National Officers will be held according to the Congressional Charter, By-Laws, and Section 617 of the Manual of Procedure.

18. Registered delegates and persons recognized by the Chair shall be entitled to a respectful hearing, and the Chair shall have the authority to clear the gallery or the floor or have the Sergeant-at-Arms escort from the floor any person or persons who may create any disturbances which interferes with the orderly process of the Convention.

19. The Commander-in-Chief may, as may be necessary and appropriate to informing the membership of the activities of this Convention, authorize that all or parts of the Convention be streamed through the website of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

20. Consent of two-thirds of the voting strength of the Convention present is necessary for suspension of the rules of this Convention.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I move these rules be accepted for the 115th National Convention.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GEORGE CRAMER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief for the 115th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, I am George Cramer, Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from VFW Post 3873 in Naperville, Illinois. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: You have a motion made and has been properly seconded. Is there any discussion on the motion? Is there any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, all in favor of the motion will signify by the sign "aye"; all those opposed by the sign of "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion is carried.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL BY-LAWS, MANUAL OF PROCEDURE AND RITUAL

At this time I would like to have the report of the Committee on National By-Laws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual by Chairman Larry Rivers.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Commander-in-Chief, thank you very much. I am pleased to report to the Convention the Committee on National By-Laws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual met yesterday afternoon beginning at 2:00 p.m. proposed for this Convention, and we are prepared to make our report, Chief.

Let me initially introduce the Vice Chairman of the Committee, Past Commander-in-Chief Glenn Gardner, who is here to my right. I know there are members of the Committee in attendance. I would ask all the members of the By-Laws Committee, Manual of Procedure and Ritual to please stand and be recognized for your hard work. (Applause)

In keeping with the procedures, Chief, I will read the By-Laws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual amendments that we recommend adopting. After that we will make a motion, and if you want to set one of those aside for discussion, then you will just rise and go to the microphone and ask that a certain resolution be set aside.

We will not read the ones for rejection, and unless you ask a particular By-Law amendment that has been approved, we do not call out the passage, you need to ask that it be set aside.

So, the proper procedure will be, after I read these and you want to set aside one for adoption, get to the mic and say that "B" so and so be set aside, which is the normal VFW procedure.

You have the little booklet that has all the By-Laws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual changes. I am going down the entire list. We don't have that many. I am just going in order as in the booklet. I am going to read everything from By-Law changes all the way through the Ritual. If you want to set one aside, then you can come to the microphone.

The Committee recommends adoption of the following: B-1, the adoption of M-1, the adoption of M-2, the adoption of M-3, the adoption of B-3, the adoption of B-4, the adoption of M-5, the adoption of M-6, the adoption of M-7, the adoption of M-8, the adoption of B-5, the adoption of M-9, the adoption of B-6, the adoption of B-7, the adoption of B-8.

Also the adoption of B-10, the adoption of B-11, the adoption of B-12, the adoption of M-10, the adoption of B-13, the adoption of M-11, the adoption of B-14, the adoption of B-16, and the adoption of R-4.

Commander-in-Chief, I move that those resolutions be adopted.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GLENN GARDNER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Glenn Gardner, a delegate from VFW Post 3359, Garland, Texas. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Glenn. We have a motion made, and it has been properly seconded, recommending the adoption of "B", "M", and "R" series.

I recognize Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE VICTOR FUENTEARBA (Department of Maryland): I am Victor Fuentealba, a delegate from Post 9083 in Maryland. I request that B-4, M-5, 6 and 8 be set aside.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: B-4, and what was the other one?

COMRADE VICTOR FUENTEARBA (Department of Maryland): B-4 and M-5, 6 and 8.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Do we have any others? Let's go over here to microphone No. 3 and then we will get back to Microphone 1.

COMRADE DAVID STONE (Department of Colorado): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am David Stone, VFW Post 3917, Colorado Springs, Colorado. I would like to have B-5 and B-7 set aside.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: B-5 and B-7 be set aside?

COMRADE DAVID STONE (Department of Colorado): That is correct.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE KELLY GODDARD (Department of West Virginia): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Kelly Goddard, Post 4484, Rainelle, West Virginia. I would like B-3 to be set aside.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: B-3 is set aside. Seeing no other movement, with the exception of the ones that were set aside, there has been a motion made and properly seconded to accept the ones other than the ones set aside.

Any discussion on the motion? Any discussion on the motion? All those in favor of the motion will signify by the sign of "aye". All opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion carried.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Comrades, why don't we start with B-3, which was asked to be set aside. B-3, let me get my staff comment notes right quick that I am working off of.

Here are the comments on B-3. "Recommend adoption, companion to B-5, which lists the requirements on the District Commanders who hold a Department office.

"It should be noted that in rules of voting a member possessing more than one qualification to vote is only entitled to one vote. That was a companion bill to B-5."

B-5 was also set aside. So, if we could, Commander-in-Chief, if we could consider those two together, B-3 and B-5, they are companion bills.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Let's start with Microphone No.

1.

COMRADE DOUG KNOTTS (Department of West Virginia): I am Doug Knotts, Post 6462, West Virginia. I would like to speak against the adoption of B-3 and B-5. I have twice been a District Commander. If the District Commander is doing his job, he has a lot on his plate. The combination of B-3 and B-5 effectively says that a District Commander will be able to equally hold an elected State position. In one aspect, that is reducing one position on the Council of Administration.

Additionally, if that District Commander is doing what is required of him to maintain his District, I think it would be a conflict between what he might be tasked to do from the standpoint of the State, and also maintain his District. That's my reason for objecting to the combination of both B-3 and B-5.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE DAVID STONE (Department of Colorado): Comrade National Commander, I am Dave Stone, VFW Post 3917, Colorado Springs, Colorado. My challenge with this motion is that you are a master of one role. By serving as a Department officer, even though a District Commander is a member of the Council of Administration of the Department, but also by serving as a Department officer, then you can automatically call on the question of who you are serving.

A District Commander's number one responsibility is to the people within his District. To be able to serve as a District Commander, and a Department officer automatically puts him into question or into conflict with that primary role. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Commander-in-Chief, I would just mention, and we discussed this in the Committee yesterday, that is up to the Department. If the Department doesn't want to elect a District Commander to a State office, if they think the District Commander has too much on his plate to be effective, or if they don't want to do that in their Department, this doesn't mandate that. It just gives it as an option.

With some of our smaller Departments that are struggling to get good officers and good leadership in various positions, we think this would be very helpful. That was the rationale for making the recommendation to adopt.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE DAVID STONE (Department of Colorado): I question that observation. It would be your interpretation that it would be up to the Department Commander, but the change in the By-Law does not state that.

It simply states they can do that. That, in my opinion, leads to the possibility of abuse. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. Not seeing anyone else at the microphones, there has been a motion made and has been seconded to adopt B-3 and B-5. Is there any discussion on the motion? Is there any discussion on the motion? Not hearing any, all in favor of the motion will signify by the sign of "aye"; those opposed "nay".

I will do that one more time. All in favor of the motion signify by the sign of "aye"; all those opposed "nay". The "nays" have it.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: The next one I have is B-4. Let's consider B-4 next. That is a companion with M-5, M-6 and M-8, which were also set aside.

B-4 deals with elected and appointed officers.

It amends Section 416 of Article IV, Districts, "Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairman and Committees, National By-Laws, (a) by removing 'Judge Advocate, Surgeon' and in (b) adding 'Judge Advocate and Surgeon' after 'Adjutant'."

The staff recommended adoption. As many of you will recall, we made this proposed change last year, and it seems to be working well in filling vacancies of positions. What we feel we failed to create similar relief to some of the smaller Districts in the organization. The recommendation was the adoption of B-4 with its companions, M-5, M-6 and M-8.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: There has been a motion made and seconded to adopt B-4 and M-5, 6 and 8 as a companion. I recognize Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE VICTOR FUENTEALBA (Department of Maryland): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Victor Fuentealba, a delegate from Post 9083 in Maryland. I rise in opposition to the adoption of M-4.

Last year I could understand the logic behind the change that was made on the local level, but as I understand it there were a lot of small Posts that were having difficulty filling their chairs. I don't think that is true in the case of Districts. If it is true, then I think this organization is in a lot of trouble. As far as Maryland is concerned, we have had no problem with the District level filling offices.

I think it is a sign of regression rather than of progression when we do something like this eliminating elected officers. You lose the interest of a lot of the members and the end result it weakens the organization.

I am, therefore, opposed to this and I would like to remind the delegates that a two-thirds majority vote is needed to approve a change in the By-Laws. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you. Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE BENNY BACHAND (Department of Florida): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Benny Bachand, a delegate from Post 4287, Orlando, Florida, also Chairman of the By-Laws Study Group. I think that what we have to understand is to acknowledge that this organization is changing. I think what Victor is saying is it is right, that we are regressing.

Unfortunately, we are. We made a change last year as was indicated on the Post level to appoint the Judge Advocate and the Surgeon. The By-Laws Study Group believes that this is another way we can bring relief to the Districts. Maybe in Maryland and some other Districts, it is not

affected. But in many other Districts, in this organization, we can't fill those positions. So, we need to be a progressive organization.

We need to either acknowledge the fact that we have issues that we have to concern ourselves with and we have to take actions as an organization to keep us progressive. So, I urge the delegates to really pass this thing, to bring some relief to those Districts, and let them allow the Judge Advocate and the Surgeon, and let us move forward as an organization. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. Not seeing anyone else at the microphones, there is a motion on the floor to adopt B-4. Is there any discussion on the motion?

Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE HERB MULLEN (Department of Indiana): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Herb Mullen, Post 286, Wabash, Indiana. I can see that we made a change last year on the Post level, and it has worked well. We don't even have a full year yet to say this worked well. I think that you need more time than one year to say that a major change is working well on any level.

I can't say for the other states, but in Indiana, what we have now is working well, and I believe we really need to show a need before we start changing things. Therefore, I would urge that we reject this motion at this time. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade.

Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE PAMELA YOUNG (Department of Michigan): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Pamela Young, a member of Post 2269, a delegate from Michigan. I oppose this By-Law change. I think you are putting too much power in the hands of the Commander by letting him appoint these two positions. I also think that you are discouraging people from coming up and taking positions by saying I am just going to appoint and not be elected.

The small Districts that cannot handle filling all of the Chairs, maybe the State needs to think about redistricting their District, making the District larger so they can survive. You should not penalize everybody for a few Districts that cannot handle it. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. Not seeing anyone at the microphones, the motion is to adopt B-4 and its companions, M-5, M-6 and M-8.

All in favor of the motion please signify by the sign of "aye"; all opposed "nay". It is not even close. It is defeated.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. The last one set aside was B-7. B-7 was recommended by the National By-Laws Study Group and approved by the Committee, Article VI, National, Section 615, Eligibility to Office.

"Amend Section 615 – Eligibility to Office, National By-Laws, by removing the last sentence of the section."

The last sentence says, "National Council members shall be ineligible to simultaneously hold an elected National office." It was sort of a companion bill the same as District officers could hold a State office. So, it would remove the ineligibility of National Council members to hold any other elected National office.

The Committee recommends adoption of B-7.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Okay. You have heard the Committee's recommendation to adopt B-7. Is there any discussion on the motion? Is there any discussion on the motion? The Chair recognizes Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE DAVID STONE (Department of Colorado): Once again, I am David Stone, a member of Post 3917, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Under the same guidelines that I opposed B-5, that you cannot serve two masters, I also oppose this measure for that very same reason.

We have National Council members, and their role is to answer to their constituents throughout their Council. Having them sit as an elected officer in the same manner as the one we discussed before clouds that role.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Commander-in-Chief, all this resolution will do, and I will give a good example. Say, you have a National Council member, and our Council members serve extended years now, and say that the Commander-in-Chief wanted his Chief of Staff to be a guy that was already serving on the National Council, now he couldn't appoint that person as the Chief of Staff for that one year he is Commander-in-Chief because he would be ineligible to hold the office. They would still only get one vote, but they could hold two different National offices.

A Council member could also be a National Council member at the same time he was serving, say, as Chief of Staff, or the National Inspector to the Commander-in-Chief. That is all this would allow. It is not going to change any other voting and hurt any other elections. So, I would urge that you consider passing that amendment.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Any other discussion on the motion? Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE DAVID STONE (Department of Colorado): As written, it would not prevent someone from serving on the National Council and be the Junior National Commander. So, there is a conflict in that concept as it is written. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. If there's no further discussion, and I don't see anybody else at the microphones, there has been a motion made and properly seconded to adopt B-7. All in favor of adoption of B-7 signify by the sign of "aye"; opposed "nay". It is defeated.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Commander-in-Chief, that completes the work of this Committee. Thank you very much for the trust and the appointment for Glenn and I to serve, as the Committee members, and we have completed our report and our work is done.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you. I am sorry, Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE PAT LOVE (Department of Florida): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Pat Love, a delegate from Post 8203, Norfolk, Florida. I would like to bring to the floor for consideration B-17.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Microphone No. 1, are you going to make a motion adopt?

COMRADE PAT LOVE (Department of Florida): Yes, I am. I would like to make a motion to adopt it.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Do we have a second? It dies for the lack of a second. Hold your hand up. I can't see you back there. Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE KENNETH CORR (Department of Florida): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Kenneth Corr, a delegate from Post 10097, Florida. I second the motion to adopt.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Okay. We have a motion made and it has been seconded to adopt B-17. Is there any other discussion on this motion? Is there any other discussion on this motion? Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE PAT LOVE (Department of Florida): Commander-in-Chief, we are not forcing this on anybody. This is a proposition that if a Department requests it, they will be allowed to have a Men's Auxiliary. You are not required to do it. When we first started the Men's Auxiliary, it is very, very simple, it is plainly stated. If the Department wants it, they can do it. I can tell Florida wants it. We have been fighting this for ten years now. I think it is about time that we actually took it into consideration.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. I recognize Microphone No. 1.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF "GUNNER" KENT (Department of Arizona): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am "Gunner" Kent, a delegate from Post 9972 in Sierra Vista, Arizona. I speak in opposition to this as I have spoken in opposition to it every year it has come up. We formed the Men's Auxiliary, at the Post level, at the discretion of the Department only.

Ever since that has happened, they have tried to become a District, they have tried to become a Department. They want to now have a National President. They are handing out flyers at a VFW National Convention asking the members to elect a National President.

Comrades, enough is enough. The Men's Auxiliary was formed to be a Post function only, to help the Post to do their job. That's where it needs to stay. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Microphone No. 2.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF PAUL SPERA: Comrade, Commander-in-Chief, I am Paul Spera, Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from North End Post 144. I stand in opposition to this motion. I agree totally and completely with the previous speaker.

When we first had this proposal on the floor, when we finally agreed to pass it and to create a Men's Auxiliary, the sole purpose of that Auxiliary was to work in the Post. It was going to be a Post function, nothing more, no Districts, no Departments, nothing. It was only to assist in the Post. Anything then to change that, I am unalterably opposed to it, and I urge you to defeat this motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE CLOYCE CORNETT (Department of Indiana): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I hope I am not in disrespect with this subject. My name is Cloyce Cornett, VFW Post 1120, Indianapolis, Indiana. We have military men and women serving. We have military women that have husbands. I don't understand why the Men's Auxiliary not only is at every Post level but is not recognized by the National VFW and the Department VFW as far as full blown. I think it is time to eliminate

the discrimination against the men, the spouses of female soldiers. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade.
Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE CHRISTINE PAWLEY (Department of Illinois): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Christine Pawley, Post 7448. If I could put my life on the line, why can't the men not support the women in the Men's Auxiliary at a District level, at a National level the way the women support their men who put their lives on the line? This is absolutely one-sided that only a Women's Auxiliary can support the VFW. It is time for change, Comrades.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrades.
Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE JUDITH BURGER (Department of Oregon): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Judith Burger, Department of Oregon, and a delegate from Post 4108. I stand in opposition to this. I think this is the wrong place to be discussing it. If we want to talk about equality, we will be discussing that coming up later on this afternoon. There should be one auxiliary and one auxiliary only.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you. Microphone No. 1.
PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF "GUNNER" KENT: Comrade

Commander-in-Chief, I am "Gunner" Kent, a delegate from Post 9972, Sierra Vista, Arizona. Comrades, there is a resolution that is going to be presented under the General Resolutions that deals with the spouses of the female veterans. This Men's Auxiliary is the relative of male veterans, female veterans, of all veterans. It has nothing to do with the spouses of the female veterans only. Don't get the apples and oranges confused here.

Wait until the General Resolutions come up. There is a resolution that will be presented today that deals specifically with the female veterans' spouses. The Men's Auxiliary was for sons and other relatives of male veterans and female veterans. Let's don't get our apples mixed with our oranges. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade.
Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE HARRY CROYLE (Department of Michigan): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Harry Croyle, Department of Michigan, Post 6756, Warren, Michigan. I stand and speak against this motion. The last thing any Post needs or any District needs or any State is another level of bureaucracy to financially support in its mission. It was made for the Post level only, and to assist those folks in money-making projects and in help in that community. That is where it is and that is where it needs to stay. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. There is a motion on the floor that has been properly seconded to adopt B-17. All in favor of the motion signify by the sign of "aye"; opposed to the motion "nay". The motion is defeated.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RIVERS: Commander, seeing no other motions to be set aside, that completes the work of our Committee.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you. I appreciate that. At this time I would like to dismiss the Committee with my thanks.

We are moving right along. We will have the report of the Committee on Finance and Internal Organization Resolutions by Chairman James Mueller.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JAMES MUELLER: Comrade, Commander-in-Chief, I am Jim Mueller, Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from Post 5077, Department of Missouri. I would like to introduce my Vice Chairman of the Committee on Finance and Internal Organization, Past Commander-in-Chief Ed Banas. Thank you, Ed. The National Staff was Director of IT Pat Botbyl.

The Committee on Finance and Internal Organization met yesterday, Sunday, at 1400 hours. I introduced the Vice Chairman, who conducted a roll call. The roll call showed 46 present, two absent and three excused.

Resolution 201 did not require any action as both the Post Commander and the Post Quartermaster currently have access to the National online membership information of their respective Post membership.

I then asked the submitter if there was any further discussion. The submitter then said he had actually proposed the resolution before he knew that access had been authorized and no further discussion was required.

The meeting was concluded at 1435 hours o'clock. That is all I have, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you. We appreciate that, and at this time I would like to dismiss your Committee with my thanks.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON GENERAL RESOLUTIONS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I would like to have the report of the Committee on General Resolutions by Chairman Wally Hogan.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HOGAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, delegates to this Convention and to all the members of the Committee that served diligently for several hours yesterday afternoon: I would also like to introduce the Vice Chairmen of my Committee. They would be Past Commander-in-Chief John E. Moon, Past Commander-in-Chief from Ohio.

Past Commander-in-Chief Richard Eubank from Oregon.

Past Commander-in-Chief Richard DeNoyer from Massachusetts. Of course, last but not least, the advisable help of the National Representative Membership Director Bob Crider.

Let's get started. I will first read those resolutions that were approved by the Committee.

First, R-301, as amended. R-302. R-303. R-305, as amended. And R-313. I move adoption of those resolutions at this time.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN MOON: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, John Moon, Post 2873, a delegate and Past Commander-in-Chief, seconds the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Okay. There has been a motion made and seconded to adopt R-301, as amended, 302, 303, 305, as amended, and 313. Is there any discussion on the motion? Is there any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, all in favor of the adoption will signify by the same "aye"; all opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion carried.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HOGAN: The following resolutions were rejected:

R-304, R-306, R-307, R-308, R-309, R-310, R-311, R-312, and R-314.

COMRADE JAMES WAINSCOAT (Department of South Dakota): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am James Wainscoat, Post 628, Department of South Dakota. I would like Resolution 306 set aside, please.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Do you want to make a motion?

COMRADE JAMES WAINSCOAT (Department of South Dakota): I make a motion to adopt Resolution 306.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: There has been a motion made. Is there a second to the motion? South Dakota, are you sleeping? Is there a second to the motion? It dies for the lack of a second.

Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE DAVID SOUSA (Department of Nevada): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am David Sousa, Department Commander of Nevada, and a delegate from Post 3396. Could we set aside 311 and 312?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We need to have a motion to adopt 311 and 312.

COMRADE DAVID SOUSA (Department of Nevada): I make a motion to adopt 311 or 312, depending on which one we want.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: And I recognize Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE DENISE ESTES (Department of Nevada): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Denise Estes, from the great state of Nevada, Post 10053. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you. We have got a motion on the floor that has been properly seconded to adopt 311 and 312. Is there any other discussion? Any other discussion? Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE DAVID SOUSA (Department of Nevada): I just want to make sure that the veterans that have served in this time period are given the exact benefits they deserve. If they are eligible for the Expeditionary Medal or just for the Combat time they served, I want to make sure these Vietnam comrades who served during that time get what they deserve.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. Any other discussion? Any other discussion?

We have a motion on the floor that has been seconded that we adopt 311 and 312. All in favor of the motion will signify by saying "aye"; opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it.

Okay. Somebody is in doubt of the Chair's decision. So, in all fairness, there is a motion on the floor to adopt 311 and 312. All in favor of adopting will signify by the sign of "aye"; opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HOGAN: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. I wish to thank you for this prestigious appointment and we will remain on call during the remainder of the Convention.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE CHRISTIAN KULIKOSKI (Department of Massachusetts): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Christian Kulikoski, a delegate from North End Post 144. I move that we adopt 309.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a motion on the floor to adopt 309. Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE CHRISTINE PAWLEY (Department of Illinois) Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Christine Pawley, Post 7448 with the Department of Illinois. I second that motion to adopt 309.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Okay. We have a motion made and seconded to adopt 309. Is there any discussion? Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE CHRISTIAN KULIKOSKI (Department of Massachusetts): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I rise in support of 309, because I fundamentally believe that it sends the wrong message from the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States who are the membership of those who fought in Operation Desert Storm, although possibly a smaller number than what we have for our Vietnam older brothers.

If we have supported the memorials for World War II, Korea and the Vietnam Wall, why would we not support the erection of a monument to honor those who participated in Operation Desert Storm, an action for which we still have troops on the ground in two different countries right now, as I speak. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HOGAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I just wanted to point out that the rejection was for referral and accept our 305, which is basically the same resolution.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Okay. Any further discussion on the motion? Any further discussion on the motion? Any further discussion on the motion? The motion on the floor has been properly seconded to adopt 309. All in favor will signify by the sign of "aye"; all opposed "nay". I believe it has already been covered in R-305. It is a moot point.

At this time I want to retain the Committee under Convention Rule No. 4 for the Adjutant to receive, until the close of the Business Session on Tuesday, any additional resolutions that may come in. So, we thank you, Committee. Don't go too far away. We are going to keep you for a while.

Now, we will have the report of the Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs Resolutions by Chairman John Furgess.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. It is my pleasure to report that the Convention Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs convened at 2:00 p.m. Sunday, July 20, 2014. Your instructions were read, the roll call was taken, and action was taken on the resolutions referred to this Committee.

We once again held our meeting in conjunction with the POW-MIA Subcommittee, because of the information presented. The resolutions that we passed are important to all Committee members. For their support, wisdom, and guidance I want to thank the Vice Chairman of the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee, Past Commander-in-Chief Tommy Tradewell of Wisconsin; the Chairman of the POW-MIA Subcommittee, Past Commander-in-Chief John Gwizdak, and the Vice Chairman of the POW-MIA Subcommittee, Past Commander-in-Chief Tom Pouliot from Montana. The Committee advisors were Joe Davis from the Washington office and Debra Anderson from the National Headquarters. Thanks to them especially. And all members of the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee who are here this afternoon, we want to thank you for your help, and the POW-MIA Subcommittee members for their thoughtful deliberation and active participation.

I want to express the Committee's appreciation to the Departments of Michigan, Virginia and Georgia for submitting National Security Resolutions to our National Convention. Bottom up involvement is what makes it the great organization that it is.

The Committee also heard a POW-MIA Mission update briefing from Mr. Johnie Webb, Deputy to the Commander of the Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command, and a life member of VFW Post 352 in Hawaii.

I will now move forward with the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee recommendations. If any delegate would like to have a resolution set aside for discussion, please do so and indicate that after I have completed reading the approval segment of the report and moved for adoption.

I will now read the resolution numbers that the Committee recommends for approval as submitted:

401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, and 422 submitted by the VFW Department of Michigan.

Let me read this one, Comrades. It re-designates the position of Secretary of the Navy to read Secretary of the Navy and Marine Corps. This is the staff's note: "This is the 11th time this resolution has come before the Committee. The Navy and the Marine Corps have both told us for a decade now that they do not support that name change. We recommend that the Committee move on after this year's action by whatever you decide today to other more important issues."

Resolution 423 for approval.

424 submitted, and let me read this one, by the VFW Department of Georgia. This resolution was a late submission, and the intent of it is for our government to continue to support the State of Israel by approving the sale of state of the art military equipment, weapons and technology to help

them maintain an adequate defense capability in order to survive as a Nation. We recommend approval, Chief, of those resolutions.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TOMMY TRADEWELL: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Tommy Tradewell, Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from Post 6498, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I second the motion to adopt these resolutions.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Okay. We have a motion on the floor that has been properly seconded to adopt these resolutions. Do you want me to read them all off to you? Is there any discussion on the motion? Is there any discussion on the motion?

All those in favor of the motion will signify by the sign of "aye"; all opposed to the motion "nay". The "ayes" have it and the motion carried.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: I will now ask the Chairman of the Subcommittee on POW-MIA John Gwizdak to come forward with his rep.

REPORT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON POW-MIA

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN GWIZDAK: Comrade Commander-in-Chief and delegates to this Convention, I am John Gwizdak, Post 5080, a delegate and Past Commander-in-Chief.

Commander-in-Chief, I am pleased to report that the POW-MIA Subcommittee met on Sunday, July 20, 2014, in a combined meeting with the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee. Your instructions were followed, all members were present or accounted for, and action was taken on the resolutions assigned to this Committee.

For their support, wisdom and guidance, I also want to thank Past Commander-in-Chief Tom Pouliot from Montana as the POW-MIA Subcommittee Vice Chairman, and also Chairman of the Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, John Furgess, as well as the Vice Chairman Tommy Tradewell. The Committee advisors were Joe Davis and Debra Anderson, and I thank all members of the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee, and the POW-MIA Subcommittee for their thoughtful deliberation and active participation.

Comrades, I will now read the two resolutions that the Subcommittee recommends for approval. If any delegate would like any resolution set aside for discussion, please so indicate after I have moved for adoption.

Resolution 420, "Protect POW-MIA full accounting mission funding."

The Committee has recommended approval, as amended, and the amendment is that Sergeant Bergdahl has returned, so we are deleting any reference to him the opening whereas is required.

Resolution 421, "Call for more unilateral POW-MIA actions by Vietnam." The Committee recommends approval.

I now move that Resolution 420 be approved, as amended, and Resolution 421 be approved as submitted.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TOM POULIOT: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Tom Pouliot, a delegate from Post 1116, Montana. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have got a motion on the floor and it has been seconded to adopt 420, as amended, and 421 in its entirety. Is there any discussion on the motion? Is there any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, all in favor of the adoption will signify by saying "aye"; those opposed to the adoption "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion is carried.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. That completes our report.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: At this time I would certainly thank you for what you have done and dismiss both Committees with my thanks for the work that you have done. Thank you.

At this time we will have the report of the Committee on Veterans Service Resolutions, presented by Vice Chairman Gary Kurpius.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief and delegates, I am Gary Kurpius, Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from Post 9365, Wasilla, Alaska. I am happy to report that your Committee convened on Veterans Resolutions at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, July 20, 2014.

Roll call was taken and a preliminary matter was discussed, and the Committee was divided into three subcommittees to carefully deliberate the resolutions they were assigned.

Before we go into the report, I wish to express appreciation to Bill Bradshaw, the Director of National Veterans Service, and Ray Kelley, Director of National Legislative Service, for the valuable, technical guidance that their staff provided to the Committee. I also want to thank Dawn from the NVS staff who served as our Committee secretary and coordinated the deliberations.

Commander, with your permission, I will present the Committee's report by presenting those resolutions the Committee recommended to be approved as written, and then proceed to report those resolutions that were approved, as amended, and finally I will present the resolutions that the Committee recommends for rejection.

We had one resolution just handed to us, and I will read it in its entirety when we are done with those other three for your action at that time with your permission.

I will now proceed by reading the resolution numbers that the Committee recommends for approval as written.

Resolution 601, Resolution 602, Resolution 603, Resolutions 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 624, 625, 628.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I move to accept the Committee recommendation that these resolutions be approved.

COMRADE BILL BRADSHAW: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Bill Bradshaw, Post 284. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have got a motion on the floor that has been properly seconded that we adopt 601 through 622, 624, 625 and 628. Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion from the floor? Is there any discussion from the floor?

All in favor of the adoption will signify by the sign of "aye"; those opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion carried.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: I will now read the resolution numbers that the Committee recommended for approval, as amended. Comrades, all of these amendments are mostly just grammatical errors and does not change the intent of the resolution at all.

For approval as amended, 626, 627, 629, 630, 631, Commander, I move to accept the Committee's recommendation on these resolutions.

COMRADE BILL BRADSHAW: Commander-in-Chief, Bill Bradshaw, Post 284, I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a motion on the floor. It has been properly seconded to adopt, as amended, Resolutions 626, 627, 629, 630 and 631. Is there any discussion on the motion? Is there any discussion on the motion? Is there any discussion on the motion?

All those in favor of adoption, as amended, signify by the sign of "aye"; all opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion carried.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: The Committee recommended rejection of Resolution 623. The one resolution that was submitted just now will be Resolution No. 632. The title of this is "Congress Must Pass the Access and Accountability Act".

"WHEREAS, America veterans enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs Healthcare Systems are being denied access to timely quality healthcare due to the lack of necessary resources and the use of a secret waiting list within the VA Healthcare System; and

"WHEREAS, in June 2014, both the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate passed different versions of the VA Access and Accountability Act to eliminate unacceptable appointment wait times. A House and Senate Conference Committee was formed to compromise the two bills into one to eliminate the access issue, as well as other reforms to fix what was broken, hold the employees accountable, and help restore the faith veterans must have in their VA; and

"WHEREAS, progress on the compromise bill has, however, stalled because of the debate over the cost of funding increase access to care, meanwhile, veterans continue to wait.

"The system remains broken and very few employees who are responsible for this Nationwide crisis and care and confidence have been accountable.

"NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States that we call on Congress to immediately pass a compromise bill that will provide the necessary resources and will provide timely access and reduced veteran appointment wait times; and

"BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that if Congress does go on summer recess without passing this legislation, that the VFW and all veterans will work together to hold all members of Congress accountable for that lack of action to this Veterans healthcare crisis."

I move its adoption.

COMRADE BILL BRADSHAW: Commander-in-Chief, Bill Bradshaw, Post 284, I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a motion on the floor. It has been properly seconded that we adopt Resolution 632. We have somebody at Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE BENNY BACHAND (Department of Florida): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Benny Bachand, a delegate from Post 4287, Orlando, Florida. While I support this resolution, the number one issue that this Convention should face is the issues regarding the Veterans Administration. We need a stronger resolution. We have the national media and the local media here looking at the Veterans of Foreign Wars for a response to the actions that have been taken in the Veterans Administration.

Even the Vice President this morning tiptoed over the issue. We ought to send a strong message, stronger than that message, to the veterans in this Nation that the VFW is not going to tolerate the things that have been going on in the Veterans Administration, and we ought to have a strong debate on this floor today about it.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade. We have not put that out yet, but we are going to actually send out a press release tomorrow that will have a little bit of vinegar in it. We thank you for that.

Is there any other discussion? Any other discussion on Resolution 632? Seeing none, all in favor of the passage of the resolution signify by the sign of "aye"; opposed to the motion "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion is carried.

Are you done?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: Yes.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I want to thank the Committee of one. You are dismissed.

CLOSING CEREMONIES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please perform the Closing Ceremonies for today's Business Session.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander-in-Chief. Comrades, please rise.

National Chaplain.

BENEDICTION

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKESON: Our Heavenly Father, as we close our Joint Opening Session, we thank you for your divine presence. We ask that you continue to bless us to have a successful Convention as you have done down through the years. Bless all those in attendance with good health, strength, peace and prosperity. Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrades, facing the Flag of the United States, join me in the salute.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the closing of this session has been completed.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms. We are adjourned until 8:00 a.m. tomorrow morning. Thank you so much for being here.

(Whereupon, the meeting was recessed at 4:50 o'clock p.m., to reconvene on Tuesday, July 22, 2014, at 8:00 o'clock a.m.)

SECOND BUSINESS SESSION
TUESDAY, JULY 22, 2014

(The Second Business Session of the 115th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, meeting in the America's Center Convention Complex, St. Louis, Missouri, was called to order at 8:00 o'clock a.m., by Commander-in-Chief William A. Thien.)

CALL TO ORDER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I will now call the 115th VFW National Convention to order.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please conduct the Opening Ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief. Comrades, please rise for the Opening Prayer.

Comrade National Chaplain.

OPENING PRAYER

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Our Heavenly Father, we truly ask for your divine guidance as we conduct the business of our organization. We thank you for our collective efforts at our Post, District, State and National levels in taking care of our troops, veterans and their families.

We thank you for the power and compassion that you have invested in our organization to make a difference in their lives. Amen.

SALUTE TO COLORS AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrades, please face the Flag of the United States of America and join me in the Pledge of Allegiance.

(Whereupon, Salute to the Colors and the Pledge of Allegiance were given at this time.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the reconvening of this Business Session has been completed and your orders have been obeyed, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms.

REPORT ON CONVENTION CREDENTIALS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I would now like to now call on Betty Gripp for the Report of the Credentials Committee, and also at this time I would request that the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief please take over.

(Whereupon, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Stroud assumed the Chair.)

COMRADE BETTY GRIPP (Department of Arizona): Good morning, Commander-in-Chief, Council members and delegates:

At the close of business at 4:00 p.m. yesterday, July 21, 2014, the total delegates registering their credentials are, 12,983. Total Department

Commanders, 44. Total Past Commanders-in-Chief, 24. Total National Officers, 49. That is for a grand total of 13,100.

The total registered at the 115th National Convention, 2,134. That is my report.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF STROUD: Just a quick announcement. We only have one full day left in the Humana Walk-It Program. Our goal is seven million collective steps to secure a \$25,000 contribution to the VFW.

The Humana pedometer booth is located in the Health Fair near the escalator. There is still time to pick up a pedometer and make your steps count.

PRESENTATION OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL AND CITATION TO ALLEN "GUNNER" KENT

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF STROUD: It is truly an honor and a privilege for me to present our next guest with the Distinguished Service Medal and Citation in recognition of his lasting years of dedicated service to the VFW.

A career Marine, Allen "Gunner" Kent served with the 17th Interrogation and Translation Team, 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions in Vietnam. He also went on a six-month assignment with an Army advisory group and participated in Operation Frequent Wind, the evacuation of U.S. personnel from Saigon on April 29-30, 1975.

His involvement with the VFW began in 1968 when he joined Post 2811 in Gainesville, Florida. He has held several positions including Chairman of the Americanism Committee, Vice Chairman of both the National Legislative and National Security and Foreign Affairs Committees, and was named All-American Post and Department Commander.

He held the office of VFW Commander-in-Chief in 1994 and in 2005 was appointed our Adjutant General, a position he held until his retirement last year.

During his tenure in the Adjutant General's Office, massive budget cuts to veterans programs and services were proposed. We suffered an economic collapse; America and its service members were in the throes of our country's longest war.

But once a Marine, always a Marine, and he didn't allow our organization to succumb to a little adversity.

He helped lead our organization's successful fight against the budget cuts that would have crippled government programs for veterans.

He ensured VFW programs and services remained strong, and made some tough calls at Headquarters that protected the financial integrity and well-being of our organization.

Gunner's commitment to veterans and our organization's mission has been extraordinary. His legacy, one of fairness, excellence and dedication. His contributions will never be forgotten.

Please join me in honoring Allen "Gunner" Kent with the Distinguished Service Medal and Citation. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Distinguished Service Medal and Citation awarded to Allen F. "Gunner" Kent.

"In lasting appreciation and spirited recognition of 45 years of exceptional and intrepid service to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. His many accomplishments as an involved and active member occurred during successful tenures at the Post, Department and National level to include holding the offices of Commander-in-Chief and Adjutant General.

"His loyal and benevolent concern for America's veterans, service members and their families, and his truly admirable commitment to the VFW mission has justly earned him the highest level of admiration and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 22nd day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General. (Applause)

REMARKS BY PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF "GUNNER" KENT

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: Thank you very much. Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Adjutant General, and delegates to the 115th National Convention, isn't America great?

I served as Commander-in-Chief and they gave me a medal. I served as the Adjutant General and they gave me another medal. Life is good.

I am not going to give you a long speech because we have a long day coming up today, but I would just like to thank a few people that helped me along the way in my service to this great organization.

First, I would like to thank my wife, Becky, of 52 years, who allowed me to go wherever I wanted to go and went with me, and my great family, my daughter, Kim, my son Allen, Jr. back in Phoenix, Arizona. I would also like to thank very, very much my Assistant Adjutant General John McNeill, who served with me for seven years, and Jerry Newberry, who has served with me for the last year of my tenure.

I also served with two great Quartermasters, Larry Maher and Bob Greene.

I would also like to thank Past Commanders-in-Chief who appointed me to the position of Adjutant General, and I would like to especially thank Diane, Mary Ann, Vanessa and Betty and all my staff in Kansas City and Washington who kept the train running while I blew the whistle.

I appreciate all of you members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and it was my honor and my privilege to serve as your Adjutant General.

May God bless each and every one of you, and may God continue to bless the United States of America. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL AND CITATION TO JOHN McNEILL

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF STROUD: It gives me great pleasure to present our next guest with the Distinguished Service

Medal and Citation in recognition of his years of loyal service to our great organization.

During John McNeill's 16 years of service to the VFW, he had an enormous impact on the organization as a whole. He was with us during good times and difficult times, and he always helped steady the ship.

While at the National Headquarters and the Washington, D.C., office, John was an integral part of the VFW, doing all he could to provide dedicated support and assistance to our Departments and Posts. Everything he did, he truly did for our Nation's veterans.

John initially joined the staff at the VFW in 1997 as the Assistant Director for Veterans Benefits Policy. In 2002, he was promoted to Deputy Director of National Veterans Service, where he served until being appointed Assistant Adjutant General of Operations in 2005.

In his many years of service, John continually demonstrated his commitment and dedication to the veterans community, his Nation and to this great organization.

For that, and his many years of loyal service, we owe him a lasting debt of gratitude.

Last year, he stepped down as Assistant Adjutant General to enjoy a well-earned, and what we are sure will be a long and pleasant retirement.

It is now my honor to introduce a great friend, John McNeill, and award him with the VFW Distinguished Service Medal and Citation Award. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Distinguished Service Medal and Citation awarded to John J. McNeill.

"In lasting appreciation and spirited recognition of his notable record of outstanding and loyal service to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. His many accomplishments during his time as Deputy Director of National Veterans Service, as Assistant Director for Veterans Benefits Policy, and ultimately as Assistant Adjutant General, Operations, have contributed significantly to the success of the VFW's programs and mission.

"His admirable and unwavering dedication to the VFW and its members, along with the professionalism with which he performed his duties, are in the finest traditions of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 22nd day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General. (Applause)

REMARKS – COMRADE JOHN McNEILL

COMRADE JOHN McNEILL: Well, thank you, Chief John Stroud and Chief John Hamilton. They are really super, super men in this organization.

Wow, I almost forgot what it's like to be up here on this stage looking out at the finest multitude of people ever arrayed in one place. But, I also have to be honest with you. I have kind of enjoyed the last couple of

days sitting out there with you and joining in with the local chorus saying, "There goes National again trying to snow us," and "Don't believe a word they're saying up there!"

Let's be further honest. I just identified you as "the finest multitude." That is not an overstatement. You are, and always will be the ones who make this organization so superlative. You do daily God's great work in helping and assisting your fellow brethren.

You are the engine that has driven us to accomplish so many significant legislative accomplishments. And, you are the ones who allow people like me to receive this award from the Commander-in-Chief. You know, we used to just say in the Army that when an individual gets an award, the whole unit gets it, too. So, it is here, too.

Now, they don't give me much time in telling you how grateful I am -- just whose responsibility is it in creating these itineraries, the Assistant Adjutant General's? However, I am now going to take every bit of my time, and probably even more, and go down that dangerous path of naming specific names to thank.

So, please forgive me for my trespasses if I inadvertently miss some people -- there are so many -- but tighten your seat belts because this is most likely the last time I will ever address you tremendous individuals.

Let me start with the Department Adjutants out there, great individuals such as Rick Barg, Roy Grona, Bob Funk, John Getz, Benny Bachand, Ray Thomas, Precilla Wilkewitz, Tim Peters, Hal Burke, Ron Rusakiewicz, Pete Mascetti, Dave Pipes, John Liebseck, Andy Dumas, and I'm still trying to figure what language Andy speaks, Jim Hesselgrave, Kim DeShano, Terry Vance, Johnny Richard, Wayne Paulson, Frank Lightower, Travis Whaley, and the list goes on and on. I always felt that the Adjutants were my de facto bosses and they always were so good to me in providing erudite advice and counsel.

Next are the Commanders-in-Chief, particularly with the seven that I closely got to know in my Kansas City years, starting with Chief Jim Mueller, who made the most courageous decision that, in my opinion, literally saved this organization, and ending with Chief Rich DeNoyer, who with every breath he makes and every step he takes is the figure of integrity, probity and fidelity. Those two Commanders are the example of all our Chiefs, past and present. That is one VFW election that we members always seem to get so right.

My first 13 years was spent in the Washington, D.C., office, which is now led so ably by Bob Wallace. Bob always supported and was the biggest cheerleader in all we did in the National Veterans Service. But what I truly thank Bob for is his superior involvement in so many of veterans benefits legislative achievements, particularly over the past 15 years.

For instance, all of us are aware of the Post 9/11 GI Bill and the impact it is having on our younger vets. But how many of you are likewise aware that significant entitlement has its genesis in Bob's fertile mind? Back then, we called it the GI Bill for the 21st Century, but almost all of that statute's words originated with Bob.

When I left National Veterans Service, there was one group that I really, dearly missed, and that is all of our superlative service officers, super people like Dale Ronning, Dennis Flynn, Dan Crocker, Kenny Thie,

Bob Schwegel, Dale Nagan, Tom Hanson, Michelle Collier, Barry Walter, Bob Craft, Bernie McElwee, Bob Poole, Tommy Todaro, Terry Lipovac, again on and on.

There is one more that really epitomized what a veterans service officer is all about: Passion, dedication, caring and concern with a big heart. And that is my dear friend, Bill Crawford, who I have had the privilege to observe from his very first day as a really excellent leader and person. Bill is the best.

I was initially a field representative with a super group of guys: Bill Dozier, George Estry, Austin Smith, Alex McFarland, Bob Gardner, Fred Burns, and my very good friend, Jay Boone. Thanks goes to that fun-loving, dedicated, benevolent group for steering me in the right direction right from the start.

The three best and most knowledgeable veterans' advocates I have ever been associated with are George Sheets, Larry Berman and the late, great Rick Hirst. No one has done more for veterans and our widows than George Sheets. Larry's value to humanity and us is reflected in this little story. Whenever "Gunner" went out on his trips, he invariably would come to my office the first thing on Monday and say, "John, I talked with a veteran's widow who really needs help. Call Larry and get him on it." That was Larry.

Rick was not a veteran himself, but he was so demanding in making sure that we always did the right thing the right way in every veteran we encountered. We all really miss his towering presence, and I deeply miss talking with him. He was equally demanding on me as he was to all the service officers, and I am so much better for having been with Rick.

The last two people in National Veterans Service I need to thank are my favorites: Jennifer Mallard and Theresa Aldana. Jennifer was my first Administrative Assistant and one of the most patient, kind and efficient people you will ever encounter. There is a special place in Heaven for Jennifer.

What more can be said about Theresa Aldana. What a gem: Totally loyal, utterly brilliant. She does everything. Maybe I can wrap it up by just describing Theresa as every bit the Heart and Soul of the National Veterans Service.

I am one of a truly few blessed people who had the honor to have worked in both Washington, D.C., and the Kansas City offices. It is kind of funny how I got to Kansas City, but I learned years before that when "Gunner" Kent asks you to do something, and believe it or not, "Gunner" almost always does so in a very polite manner, but when he does so, you always employ the greatest words in the Queen's language, "Yes, sir."

But I learned immediately that the Kansas City staff is every bit as talented as the D.C. people. Let me start with the Quartermaster Generals' staff, who always worked, in my seven years there, so diligently and effectively to make the Quartermaster and the Adjutant General staffs the efficient and well-integrated team they are.

Superlative people like Jim Lierz, Pat Botbyl, Linda Porter, Cindy Duesenberry, Billy Weissend, Judy McNeel, Sonja Cutright, Sandy Kendrick, Mary Heineman, Ryan Strathman, Debra Anderson, John

Mucklebauer, literally all who worked in the Quartermaster General's Office.

The credit for all of this in the Quartermaster General's Office goes to the tremendous leaders they had in my time: Larry Maher and Bob Greene. Most of you have seen Larry in action at least once yearly as our front man who scrupulously and efficiently took care of the "company's money." I was privileged to see Larry's utmost integrity on a daily basis, and he was so good to me with his wisdom.

I am proud to consider Bob Greene a great friend, and he always made time to talk with me when I needed him. That includes sharing his vast historical knowledge of the VFW, and maybe just as important, giving his judgment on the best barbecue places in Kansas City. Again, Bob's election to replace Larry as the Quartermaster is an election that you certainly got right.

My seven years with the Adjutant General's staff was the best ones of my life. That's because of people like Marti Vassholz, Darla Garrison, Tammie G, Kris Harmer, Rachel Powell, Theresa Johnson, Tammy Beauchamp, Lucinda Cox, Janie and Tim Dyhouse, Rob Widener, Becky Curtis and Susan Earnest. They are simply the named representatives here of the whole Adjutant General's staff.

Do you know when you are elected to have such wonderful people? When you have an extremely low turnover and they all tell you how much they love their jobs. That's your Adjutant General's staff.

Now, I need to add the Adjutant General's Directors: My super protégé, Jerry Newberry, Rich Kolb, Randi Law, Kelly Jones, the late Jim Rowoldt, Joe Davis, Richard Freiberghouse, Alisa Neilon, Dave Swindler, David Prohaska, Steve Van Buskirk. They fulfilled so capably vast professional responsibilities and were and are here again epitomized by one particular counterpart, Kevin Jones.

When there were times that I couldn't figure out what section to send an action, I always gave it to Kevin. One time, when Kevin was curious as to why I was doing that, I told him, "Because you will get it done well." That's Kevin and all the Directors, they get it done well.

I am now to what I affectionately call the "Quad Mob", the fabulous four of Betty Franke, Vanessa Kane, Mary Anne Vassholz and Diane Putthoff. All of you know Betty as a very efficient person who gets our leaders to the right place at the right time and in the right manner. Betty is so integral to what is accomplished at the Command Headquarters. She is just a truly caring and beautiful person.

Vanessa is the hardest working individual I have ever known. She lives and breathes VFW to the core. My wife, Cecile, told me once to make sure Vanessa is always happy because if she leaves I would die. How true that is.

Mary Anne has had for many years the responsibility of something that could rapidly get us in very deep trouble if anything went wrong, and that is getting all you good people here to the Convention and the D.C. Conference. One thing we all learned quickly was that Mary Anne really loves her Committee members. But she was also much more than that to me. She really took such great care of me for my last three years, and I love her for the super person and doting grandmother that she is.

And now to the undeclared leader of that mob. When I first went to Kansas City, "Gunner" made a fantastic gesture to me and assigned Diazzy as my Executive Assistant. "Gunner" has always had a superlative eye for recognizing talent and excellence. That is exactly what Diazzy is, excellence through and through. And to boot, she's the most brilliant and quick-minded person I have ever known.

She always knew exactly what "Gunner" and I wanted to do and could rapidly put it to paper. Equally, she always knew exactly what we needed to do and made sure we did it.

Maybe a little story will adequately reflect the importance of those four to this great organization. One time, the six of us were gathered around Mary Anne's desk and the four girls were telling "Gunner" and I all the things we are now supposed to do. As it went on, I turned to "Gunner" and asked him whether he and I should get the feeling that two of us are really there only for show.

I saved these three individuals for last. Bill Bradshaw is recognized by all here as the long-time, highly efficient, super dedicated, superlative leader of the National Veterans Service that simply does the best Veterans Service work of any veterans organization. Now or ever created.

You also know the personal obstacles that Bill has overcome in being that leader. But I had the honor of being with Bill on a daily basis as his Deputy, and there are not enough God-given virtues to fully describe Bill. Suffice it for me to say that Bill is also the most wonderful human being that I know and we all are truly blessed to be in his company. He is a great friend and who was my true mentor.

You all know well how much "Gunner" Kent has meant to this organization. If there was a VFW Hall of Fame, "Gunner" would be our Lou Gehrig, who I consider to be the greatest ball player of all time. Personally, I said the last seven years of my time in the VFW were the best of my life. That is due to having had the privilege and honor in serving "Gunner" as his Deputy.

There are so many platitudes I could render to "Gunner", but I also know that he does not suffer compliments very well. But I am going to chance encountering his wrath one more time. I have had many great leaders, both in my military careers, some with well-recognized names like Norman Schwarzkopf. Having said that, "Gunner" Kent is the greatest leader that I have ever served or been associated with in my life. Thank you, "Gunner", for being the best mentor and teacher to me and for doing so many kind things for Cecile and me.

And, as we all know, great leaders always have great spouses. Becky Kent is exactly that. When we first got to Kansas City, Becky immediately befriended Cecile and always made sure she felt so welcomed. Becky is also one of the most knowledgeable baseball fans around and both Cecile and I really miss going to the Royals games with you guys.

Finally, I come to the most important person in my life, my lovely wife, Cecile, who I truly cherish and deeply love. She is everything wonderful that a man could possibly hope for or pray for. She is kind, sweet, fun to be with, has a good sense of humor. She has really needed that latter capability to have put up with me for these 45 years.

Cecile only asked one promise of me when we went to Kansas City, and that was wherever possible, could she also go on my trips? I will tell you that promise almost gloriously flamed out when one weekend we were in Cheyenne and it was minus 15 degrees. Being from Montgomery, Alabama, Cecile doesn't tolerate cold very well, and she turned to me and said, "Do you remember that promise I made you give to me? Well, forget it."

I didn't have the courage, but certainly the wisdom, at that moment to not remind her that we would be in North Dakota the next weekend. In all the Departments that we traveled to, starting with the super people of South Dakota, were so good to us, and I really extend my appreciation to you for your justly famed VFW hospitality.

Cecile kind of sacrificed, especially our family, when she went to Kansas City with me, but she has always supported me in both my military and VFW careers. It is now time for me to return that favor and support her with all my dedication and love.

With that, I am a long way overdue to get off of the stage. Jerry's PTSD has long ago kicked in. I need to fade away, go out there in the hinterlands and find some veterans to take care of with the same expectations and standards that all of you do in your daily lives as your stellar vocation. Please take care and may God bless the VFW, the greatest fraternity that man has ever created. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF ACTING SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SLOAN GIBSON

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF STROUD: It is now my honor to introduce someone who right now has the toughest job in America, Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan Gibson.

The Secretary is a 1975 West Point graduate who earned Airborne and Ranger qualifications as an Infantry Officer. He is the son of a World War II B-17 tail-gunner and the grandson of a World War I soldier who was wounded in the Second Battle of the Marine.

And prior to being confirmed in February as the new VA Deputy Secretary, he was the President and CEO of the USO for more than five years.

Taking care of veterans, service members and their families, is in his blood. But nothing could have prepared him for the crisis in care and confidence that has rocked the VA over the past few months.

Mr. Secretary, proper leadership, management and accountability are the only requirements the VFW has ever demanded from your office and of your Department, and right now we see your three immediate challenges are to:

Identify and fix what's broken;

To hold employees fully accountable to the maximum extent of the law;

And to restore the faith of veterans in their VA.

Just as the VFW was there in the early years to help create the VA, I promise we will continue to be there to work with you to fix it.

Comrades and distinguished guests, please welcome the Acting Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Sloan Gibson. (Applause)

REMARKS BY SLOAN GIBSON, ACTING SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

ACTING SECRETARY GIBSON: Thank you. The Department of Veterans Affairs is in the midst of its most serious crisis in more than a generation. I know that and I know that you know that.

But here's something I want to make sure you also know: The Department of Veterans Affairs has before it perhaps its greatest opportunity to enhance care for veterans in its history. I am not the only one who thinks that. Two weeks ago, I met with Dr. Harvey Fineberg, the distinguished clinician and healthcare leader who had just completed 12 years as the President of the Institute of Medicine.

When I commented that we could accomplish more in the next two-to-three years than we could have in two-to-three decades, he immediately interrupted and corrected me, "No. VA can accomplish things now it never could have accomplished." He is right. We are in an extraordinary position.

We all understand the seriousness of the problem. The President, Congress, VSOs like the VFW, the American people and VA's rank-and-file are all on board and understand the need for reform. What is needed now is for all of us to seize this opportunity and make the most of it.

VA's faults are well documented. Veterans are waiting too long for care. Our scheduling system is antiquated and cumbersome.

The metrics we used to measure performance became an end in themselves, rather than as a means to better the quality of veterans' care.

There were widespread attempts to "game the system" which only hid the problem, making veterans wait even longer for care.

Those employees who pointed out problems in the system or wrongdoing by others were often punished for doing so.

Managers who hid their poor performance or retaliated against whistleblowers were not held to account.

Senior leaders failed to adequately assess and quantify the resources needed to provide the care they were obligated to give to the veterans.

All of these problems fall into three categories:

Business process problems, like improper scheduling practices and other antiquated scheduling system.

There are clearly leadership problems, like our misuse of metrics and our failure to hold people accountable for negligence and misconduct.

And finally, I would say there are resource problems, our persistent lack of sufficient clinicians, patient-support staff, space, information technology resources, and purchased-care funding to meet current demand for timely, high-quality healthcare.

As we begin to tackle these challenges, what are our priorities?

First, is our business process initiative, using available resources to get veterans off wait lists and into clinics, while also fixing our scheduling system.

Second, but simultaneously, our changes in leadership, addressing VA's cultural issues, holding people accountable for willful misconduct or management negligence, and creating an environment of openness and transparency.

Third, the resource challenge, making a compelling case for the resources needed to consistently deliver timely, high-quality healthcare.

Those are our priorities. Now, here are some of the immediate actions we are already taking to tackle the first one, getting veterans off wait lists and fixing scheduling problems.

We have reached out to over 160,000 veterans to get them off wait lists and into clinics sooner. In just the last two months, we have made over 571,000 referrals for veterans to receive their care in the private sector. That's up more than 100,000 over the same time last year.

Each one of these referrals, on average, results in seven visits or appointments to a clinician. So, we are talking about 700,000 additional appointments in the private sector just from increased referrals over the last two months.

Facilities are adding more clinic hours, aggressively recruiting to fill physician vacancies, deploying mobile medical units, and using temporary staffing resources to provide care to more veterans as quickly as possible in all our healthcare facilities.

We are updating the antiquated appointment scheduling system with the VFW and other VSOs actively engaged in the process, beginning with near-term enhancements to the existing system and ending with the acquisition of a comprehensive state-of-the-art "commercial off-the-shelf" scheduling system.

We are contracting with an outside agency to conduct a comprehensive independent audit of scheduling practices across the entire VHA system beginning early next fiscal year.

I have directed every Medical Center Director to conduct regular in-person visits to all of their clinics, to include interacting with the scheduling staff to ensure all scheduling practices are appropriate. Veterans' Integrated Systems Network, VISN, Directors will also conduct similar visits. To date, over 1,100 of these visits have been completed.

We are building a more robust, continuous system for measuring patient satisfaction, to provide real-time, robust, site-specific information on patient satisfaction. We will augment our existing survey with expanded capabilities in the coming year, to capture more veterans experience data using telephone, social media, and on-line means. Our effort includes close collaboration with the VFW and other VSOs, with whom we have already met to begin planning our efforts. We also will learn what other leading healthcare systems are doing to track patient access experiences.

The 14-day access measure has been removed from all individual employee performance plans to eliminate any motive for inappropriate scheduling practices or behaviors. In the course of completing this particular task, over 13,000 performance plans were amended.

VHA has dispatched teams to provide direct assistance to facilities requiring the most improvement, including a large multi-disciplinary team on the ground, right now, in Phoenix.

The VA is expanding our use of private-sector care to improve access to healthcare for veterans who are experiencing excessive wait times. VHA is improving its monitoring of the effectiveness of our use of non-VA care to ensure veterans are receiving the care they deserve timely and effectively.

These are just some of the actions we are now taking to meet some of these business process challenges. Now, let me take a moment to talk about the leadership challenge. I've been making the rounds of VA Medical Centers in recent weeks seeking out the "on-the-ground truth." I have heard both good and bad, and what strikes me is the contrast between places like Phoenix and places like San Antonio.

In Phoenix, I spent over an hour in listening to a cross section of employees share their frustrations, and sometimes their anger, surgeons, nurses, physical therapists, custodians, IT staff.

Half of those who spoke seemed to be holding back tears. Some actually broke down crying. These are people that care, they believe in our mission and they care deeply about doing things right and taking care of veterans, and it angered them that their complaints weren't being heard.

A surgeon in scrubs stood up and said he didn't have much time before heading off to surgery, but could I please fix the two X-ray machines in the OR, which hadn't worked since an attempted computer upgrade months earlier. All it took was getting someone down to the OR to work the problem, but somehow that hadn't happened yet. By the next day, both were working.

Interestingly, the next day I went to visit the Medical Center in San Antonio. It was a whole different story. Everywhere I looked, what I saw was excellence. Not only in the facility and the equipment, but in the people in the sparkle in their eyes and the spring in their step as they talked about the things they were doing to care for our veterans.

When I met with the press later that afternoon, as I do at every one of these visits, I told them I wished every veteran in America could have been standing by my side as I went through that center, because they would have been proud of what they had seen that day.

I would tell you that, for me, the harder of these two visits was San Antonio because everywhere I looked I realized that, but for leadership, that could have been Phoenix, but for leadership.

Since those visits, I have challenged VA leaders to explain to me the difference between Phoenix and San Antonio. I have yet to hear an explanation that doesn't boil down to one thing, leadership, leaders failing to take ownership of the problems, both large and small, facing their employees.

Take, for example, the inoperable X-ray machines in the OR. You know what was wrong? The computers required to operate the machines needed to be updated from Windows XP to Windows 7. How simple a problem to solve. But no one took ownership to correct the problem that was getting in the way of caring for our Veterans. And I think that also highlights an unresponsive bureaucracy that frontline staff have simply given up trying to fight.

We've created an environment where the opinions of the rank-and-file, those doing the hard, day-to-day work of caring for our veterans, are not only not listened to, they are instead punished.

Here is some of what we have done so far:

I have frozen VHA Central Office and VISN Office headquarters hiring.

I have also suspended all VHA senior executive performance awards for fiscal year 2014.

The VA is now posting regular data updates showing progress on its efforts to accelerate access to quality healthcare for veterans who have been waiting for appointments.

We have also made public additional care-quality statistics for every medical center as well as release of the results of our recent field access audit.

I have personally visited 12 VA Medical Centers in the past six weeks to see firsthand the actions being taken to get veterans off wait lists and into clinics. I will visit the VA Medical Center here in St. Louis later today.

Such visits have been invaluable to me, both as opportunities to speak to veterans, local VSO representatives, including representatives from the VFW and VA employees, and as opportunities to gauge the scope and scale of the issue we face are.

Let me talk for a moment about accountability. At VA, we depend on the service of employees and leaders who place the interests of veterans above and beyond self-interest. Accountability, delivering results, and honesty are also key to serving our veterans.

Those who have not performed and have not delivered results honestly will be held accountable. Where willful misconduct or management negligence is documented, appropriate personnel actions will be taken. This also applies to whistleblower retaliation. We will not tolerate retaliation against whistleblowers.

I am going to digress for just a moment. Retaliating against whistleblowers is against the law. We are going to obey the law, period. But it is more than that. To me, it is more than that. If I intimidate another employee for raising their hand, or I retaliate against that employee, I am not showing that person the respect that they deserve.

Now, call me old-fashioned, call me naïve, if I happen to think values are important, we are going to have behavior that is aligned with our values. And if that's not enough, I learned in the private sector that the most important source of information I need for innovation and continuous improvement are our employees. If we are working to deliver better care for veterans, the last thing we want to do is to create an environment where people are afraid to raise their hand. We are not going to tolerate that behavior.

Leaders make the difference between Phoenix, on the one hand, and San Antonio on the other. Leaders are responsible for identifying shortfalls in resources and taking action to secure additional resources. Leaders are also responsible for setting the standard for honesty and square dealing, and for quashing the “corrosive culture” of self-protection and retaliation that destroys the trust required for any organization to succeed.

So, as you would expect, there are many changes in leadership underway.

First, I've named Dr. Carolyn Clancy Interim Under-secretary for Health. Dr. Clancy is new to the VA. She joined us last August as Assistant Deputy Undersecretary for Health for Quality, Safety and Value. Before that, she worked at the Department of Health and Human Services as Director of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Dr. Clancy is a proven leader and innovator when it comes to healthcare quality and safety. She will spearhead our reform efforts to accelerate access to care and restore trust among our veterans.

Second, I have appointed Dr. Gerald Cox as the Interim Director of the Office of the Medical Inspector responsible for restructuring the office. Dr. Cox is a 30-year Navy veteran and former Assistant Inspector General of the Navy for Medical Matters. He will provide new leadership and a fresh perspective to help restructure the Office of the Medical Inspector and ensure a strong internal audit function.

Third, I've brought on Dr. Jonathan Perlin for a short tour of duty as a Senior Advisor to the Secretary. Dr. Perlin comes to us on loan from the Hospital Corporation of America, where he is the Chief Medical Officer and President for Clinical Services.

He is also chairman-elect of the American Hospital Association and a former VA Under Secretary for Health. Dr. Perlin brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to help us bridge the period till we have a confirmed Undersecretary for Health.

Incidentally, that selection process is well underway and included participation by VFW Executive Director Bob Wallace on the selection Commission.

Fourth, I've also brought back Leigh Bradley for a four-month assignment as Special Counsel to the Secretary. Ms. Bradley is a former General Counsel at VA and, most recently, a senior member of the DoD General Counsel team, with direct responsibility for their entire ethics portfolio. At VA, she will assist us in taking action against those supervisors and employees accused of wrongdoing or serious management negligence.

Finally, as you all know, the President has nominated former Procter & Gamble CEO Bob A. McDonald to be the next Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Bob and I have been friends for 40 years beginning during our time together as cadets at West Point. He brings strong leadership and exceptional management skills to this role, and he has got one of the strongest moral compasses I have ever seen. He always has had.

This combination of executive skills and values are ideal for VA at this critical time. His confirmation hearing is today and I hope for a speedy confirmation.

Before I move to my last topic on healthcare, I want to say a brief word about benefits. Since arriving at VA five months ago, I have been very impressed with the transformation that is underway at VBA. I seriously doubt that any major part of the federal government has transformed so much in the past two-to-three years, and I believe that without this transformation we would not be on track to eliminate the disability claims backlog in 2015.

Having said that, veterans still wait too long for their claims decisions and our quality is still not up to standard. More recently, there have been reports that call into question the accuracy of the data we use to report our progress. Clearly, we have more work to do, faster, more accurate decisions, documented with credible reporting.

The last topic I want to address is resourcing VA to meet the current demand for timely, high-quality healthcare. As I mentioned in my Senate testimony last week, and as I will repeat at my House testimony this week, I believe that the greatest risk to veterans over the intermediate to

long-term is that additional resources are provided only to support increased purchased care in the community, and not to materially remedy the historic shortfall in internal VA capacity. Such an outcome would leave VA even more poorly positioned to meet future demand.

Make no mistake here: Purchased care plays an important role in extraordinary circumstances:

Extraordinary geography, we will never be able to put an outpatient clinic in every community in America.

Extraordinary technology, it will always make sense to refer veterans to great providers for certain, highly-specialized procedures; and

Extraordinary demand, such as the time we are in right now, trying to accelerate care to veterans who are waiting too long.

But purchased care is not a replacement for a strong and vital veterans' healthcare system.

Consider these points: For years, the VFW and other key VSOs have warned of a shortfall in resources needed to care for our veterans.

In our recent internal field access audit, the most frequently cited barrier to scheduling veterans for care was a lack of appointment slots.

The number of veterans seeking care at VA continues to grow steadily year by year, during a period of high medical care inflation all across the country, and we continue to serve a population that is older, has more chronic conditions, and is less able to afford care in the private sector.

We simply lack sufficient clinicians, direct patient support staff, space, information technology resources, and purchased care funding to meet the current demand for timely, high-quality healthcare.

This simple fact explains my statement to Congress last week that we needed an additional \$17.6 billion in funding over the next three years, making it possible to hire an additional 10,000 clinical staff, provide essential information technology support, make a very small dent in the massive capital project deficit we carry, and fund additional purchased care while we build the internal capacity to meet the current demand.

These resources are critical if we are to seize on the opportunity before us. The VFW has been there for veterans from the very beginning as the oldest of the major VSOs.

You have had a hand in every major achievement on behalf of veterans for the past hundred years: Formation of the Veterans Administration and the original GI Bill, advancing VA's elevation to Cabinet-level status; creation of the new GI Bill; and advocating for recent funding increases and advance appropriations. I know I can count on you to lend a hand, along with your best advice, to making a lasting difference for veterans.

I want to say a special thank you to your leadership, Bill Thien, John Stroud, John Hamilton, Bill Bradshaw and Bob Wallace, who I've known for four or five years now.

I was telling the group earlier this morning when my nomination was announced, the very next day I was in his office asking him for advice on how to proceed and how to be a good Deputy Secretary for the veterans.

Thank you for all you do for veterans. I look forward to working with you to seize this historic opportunity to transform VA into the provider of choice for veterans' healthcare. (Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF STROUD: Mr. Secretary, the Veterans of Foreign Wars wish you every success because your success means that good things happen for veterans.

(Whereupon, Commander-in-Chief Thien assumed the Chair at this time.)

PRESENTATION OF TEACHER AWARDS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: For more than a century, we have placed great emphasis on educating our Nation's youth on civic responsibility, Flag etiquette and patriotism. In 1999, the National Citizenship Education Teacher Award was created to recognize teachers who strive to implement these values into their classroom curriculum. This year's award winners are three exceptionally devoted Americans who have undoubtedly fulfilled their responsibilities as citizens of the United States through the art of teaching.

These three honorees were selected from across the Nation for their originality and dedication to citizenship education. They have effectively encouraged their students to become better citizens by spreading knowledge of our Nation's history, its institutions and becoming involved in the community in which they live.

Each recipient will receive the \$1,000 Past Commander-in-Chief John Smart Award for personal development and their schools, likewise, will receive a \$1,000 award.

I would like to take this moment to personally thank these three teachers, and all of the teachers of America. Without them, who knows where our country would be. They teach the leaders of tomorrow, and we are forever indebted to them for their service to our children and to this country. Thank you, teachers, and congratulations to you on a job well done. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF MRS. SHIRLEY HARMON HELTON, CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TEACHER OF THE YEAR

I'm pleased to introduce to you the National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, representing Grades K through 5, Mrs. Shirley Harmon Helton of Fort Pierce, Florida. (Applause)

In the many years that Mrs. Helton has been teaching Elementary Magnet School in Fort Pierce, Florida, she has provided her students the opportunity for some first-hand experiences. Mrs. Helton's classroom is a place where the importance of history, civic pride, patriotism and democratic values are instilled in her students daily.

Mrs. Helton's students are showcased every year throughout the district and state by participating in, and winning, essay, poetry and art contests.

A few of her many classroom projects include: "Treats for Troops" where the students send care packages and letters to soldiers in Afghanistan.

In the last five years, the fifth grade students have sent 110 packages and letters to soldiers.

“Adopt a Soldier” program is a project where students pair with medics in Afghanistan and correspond regularly with letters and special gifts.

Another program “Cook-out for Soldiers” honors and recognizes Veteran’s Day, Memorial Day and Flag Day. Proceeds are used to buy necessities and treats to send to the troops.

Mrs. Helton engages her students in plays about the writing of the Constitution, creating the Declaration of Independence, and in living biographies of historical figures.

She has organized numerous school-wide projects to promote community and civic pride, and she has created a no bullying program called, “Banish Bullying” to promote good citizenship.

Her many awards and accomplishments include being named the State of Florida’s Teacher of the Year for “Excellence in Teaching History,” and she has received many youth activities awards and citations from our Ladies Auxiliary.

Comrades, please join me in welcoming Mrs. Shirley Harmon Helton, sponsored by VFW Post 8058 in Fort Pierce, Florida. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: The plaque reads as follows: “National Citizenship Education Teacher Award, Grade Level K-5, presented to Shirley Harmon Helton, Fairlawn Elementary Magnet School, 2013-2014.”

REMARKS – MRS. SHIRLEY HARMON HELTON

MRS. HELTON: I would like to thank you for this honorable and prestigious award. I would first like to thank God. Without Him, nothing would be possible. I would like to also thank my local Post 8058 and four wonderful ladies, Rosemary, Sue, Allison and Barbara for all they do for our community and our students.

Mostly, I would like to thank you veterans, because you have helped me to instill and teach the sense of pride and patriotism to my students. So, thank you for all you do for helping me show my students that this is the greatest country in the world, and that you are here to protect us. So, thank you. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I have a small correction on the award. The award is a dual award with John Smart, Past Commander-in-Chief, and our Past Quartermaster General Larry Maher.

INTRODUCTION OF JEFF GEPHART, NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TEACHER OF THE YEAR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Now, I will introduce the National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, representing Grades 6-8, Mr. Jeff Gephart, a seventh and eighth grade history teacher at Holloman Middle School on Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico.

Mr. Gephart’s peers and community believe he upholds the values and provides the inspiration it takes to be awarded this esteemed VFW National Award, and we couldn’t agree more.

Teaching at a school on Holloman Air Force Base, Mr. Gephart partners with the Air Force community and is very involved in sponsoring school programs and extracurricular activities. Mr. Gephart engages and the challenges his students to think critically about the concerns and issues of our society in the present and past, and how it will affect their future.

While his classroom and teaching style provide enthusiasm and creativity for his students to learn all they can about our Nation's history; Mr. Gephart doesn't stop there. He has sponsored veterans by organizing the Veteran's Day program and parade, all the while teaching his students about America's wars and their heroes.

Mr. Gephart brings history to life for his students, teaching them how events of the past affect current events. He encourages open discussion, explaining to his students how they can make a difference to help determine the destiny of their country. He teaches his students to value the freedoms we have and to take seriously the responsibilities that come with those freedoms.

In the 14 years Mr. Gephart has been a teacher, he has been recognized in his community for his outstanding teaching methods and commendable civic service.

Mr. Gephart has demonstrated time and time again his passion for his community and his dedication to the United States.

Please join me in welcoming Mr. Jeff Gephart, sponsored by VFW Post 7686 in Alamogordo, New Mexico. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: The plaque reads, "National Citizenship Education Teacher Award, Grade Level 6-8, presented to Jeff Gephart, Holloman Middle School, 2013-2014."

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We also have the Smart-Maher VFW Citizenship Education Teacher Award presented to Jeff Gephart. This is a \$1,000 honorarium which all three get. (Applause)

REMARKS – MR. JEFF GEPHART

MR. GEPHART: I would like to thank you for this award, but what makes this award so special, it comes from a quality organization like the VFW. I almost feel like I should be honoring you today with everything that you do for your community in the face of injustices. Every time I open a newspaper, I read another story about veterans not receiving benefits that they have earned, the homeless veterans epidemic.

All our politicians in Washington, D.C., seem to be bickering over petty little details and politics, yet the men and women of the VFW keep plugging along and improving their communities, improving their states, improving their country, helping veterans. I can't thank you enough.

I know that words really can't express my gratitude for your organization, but my family and I would just like to let you know how much we appreciate you, how much we appreciate what you do for your community. Thank you for your support. I have a special shout out to New Mexico, the New Mexico contingent, the rowdies in the back there, B.J., Ski and I am kind of rambling right now.

I just can't tell you how much we appreciate you and we wish we could do something more to honor you and your organization. Thank you. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF TOM CLARK, NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TEACHER OF THE YEAR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is with great pleasure that I introduce you to the National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, representing Grades 9-12.

Mr. Tom Clark, from Lake Central High School in Saint John, Indiana, is a fellow VFW member, and no stranger to receiving a VFW award. In fact, just yesterday he was the recipient of this year's VFW Americanism Award.

In 1982, after serving in the Army for three years and working at the VA for a brief time, Mr. Clark began his teaching career. Twenty-three years later, he rejoined the service as a member of the Indiana National Guard, deploying to Afghanistan in 2006.

In his early days of teaching, he noticed that students were disengaged from the military. In an effort to change that, he created the "Gold Star Honor Roll Project" requiring students to conduct extensive research on fallen heroes exclusively from Indiana with the ultimate goal of profiling every service member from Indiana who has perished fighting for our country.

Since he began this program in 1986, his students have completed more than 1,350 profiles of fallen service members, from World War II to the war in Afghanistan.

Mr. Clark has gone above and beyond to instill patriotism and appreciation of service in today's youth. The American principles his students are learning and applying contribute to the betterment of American society as a whole.

It isn't hard to see why Mr. Clark is so deserving of the Americanism Award he received yesterday, and why today he is being presented the National Education Citizenship Award in Teaching.

Please help me in welcoming, once again, Mr. Tom Clark, sponsored by VFW Post 717 in Saint John, Indiana. Go Hoosiers. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: The plaque reads, "National Citizenship Education Teacher Award, Grade Level 9-12, Presented to Tom Clark, Lake Central High School, 2013-2014."

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: And again the Smart-Maher VFW Citizenship Education Teacher Award, awarded to Tom Clark at Lake Central High School, with a \$1,000 honorarium. (Applause)

REMARKS – MR. TOM CLARK

MR. CLARK: There are so many people to thank for this, but there is one person in particular, and she is not sitting here right now. She has my grandson, and that's my wife.

I met my wife in the ninth grade, and when I was 19 years old I decided to join the military. I joined the military without telling her, and

we were married. I came home, and I told her we are going to Germany, and I had no idea we were going to Germany, but I lied to her and we went.

I served for three years, and then I was blessed. I have an incredible wife just like many of you veterans have incredible wives that have stood beside you. She let me become a teacher, and that is one of the greatest things I have ever done is become a teacher.

It is because of her; she went out and got a job. I am telling you without her working, I would never have become a teacher. I wouldn't have been able to be a teacher because of the pay.

But over the years, she has stood side-by-side with me, and in 2006 she made a big commitment to me. She allowed me at age 50 to go to Afghanistan. I can't thank her enough. I wish she was here right now.

I have a daughter, two beautiful daughters. One is with me today, Melissa. I have a younger daughter, who has served two times in Iraq, and now I have a grandson, which has probably driven many of you crazy.

Thank you, Post 717, in Saint John, Indiana. Thank you to the great State of Indiana, the VFW for the State of Indiana, for all your support for my projects and the things I do with students even before I became a member of the VFW.

Without your support, I could never have been the teacher that I am today. It is because of you and all of the students that have left our school and gone on to do greater things are because of your great sacrifices. I want to thank you, and God bless America, and God bless the VFW. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GOLD MEDAL AND CITATION TO THE 920TH RESCUE WING

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Our next award recipient has earned the respect and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars through its unwavering dedication to the safety of the U.S. Armed Forces and civilians alike.

Since its inception in 1963, the 920th Rescue Wing has made 1,221 combat rescues as the Air Force Reserve's first and only rescue squadron. 1,800 citizen airmen are trained to search for, locate and recover U.S. Armed Forces and coalition personnel during military operations. Air Force Rescue is the only Department of Defense entity organized and equipped to conduct these rescue operations in hostile or denied areas as a primary mission.

The Wing has mobilized airmen to Operation Allied Forces in 1999, Operation Southern Watch and Operation Noble Eagle in 2001, Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2002, and Operation Enduring Freedom in 2005, 2008 and again in 2011.

In addition to combat rescues, the 920th Rescue Wing contributes to humanitarian relief efforts and has been a mainstay during national disasters. Furthermore, it has worked directly with NASA to assist with space flight support as "guardians of the astronauts."

The 920th Rescue Wing has saved more than 3,000 lives and truly lives up to its motto, "These things we do, that others may live."

Please join me in welcoming Lieutenant Colonel Tim Davis, Commander of the 920th Operations Support Squadron here to accept the VFW Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal on behalf of the 920th Rescue Wing. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit and Citation awarded to 920th Rescue Wing.

"In esteemed recognition and sincere appreciation for its selfless and dedicated service rendered to country, community and mankind on a national and international level. As the Air Force Reserve Command's premier combat search and rescue unit, it has displayed remarkable dedication to operations in times of war and peace, involving both civilian and U.S. military personnel.

"The courage it has displayed while conducting operations in hostile areas, as well as the compassion put forth during humanitarian efforts, truly embody the values of the United States military.

"Its unwavering commitment to the mission is worthy of this organization's highest honor as well as the gratitude of all who benefit from their proud service. On this date, the 1.9 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and our auxiliaries salute the 920th Rescue Wing.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 22nd day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General. (Applause)

RESPONSE BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL TIMOTHY S. DAVIS

LIEUTENANT COLONEL DAVIS: Commander-in-Chief, ladies and gentlemen of the VFW, it is an honor to be here to accept this award on behalf of Colonel Macrander. He was not able to be here today.

As I look over my talking points, I realize we've have covered everything in the Citation. What I am going to do is just to say on behalf of the 1,800 men and women, citizen airmen with the combat Rescue Wing, we appreciate this.

We are basically a coast-to-coast organization. We have a unit in Portland, Oregon, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, and Patrick Air Force Base in Florida.

I have been a combat search and rescue pilot for 28 years now. It is the best mission in the Air Force. Any other rescue airmen out there? (Applause) All right. A good job.

Again, it is the best mission. We have three NWS or weapons systems at Patrick, and it is scattered throughout our other organizations. We have the HH-60 Pave Helicopter, which you may have read about. Unfortunately, it is combat tried, proven and it is tired. We will need a new aircraft soon, folks.

Also, the HC-130 aircraft is our Combat King Aerial Tanker that provides long ranges for deep penetration.

We need the new J models, and eventually they will be on board. We have the Guardian Airman or PJs, the guys who get out of the helicopters that are on the ground, pick up the battlefield wounded. We collect those and take them back to a higher level of care.

At the height of the war in Afghanistan, it was not uncommon for an injured sailor, soldier, Marine, or airman on the battlefield of Afghanistan, Helmand Province or Kandahar, be picked up by a 920th helicopter and crew and taken to a local surgical hospital, transferred to a strategic airlift aircraft manned by 920th medical personnel on the back, and taken to a hospital in Germany, also staffed by 920th medical personnel. We did a point of impact or injury, all the way to Germany with 920th personnel.

It has been an honor, and again we stand ready to serve the communities in case of national disasters, such as Hurricane Andrew, Floyd and Katrina. We also stand ready to help in local emergencies from injured or lost mountain climbers on Mount Hood, or hikers lost in the deserts of Arizona or boaters in distress off the coast of Florida.

Again, Commander-in-Chief, it is an honor to accept this award on behalf of the 920th Rescue Squad, and I thank you. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL AND CITATION TO PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I am pleased to present you with our next guest, a man who has served the VFW for 40 years, and shows no sign of stopping any time soon.

John E. Hamilton, a third generation Marine and a three-time Purple Heart recipient, earned his VFW eligibility through service in Vietnam.

In 1974, he became a member of Post 7909 in Jacksonville, Florida, where he maintains his Gold Legacy Life Membership today. He has served the VFW in a number of leadership positions, including State Commander, a sitting member of the National Council of Administration, and on the Board of the VFW National Home.

He reached the pinnacle of VFW achievement last year, successfully fulfilling the office of VFW Commander-in-Chief, a year in which our organization celebrated many victories.

John's commitment to doing what's right for our veterans has led him to his current position of VFW Adjutant General.

Though he has now held the esteemed positions of both VFW Commander-in-Chief and Adjutant General, according to John, "The highest rank in this organization is 'Comrade,' because that's the price you pay to be eligible. The rest are just titles and jobs. To be a comrade in the VFW is the ultimate."

John has proven himself to be an admirable leader and remains fully committed to the VFW mission. I am proud to present him with the Distinguished Service Medal and Citation. Please give John a hand. (Applause)

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL NEWBERRY: Distinguished Service Medal and Citation awarded to John E. Hamilton.

"In lasting appreciation and spirited recognition of 40 years of unyielding dedication and stalwart service to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. With forthright advocacy efforts and a genuine commitment to supporting our Nation's veterans, service members and their families, he worked to further the VFW mission while successfully

fulfilling the roles of State Commander, VFW National Council of Administration member, and President and Board member of the VFW National Home and ultimately, as Commander-in-Chief, the pinnacle of VFW achievement.

"The ultimate integrity with which he performed his duties, his steadfast dedication and no-nonsense approach to serving the veteran community are in the finest traditions and highest values of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 22nd day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief.
(Applause)

RESPONSE – PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: I will be real quick. Now, I will be real quick, I promise you. You know, it is difficult to believe a young guy who was making a living in the restaurant business a number of years ago went screaming and clawing not to join the VFW as my dad did.

I remember waiting in that car with my father who said, "I will be out in just one minute. Let me grab one quick Coke and say hi to Chief so and so, and Commander so and so, and I will be right with you."

Three or four hours later, I was playing across the street with other kids waiting for their fathers to get out of the VFW. Darned if I didn't turn and do the same thing to my kids.

But let me tell you, it is an awesome reward. I appreciate it very much. I share with all of my comrades around the country, and particularly Post 7909, my Post in Jacksonville, Florida, who gave me a chance.
(Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF MICHAEL D. LUMPKIN, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is now my privilege to introduce the Acting Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Mike Lumpkin.

Mr. Lumpkin served more than 20 years as an active-duty Navy SEAL, and held every leadership position from Platoon Commander to team Commanding Officer. He is also a veteran of numerous campaigns and contingencies throughout the world, to include both Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

Aside from being the Acting Undersecretary, he also serves as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, and is responsible for the overall supervision, policy oversight, and resourcing of Special Operations Forces who may, at any time and place, be engaged in Counterterrorism, Unconventional Warfare, Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, Foreign Internal Defense, Civil Affairs, Information Operations, and Counter-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

He is here today because he is also leading the merger of America's full accounting community's three largest organizations into one.

Merging the Defense POW-MIA Office, the Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command, and the Air Force Life Science Equipment Lab will be difficult because they are geographically separate, with unique scientific requirements that can only be provided by JPAC's Central Identification Laboratory, or access requirements that will still have to be maintained to the National Archives in Washington or to potential MIA recovery sites in the Pacific, Asia and elsewhere.

To the VFW, we don't care who runs the new organization or where it is headquartered. Our primary concern, our only concern, is that the mission continues, and with that we are very grateful for the progress report we are about to receive.

Comrades, please welcome a fellow combat veteran, the Acting Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Mike Lumpkin. (Applause)

REMARKS – ACTING UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY
MIKE LUMPKIN

ACTING UNDERSECRETARY LUMPKIN: Thank you very much, and my sincere thanks to all your officers, leaders of the VFW, and the Ladies Auxiliary. It is a true privilege to be with all of you here today in St. Louis and to be part of the 115th VFW Convention. It is amazing to think that for more than a century, the VFW and its Ladies Auxiliary, nearly two million members strong, have been there supporting our Nation's veterans.

As a retired Navy SEAL and a combat veteran myself, I am truly grateful for your commitment to honoring our service members and our families. So, thank you for your selfless dedication and tremendous work. I look forward to working with the VFW and John Stroud, the new National Commander, and see how we can better support one another.

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the hard work of your Executive Director, Bob Wallace, and other members of the Washington, D.C., team. I can always rely on Bob Wallace and Joe Davis for both their insightful and sage counsel.

I am also honored to follow John Hamilton, a distinguished member of this tremendous organization, and I would like to personally thank you for your service to our great Nation. Thank you very much. (Applause)

Before I move on and talk about the Department personnel accounting reorganization, and where we are at in the process, I would ask that we take a moment to acknowledge all the veterans and families of those still missing who are here today. Thank you for your service, and thank you for your sacrifice.

As mentioned in the introduction, in addition to my duties as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflicts, I have had the privilege to serve the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, from January of this year to June.

Of the multitude of issues that came from my office, the personnel accounting mission stood out. It is a true reflection of the high cost of war,

and its direct impact on the lives of Americans. Families waiting for answers, waiting for answers while the rest of the world is moving forward.

I have had the opportunity to talk and to visit with many of these families, to hear their stories and to truly understand the depth of their loss. For those service members who went to distant shores to fight for our Nation and never returned, and remain unaccounted for, we owe their families the best resolution possible. It is our solemn duty.

Each and every missing service member is the purpose behind what we do, and more importantly why we are changing how the Department conducts personnel accounting.

Secretary Hagel's decision to overhaul how the Department of Defense conducts accounting for personnel lost in past conflicts is about honoring the sacrifice of those who are missing and providing the fullest possible accounting to their families.

I am not talking about changing a title, I am not talking about rewriting a policy. What I would like to say is not just me reshuffling the deck chairs on the porch. We are building a new porch, and we are redoing all the chairs.

Since I am a guy that likes to roll up my sleeves and get dirty, I am all in. I am committed to this reorganization. The President and Secretary Hagel have been very clear with me about their dedication to returning our missing service members.

After careful consideration, Secretary Hagel, in February determined that the Department must make significant changes in the way that it accounts for its personnel who are missing in past conflicts. He directed me to develop a plan on how to best organize the Department, focusing on how to effectively increase to the maximum extent possible the number of service members accounted for annually and also to ensure timely and accurate information is provided to their families.

In March, I presented the plan to the Secretary. I reviewed studies from the General Accountability Office, comments from families, comments from VFW members and internal Department of Defense assessments, including the Inspector General.

The Secretary approved restructuring the components involved, streamlining and redesign processes and improving services to families, and I'm happy to report change is well underway and we are making steady progress.

Our implementation plan for this new agency is divided into three principal phases. The first is unifying the mission set for the new agency. The second is the process of how we evaluate cases for our missing and unaccounted. The third, and the final piece, is the people, how we are going to effectively align our very passionate and highly skilled work force to support the mission.

It is critical that we remove the barriers, which are largely bureaucratic, so that they can successfully complete the work they are so devoted to. Our goal is to have the new agency functionally started up on the 1st of January, 2015 and completely operational by the end of next year.

The Secretary's direction to me, which is very clear, and everyone else involved in the process is to keep current personnel accounting operations ongoing while demonstrating significant improvement. So,

essentially, we are flying an airplane and building it at the same time, no small task.

Our new agency will combine their resources of the Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office, the joint POW-MIA Accounting Command, and the Life Science Equipment Laboratory. The new Defense agency will be responsible for all aspects of past conflict personnel accounting, aligning accountability, authority and responsibility.

Everybody that has ever worn a uniform understands the importance of having those three things aligned. I will be honest with you, it has been asked for some time, and I can tell you we are taking this issue, we are taking it on and we are taking it head on.

As the Secretary of Defense for Policy, we will have oversight responsibility for our accounting matters, and we will be exercising authority, direction and control of the new agency.

As we change processes, that means we will change how we identify those missing from previous conflicts. It may be consistent with how we do accounting today.

We are increasing the resources. Yes, in the declining budgets, we are increasing the resources available to past conflict accounting by fully accessing the Armed Forces' Medical Examiner's system.

As we continually work closely with Congress, families and Veterans Service Organizations, we are working towards establishing a baseline for assessing past conflict accounting. By consolidating the responsibility, we are able to consolidate resources. That is a good thing.

We remain engaged with Congress to realize funding. If we have a single budget, we can make decisions faster and we can plan better. This means more successful excavations and identifications and increased family satisfaction.

Because the finding of our missing personnel is important, is a national effort, and many, many of the Department's success in this area is due to contributions from private citizens and other groups. The VFW exemplifies how private individuals and groups bring unique resources and talents to the table.

As you are certainly aware, the VFW is the only Veterans Service Organization to visit Vietnam every year since 1992; Russia since 2004; and the people of the Republic of China for the past five years. That's absolutely remarkable. I want to thank you for your continued sustained engagement.

For these types of business, we can have more open discussions and we can develop landmarks to help our personnel accounting efforts.

I recently testified before Congress on our plans for reorganization, the organization of the entire personnel accounting efforts and how it marries up with public/private partnerships.

The Representatives made it clear to me that we need to leverage this support. Trust me when I say I have heard the message, I have heard the message from the families, I have heard the message from the Congress, and I have heard the message from the veterans organizations loud and clear.

We are taking significant steps to enhance collaboration with private groups and organizations, such as the VFW, both in the United States and overseas.

The new agency will be responsible for building and for managing these vital relationships with the private entities. A new Defense agency will also be responsible for establishing and maintaining a single database, a case management system. It will contain all missing service members' information, including all permanent information regarding the cases.

This report has been in place for some time, but it hasn't been getting done the way it should be. With Secretary level oversight, the new agency will make this fully operational.

Finally, one of the most critical changes is in how we communicate with families, with Veterans Service Organizations like the VFW, concerned citizens and the general public. Sadly, we have not done this very well. I recognize that as does the Secretary of Defense.

I would like to use a business world analogy here. Our families are our customers, and in the business world and in personnel accounting, we must demonstrate our commitment to the process of recovery and/or our commitment to family satisfaction to be successful.

So, this is one of our top priorities. The new agency will be responsible for managing communications with the families and further communications of Veterans Service Organizations, concerned citizens and the public, engaging stakeholders along the way about our personnel accounting efforts.

The more I hear from the families and the veterans from World War II to Vietnam, the more I appreciate the need that we need to do a better job explaining how families can access information. What we know, what we do would be information that citizens give us and our limitations to help manage expectations. Consolidating the organizations that work on past conflict accounting is necessary, but not singularly sufficient for the changes we seek for families.

Our workplace culture and our processes within the Department must all change for us to be successful. I am not used to failing. We will be successful.

Some of these decisions, particularly on the role of the Medical Examiner, are significant departures from how we have done business in the past within the Department. Change, even for the better, can be difficult, but we can't let that stop us. We owe it to our missing, we owe it to their families, and we owe it to the Veterans Service Organizations. We must do enough things right.

We have a talented work force, and they are vital to our operations. We also have allowed ourselves to become too comfortable in certain ways, and that has contributed to our shortfalls. We owe every stakeholder better processes and structures to accomplish the mission, the mission that they are so deeply dedicated to.

You have the Department's commitment. The new agency will sustain and further develop strengths of our past conflicts personnel accounting processes, scientific independence and validity, and embrace the necessary changes as we see critical for the new agency's mission success.

Immediately, the Secretary's announcement directing the reorganization, we developed a legislative proposal of providing specific authorities that he would help us implement the necessary changes. I am pleased to say we were successful in getting the proposal in both the

House and the Senate bills for fiscal year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act.

With full Congressional and Administration's support behind us, I know we are on the right path. But without your continued support, we cannot change the way we account for missing service members. I welcome your input, we need it as we move forward with this new agency.

The VFW is a persuasive advocate for the veterans issues, and in large part because it treats all members as equals. From a diverse group of members and interests, you continue to pursue issues that matter to Americans. Your continued focused cooperation and assistance are vital, and we appreciate your efforts.

One challenge we face is that all families of missing personnel deserve equality. Their cases are unique and require different resources.

It is only, in 2010, that Congress added the act of accounting of our World War II missing. Our World War II accounting effort is often one of gathering data and rebuilding information. In contrast, many of the cases from Vietnam are very mature research. The challenges in Southeast Asia are often about access of sites due to weather and due to terrain.

While the situations may be different, the legacy, the responsibility and the commitment are the same, and in case we are unlikely to find remains, we are going to be open; we are going to be truthful about it, and provide the fullest positive accounting of what happened.

We would like the families of those missing veterans to shape and inform our process for the future. We have successes to build on, including our relationship with the VFW. We are committed to personnel accounting issues and have taken practical actions to advance policies for research and citizen diplomacy.

So, this is the way you can help. The VFW has a strong unified voice. I think we can agree why we are making the changes. It is to fulfill our commitment to the missing personnel and service to their families. I know that you will not shy away from defending what you think is right, and I want to hear it. Our discussions, even our disagreements, are what push us to a better solution.

Secretary Hagel has a longstanding personal interest in this important mission as do I. It is an important issue and we are fully committed to improving the Department's personnel accounting mission. In working on our personnel accounting reorganization, I have got to know many of the stories of the families and of the members that are missing. These stories are personal perspectives on Americans who gave their all. These stories, these veterans, they are important to our history, our culture and our freedom as Americans. They cannot and will not be forgotten or left behind.

We have an important obligation to fulfill, to both our service members and to their families, and it is this obligation that is the foundation that we are building on. As we continue moving forward with our reorganizational efforts, I would ask for your continued support. We need the VFW to stay engaged, both as a voice for all veterans and an active partner in personnel accounting efforts.

As I look across the audience, I see veterans and families whose lives have been committed to helping our service members, our veterans and their families. This is because of people in this room, because of men

and women like you that we have been able to persevere when our great Nation has been at war. They are here today because of you and because of your sacrifice.

Your dedication to ensuring that this Nation honors our service members is unwavering. I personally cannot thank you enough for everything you do every day. I look forward to continuing to work with you as we move forward with our new personnel accounting agency.

It has been an honor and a privilege to be part of this year's Convention, and I look forward to sharing our progress with you next year in Pittsburgh. Thank you very much. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF JAMES E. VAN ZANDT CITIZENSHIP AWARD PRESENTED TO MIKE DeROSA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It is now my pleasure to welcome our next guest and award recipient who is no stranger to the VFW. While he is not a veteran himself, he is a true patriot dedicated to improving the lives of veterans, service members and their families, Burger King franchise owner, Mr. Mike DeRosa. (Applause)

Mike has been involved with Burger King for over 36 years. He has held multiple positions from restaurant manager to Burger King franchisee, and is now the operating partner and president of two companies that own and operate 13 Burger King restaurants in West Central Wisconsin.

He is also the President of DeRosa Development, Inc., a real estate company that specializes in fast food restaurant locations.

Mr. DeRosa approached the VFW in 2007 with a strong desire to help America's veterans, service members and their families. He recognizes the financial difficulties that many service members, veterans and their families face after departing from the military, and he wanted to use his resources to help make a difference in their lives.

He worked to mobilize other Burger King franchise owners and began an annual fundraising event to benefit the VFW's Unmet Needs Program.

The VFW has now been partnering with Mike DeRosa and Burger King franchise owners across the Nation for eight years. Together they have raised \$2.6 million for the Unmet Needs Program to help service members and veterans who experience financial hardships.

Mike, we are so grateful for everything Burger King has done for the VFW Unmet Needs Program.

Comrades, I present to you the recipient of the 2014 VFW James E. Van Zandt Citizenship Award, truly a wonderful individual, Mr. Mike DeRosa. (Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: James E. Van Zandt Citizenship Award and Citation awarded to Mike DeRosa.

"In special recognition and sincere appreciation of his unwavering devotion to our Nation's veteran and military communities through his support of the VFW's Unmet Needs Program. His selfless efforts have made a positive and significant impact on the lives of countless veterans, service members and their families.

"His unwavering commitment to those the VFW exists to serve aligns with each ideal, tradition and value of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, thus earning him our deepest respect and gratitude.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 22nd day of July, 2014. Approved by the National Council of Administration."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General.

RESPONSE – MR. MIKE DeROSA

MR. MIKE DeROSA: Thank you very much. So, I get this letter from the Commander and it is about this award. I did what everybody does when he gets a letter like that and you don't really understand it, I Googled it. I found out about it.

One of the things I found out about it is the list of the other recipients. You people have given this to Presidents and Senators, very prestigious people.

I went to my wife Sherry, this award goes to Presidents and Senators. I am a guy that sells Whoppers, fries and Cokes.

I said, "Why would they give it to me?" She said, "I know." She usually does. She says, "Think about it. There are Presidents and Senators but how do they get there?" I said, "They got elected." She said, "What does that mean?" It took a while. I said, "It means they are politicians." She said, "Right. What do you get when you elect a politician, you get everything you want?"

I said, "Well, I guess not." She said, "What do you get when you want a Whopper?" I said, "You get the best sandwich in the world that you could have it your way." She said, "That's the reason."

Now, I have got some very, very special guests, family here today and I want to take a very quick time to introduce them, and I want you Commanders in the Departments to pay attention to where they are from, because these are people that have helped us raise that money.

By the way, it is \$2,630,000. I will tell you why in just a second. I want to first go with this introduction.

I would like her to stand up. My partner in all of this, not just my spouse, but my partner in all of this, who has always been with me. She speaks better about the Unmet Needs Program than anybody I know, and it is true that if you sit next to her in the airplane, by the time you land you will be writing a check for Unmet Needs. That is my beautiful wife, Sherry.

She also tells me you get these beautiful gold necklaces, what do I get? We will have to do something about that.

All the way from Long Beach, California, my beautiful daughter and her husband, Janet and Mike Ellis. Thank you for coming. It was very, very nice of you to do that.

Then we have some franchisee guests. These gentlemen have been with me since day one, and some of them I have known for over 40 years. The camaraderie in the Burger King franchise community is very much like the camaraderie here in the VFW.

There is Donald O'Bryan from Beaumont in the great state of Texas. Wherever he goes, he has a Texas cheering committee with him. I

don't know why that is. Next is Mark Malenchik, who has Burger Kings in Rockford, Illinois, and in Iowa, a great supporter of the Unmet Needs Program. Mark is finishing three years as President of Mid-America Franchisee Association, and during his three annual meetings he was able to raise, at those meetings, over \$40,000 for Unmet Needs Program. Thank you, Mark.

Next is Jay Amarosa from right here in St. Louis but also a great supporter. He doesn't have any restaurants close enough, he was desperately trying to develop one in the building next door to feed you. On your way out of town, if you see a Burger King, it is probably Jay's. So stop by and say hey.

Then my great friend Joe Angelo from New Jersey, who has been with us from day one and his stores in Jersey have been just great. Thank you very much, Joe.

Before I get to the last two franchisees, we have with us the CEO and the COO of the National Franchisee Association, Andy Myers and Christy Williams. That is the association of independent Burger King franchisees. They have been extremely helpful in spreading the news about Unmet Needs and our involvement.

We get featured in their magazine every issue, so that everybody knows throughout the country they can join us and raise more money. There's my very personal friend, I started with Burger King because he hired me 40 years ago and has the brilliant ability to find out good management talent, my good friend Steve Lewis. He is not only a franchisee in Pennsylvania, but he is the Chairman of the Burger King McLamore Foundation and is very supportive and has helped us a lot.

This year during this month of July, he is raising money for Unmet Needs, and he has promised us \$30,000. So, that is where we get that extra \$30,000. Thank you, Steve.

You always hear about the tipping point when something goes right or wrong. This way it went right.

This next franchisee I want to introduce to you is a guy that really put us over the top. He continues to do that. With his 120-some restaurants in Indiana and Michigan, and now 55 in Tampa, Florida, not only has he always done that with his restaurants, but he says to me when he bought his first stores in Tampa, he said, "Mike, we will deliver Florida to Unmet Needs." This past year, the State of Florida, the Burger Kings there, raised \$210,000.

That is my great friend, Dan Fitzpatrick. Thank you, Dan. He is obviously one of the Commander's favorites because he is from Indiana, a fellow Hoosier. He always tells me that. Then for the very first time, and we are proud of this Burger King Corporation, who has been helping us. We want them to be more aggressive. They have sent someone here, and it is a friend of mine, Jim Meyers, the Senior Vice President of Franchising for the United States. Thank you, Jim, very much for being here.

You will notice that he is sitting next to my wife. He will be writing a check before this is over with.

So, you are 18, 19 or 20 years old and you find yourself someplace in France, or Italy, or even the islands in the South Pacific, and you are 18 and 19 years old, and you are on a hillside freezing in Korea or you're in the swamps of Vietnam, or you are dodging SAMS in the air over

Vietnam. Maybe you are the jack of the dust on a ship in the South China Sea. I think what is called the Big Sand Box in Iraq and you are in the mountains of Afghanistan, not good places, and you all have one thing in common when you are there.

When you are there, you worry about your family here, and when you are there, your family here, is worrying about you there.

When you are 18 or 19 years old, that's going to be a huge, huge burden to you. You know it because you have already lived it, and you're back. We know what it is like. What you have done is priceless, because what you have done is the reason I am sitting here or standing here in front of you. How could there be a Citizen's Award if there wasn't a country to be a citizen of?

You have made this country the exceptional country it is, and the exceptional country it always will be.

I want to thank you for that. I want to thank my Burger King franchisee friends and the crews. You probably saw we have four or five of our crew members and managers who have been in the Convention with you. The last couple of days volunteers from Dan Drury's organization is here. They will be helping you out, where you need to go. If you are a little confused on what is going on, they are there to help you out and their men and women volunteered to come and do that. We really want to thank them.

What Burger King has done is they have gone the extra mile. Right now, if all of you vets, people come up to you and say thank you for your service, and they should, but the Burger King franchisees have taken it another step. They say thank you for your service. What do you need and how can we help? It is these men and women over here who represent all those franchisees.

Jim, who represents over 7,000 Burger King restaurants. I said the other day there are 7,000 VFW Posts and about 7,000 Burger Kings. That is not coincidence. We planned it that way. But because of these people and their efforts, I could stand up in front of you today and remind you that Burger King will always be with veterans until every need is met. Thank you. (Applause)

The Commander-in-Chief asked me to explain one more thing. Along with this wonderful prestigious award, there is an honorarium of \$2,500. Well, \$2,500 is exactly the amount of a grant that we give to military families in need. As soon as Sherry and I knew this, we knew where it was going, and is going back to the Unmet Needs Program. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Before we get to our next guest, if you were in the hall, we talked about the Veterans Preference Act and getting that done before the Congress and Senate will take a six-week vacation. I told you we were going to put a little bit of muster in the press release. We were not going to wait until we get back home to send out a press release. We got together this morning, and we met with the Acting Secretary of the VA, so I am going to let the Adjutant General talk to you a little bit about that.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Thank you, Chief. The press release went out in relation to publicize Resolution 632, what it does is, it calls upon this nation, our elected officials to put together that compromise

bill, to put whatever resources that are necessary to take, by God, care of America's heroes.

I want you to know that the Acting Secretary of the VA talked about a lot of issues. One thing we all agreed upon is this: You can find the resources to send everyone to war, then you better find a resource to take care of those GIs when they come home. (Applause)

Before our Burger King friends leave, I want to say to the membership out here, if you are going to eat a hamburger, it better be a Burger King hamburger. That is the only fast food place of choice. These guys put \$2.6 million in our coffers to help America's heroes. There is no other, it's only Whoppers. Thank you, guys. (Applause)

Let me tell you this. We got together, and the Chief issued the press release and calls on Congress, before they go on recess and stay gone for five weeks, to do the right thing, get a compromise bill together and pass legislation to adequately fund it, take care of America's heroes, quality healthcare, reasonable scheduling, and to make certain there is a provision in there, which I know there will be, to hold people accountable.

If you don't do the job, this is an idea, fire the people. There you go. (Applause)

Let me say this to you. I mean this most sincerely, how can you take five weeks off when there is a crisis in your country? You can't do it in a real world. If your business is floundering, you don't shut down and go on vacation for five weeks. Mr. President, keep them in session. Make them do their jobs. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF D. WAYNE ROBINSON, STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Our next guest is the President and Chief Executive Officer for the Student Veterans of America, an outstanding organization that strives to help our veterans succeed after getting out of the service.

D. Wayne Robinson served in the U.S. Army and rose to the pinnacle of enlisted ranks as a Command Sergeant Major. During his career, he held many leadership positions in artillery, special operations and recruiting, and he graduated from every enlisted leadership course offered by the Army.

He has over 39 awards recognizing his valuable contributions to multiple units, as well as actions taken during combat. He has also served in more than 12 countries around the world.

Before joining SVA's professional staff last October, Mr. Robinson served on the organization's Advisory Board.

SVA's vision is one we can all get behind and support, that all veterans will succeed in higher education, achieve their academic goals, and gain meaningful employment.

We all know that veterans face numerous obstacles when pursuing higher education and post-graduation goals. These challenges range from a missing sense of camaraderie to feeling like an outsider amongst 18-year-old traditional students, to a lack of understanding by university faculty.

When coupled with the visible and invisible wounds of war, a college degree or professional certification can be an elusive goal for men and women returning from military service. Student Veterans of America makes that goal a reality.

SVA Chapters are made up of groups of student-veterans who are there to support each other through the challenges of being a student-veteran. These Chapters provide the students with a sense of camaraderie they may be missing after leaving the military.

The SVA and VFW joined together to give America's student-veterans more specialized assistance in navigating the VA and acquiring their GI Bill benefits, most notably through our 1 Student Veteran program.

In addition, these veterans in SVA Chapters around the country are learning about the VFW and how we will continue to be there to support them even after they have completed their educational goals.

Please join me in welcoming an outstanding veteran and a true American patriot, Mr. D. Wayne Robinson. (Applause)

REMARKS – D. WAYNE ROBINSON, STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

MR. ROBINSON: Good morning. Thank you for having me. I would like to begin by thanking Ann Panteleakos, Sissy Borel, Bob Wallace, who I know from D.C., Jerry Newberry, John Hamilton, John Biedrzycki, John Stroud and Bill Thien. Thank you for having me.

I want to take a few minutes of your time this morning. What I wanted to speak to you about today actually reminds me of a story I heard a long time ago when growing up in Alabama.

I heard it from this older preacher. It was about this little dog, what we call in Alabama a little feisty dog. Every morning, this little feisty dog would get up after eating his breakfast and go sit on his porch, and he just watched the neighbors.

After a period of time, eventually this Bulldog, big Bulldog moved in and this big Bulldog, every day, would walk down the street proud and head held high with that Bulldog trot.

That little feisty dog would run down as soon as he saw that Bulldog getting in front of his gate, would run down and hit the fence, and was in that Bulldog's face, ruff, ruff, ruff, ruff every day. So, this happened and this went on for days and days and weeks and weeks. Sure enough, every morning this would happen.

Eventually one morning the little feisty dog, the little lap dog, woke up and the sun rose and the Bulldog didn't come walking down the street. So, he sat and watched the neighborhood and saw people come and go, and no Bulldog. Eventually, that evening, sure to form, here comes the Bulldog, his head held high, in that Bulldog trot right proud. He is the biggest and baddest thing in the neighborhood.

The rest of the week that little dog comes off the porch and across the yard, he hit the gate, and sure enough the gate swings open. The Bulldog commits to tearing the little feisty dog to pieces. So he is swinging him back and forth, back and forth.

Eventually, they separate the dogs and the little feisty dog crawls back into the yard, up the steps, with all the energy he can muster, he looked at the screen door and yells, "Who in the hell left the gate open?"

He wanted to know who left that gate open. He never planned on actually getting to the other side of that gate.

That is what I want to talk to you about today. SVA are small, but we punch above our weight. Speaking, I know the Adjutant General talked about the release this morning, so it was very good pre-empting for what I wanted to speak about, because today we released in an environment where everyone is striving to work more military friendly. We have released a list of "Not Recommended" institutions for student-veterans.

The reason that we released it, is not that we are against a particular industry, but because we support student-veterans regardless of where they choose to attend school, whether they be proprietary, public or private. We support student-veterans. But these institutions are right now going through reorganization, which means that it looks like they are going to close. We don't have a problem, we did the PR, we did our release, and now it looks like they are going to close in 90 days. They couldn't tell you what date it would be. They right now don't have a buyer.

They can't tell student-veterans if, in six months out from graduation, whether they will be able to graduate. More importantly, if they expended benefits, what will happen to these benefits, and will those credits transfer to other organizations?

So, while we work with governmental organizations to be able to figure out what that should look like, help vets transition, so we have been scrambling over the last week to help in these areas. We gave reports that while all of this is going on, these schools are still recruiting on active duty military bases. That's the problem.

That would be the equivalent of your local neighborhood bank is about to go under, and it has been announced that they don't know if they will be able to return deposits to those who deposited funds in accounts in the bank.

That's Monday through Friday. On Saturday, they are holding a recruiting fair to bring in more individuals, more investors, more depositors. We quickly see that is an issue. Unless it is dealing with vets and education, this should not be allowed.

Once again, we support governmental organizations and what they are doing to bring items like this to light. We cannot sit idly by and not pre-empt, not warn student-veterans, especially those on active duty of a particular environment they could be signing up to expend governmental dollars.

To volunteer to step into a situation that is not the best, not conducive to student-veterans doing the best that they can in the area of education. So, as a Command Sergeant Major, who joined the Army almost 29 years ago, I was trained by the likes of a number of you in this building, and that's before me and still stays to my left and right.

A lot of that training consisted of doing what is right even in the absence of orders. I was taught integrity comes with a price. I was taught that I have a moral obligation as a leader to be able to stand up and take the unpopular stance, and to support my soldiers, eventually my soldiers, sailors, Airmen, Coast Guardsmen and Marines.

So, that is the position that we take right now at SVA, because which one of us having gone on record, could go out, know where a potentially treacherous situation lies, and then would not come back and

share that with their comrades. So, that's what we recommend that student-veterans do. It is information we have gathered.

We don't have a system of doing this. This is information that we know the lay of the land, and knowing that because we have worked in this, I kind of feel that a lot of vets have been busy the last 12 years, they have been busy out serving, fighting wars. They are not as well versed in the area of education. It is our moral obligation, as I was told by my elders to be able to share this information, and it will be a price to pay, I am sure.

So, I turned my phone over so I couldn't see the texts and e-mails, and things I will be facing once I get down the steps. I know that our big brothers and big sisters at the VFW, just as you have supported us up to this point in our infancy, that we can always count on this support of the VFW as we step out to continue to bring light to this matter.

I want to close. Before coming here on the stage, I was talking to John Stroud. I was talking about the bridge that naturally can be built between the VFW and SVA. Because you guys are experienced, you know what veterans are going to face. You know the issues that will face you on the other side of that chasm. So, I want to share one of my favorite poems, and I will close with this. To me, it exemplifies the VFW and it exemplifies who we would like to be in SVA.

The poem is called "The Bridge Builder." It is by W. A. Dromgoole out of Tennessee. And it says:

"An old man going a lone highway,
Came at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide.
Through which was flowing a sullen tide
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The rapids held no fears for him.
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.
"Old man,' said a fellow pilgrim near,
'You're wasting your strength with building here.
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again will pass this way.
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build this bridge at evening-tide?'
"The builder lifted his old gray head,
'Good friend, in the path I have come,' he said.
'There followed after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm, that has been as naught to me,
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He too, must cross in the twilight dim; -
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him.'"

Thank you, and I look forward to continuing to work with the VFW. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you so much. What a great relationship we have with the Student Veterans of America. It is only going to continue to get stronger and better for the VFW vets.

PRESENTATION OF VFW COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GOLD MEDAL AND CITATION TO DENNIS FLYNN

The VFW is fortunate to have so many outstanding and dedicated members. Our members are the face of the organization and what really make the VFW tick. Remember, this is your organization.

Dennis Flynn embodies all that a VFW member should, and then some. Dennis regularly goes above and beyond to serve this organization and to serve the veteran community as a whole.

A member of Post 2866 in St. Charles, Missouri, Dennis serves as a VFW Department Service Officer. In that role, he has helped countless veterans and their family members get the benefits they deserve.

On top of that, Dennis is one heck of a recruiter. Last year, he was awarded the 2012-2013 VFW Certified National Recruiter Award after successfully signing up an impressive 313 new or reinstated members. To follow that, during the 2013-2014 year, he recruited 508 members, once again earning him the Certified National Recruiter of the Year Award. Dennis, that is a job well done.

He is truly an inspiration to me, and I can't think of anyone that deserves this honor more.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my honor to award Dennis Flynn with the Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit and Citation awarded to Dennis Flynn.

"In esteemed recognition and sincere appreciation of his dedicated service to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, as well as to the entire veteran community. He has eagerly provided assistance to those in need, and his tireless efforts have greatly contributed to the organization's continued success in fulfilling its mission.

"His longtime commitment to the objectives of the VFW has justly earned him the highest level of admiration, respect and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 22nd day of July, 2014."

This has been signed by William A. Thien, Commander-in-Chief, and John E. Hamilton, Adjutant General. (Applause)

RESPONSE BY COMRADE DENNIS FLYNN

COMRADE DENNIS FLYNN: Thank you very much. When I was offered this job in 1976 as a Service Officer, I didn't really know if I could do that. I was offered a job at the VA Medical Center and I was saying to myself, I am young, can I really handle people with their arms and legs off? Then I realized that most of the veterans that we deal with were World War II veterans.

Knowing my father was a World War II veteran, I decided to take the job and go in there and give those veterans all the dignity and respect they deserved, and I had no problems with that job.

Then on the service work, I am successful because I work outside the box. I don't wait for veterans to come to me to file their claims. When

a veteran files a claim for benefits, I look at their discharge document to see if there are other benefits they should be seeking and inform them of those benefits.

When it comes to veterans that are like already service connected, like hearing loss, you run into veterans with 10 percent for hearing loss, or even greater, zero. Twenty years they have not filed a claim for that hearing loss.

As you get older, that hearing will deteriorate, and the worse it gets, more compensation you get. So, I decided to go on my computer and ask my computer to tell me how many service connected veterans I have that have hearing loss. My computer tells me I have 10,000.

So, then I can flush in the computer, who is 80 or above, and it will spit that out. I take that information and run it across the computer to make sure they are not already drawing 100 percent from the VA.

I decided to send a letter to those veterans. I sent out 1,700 letters on my own, not on VFW business, but on my own.

A thousand contacted me back, and of the thousand, 432 got increases, and 67 of them got 100 percent. With 67 veterans that got 100 percent, that touches another thing with me. If I try to get free nursing home care for veterans, so when the rate is 70 percent or more, I am able to get free nursing care, it makes me feel good.

When it comes to membership, I have the opportunity to see 30 or 40 discharges per day. I review those discharges to see if they're eligible for VFW. Then on my computer, I have all the members in the State of Missouri, so I run it across there to see if they are already a member. If not, I invite them, to thank them for their service, and I am there to tell them that our services are available for membership. So, that is why I am so successful in getting so many members.

When people ask me how do you do that, I say, "I give you \$10,000 in back pay and I ask you for \$45, how hard is that?" So, that's why I have been successful in membership.

It is a lot of work to it. I can sign up 100 each year and no problem, but 500 is hard. I thank you very much for this high award. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF NATIONAL HOME REPRESENTATIVES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: One of the standout icons of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Ladies Auxiliary is the VFW's National Home for Children in Eaton Rapids, Michigan. The National Home is a profound example of veterans helping veterans.

This morning we have with us the home's terrific leaders, Board President Al Cantu of Texas. Executive Director Patrice Green, and most importantly, our 2014 Buddy Poppy child, Grant Gentges, who resides in the Tennessee house.

Once again, in keeping with one of our great time-honored VFW traditions, our 2014 Buddy Poppy child will circulate among all of the generous comrades in the meeting room and "pass the hat" on behalf of the National Home.

So, please stick around and reach deep into your pockets. Your donation to such a worthy cause will help put a big smile on Grant's face this morning.

Let me just say, I can't remember who came up with the idea of putting the box out there when you had to go through the metal detectors, when the Vice President was here. Since you had that change in your hand, you might as well throw it in the box. It amounted to \$359.19. I couldn't get it all in here, so we will turn it into cash.

At this time I would like to call on Al, Patrice and Grant.

REMARKS BY COMRADE AL CANTU

COMRADE AL CANTU (Department of Texas): Thank you, Commander-in-Chief Thien, for inviting the National Home to speak here today. It is an honor for me to serve as the President of the VFW National Home for Children, with all of the excellent and dedicated Trustees we have.

The Board is made up of 12 elected Trustees, who serve their National Home Districts and there are five ex-officio members, who include Past Commander-in-Chief John Hamilton, Quartermaster General Bob Greene, and the current Commander-in-Chief Bill Thien.

All have been very dedicated and supportive of the National Home. We appreciate your expertise in policy and finance, and facilitating the Home's participation in National Conventions, the Washington Conference, and all the other work that we do as trustees, to facilitate and participate in.

All those are very important venues for us to teach people about the families of the veterans who are being helped at the National Home.

Commander-in-Chief Thien, I thank you for your guidance and leadership, for all of your years of hard work for the VFW on behalf of all matters. We thank you, all members, for the support of our VFW National Home, from all across the country.

The good work of the VFW National Home for Children is possible because of the vision of our comrades who went before us and because of what all of you do today. Each and every day you make it Veteran's Day. Your dedication and support make it possible for the Home to do what it set out to do since 1925, to help and strengthen veterans' families.

As Trustees, we are able to meet the children and the families you are helping. And as members of the VFW and the Ladies Auxiliary, we can be very proud of what we have achieved at our National Home because of your continued support and dedicated service to our families, to our veterans and their families.

We have a workshop in Room 203 at 3:00 p.m. this afternoon. Visit us at the VFW National Home booth. We would like to meet you, talk to you and explain further what we do each and every day to ensure that our veterans and their families are taken care of.

Now, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce the National Home Executive Director, Patrice Green.

REMARKS BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PATRICE GREEN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREEN: Thank you, Al. We appreciate Commander-in-Chief Thien for his service on behalf of America's veterans, and we know that the VFW National Home for Children is very special to him. He visited us many times in his capacity as a Trustee, but also as a member of the Department of Indiana, his Department for decades has held a wonderful Indiana Day every fall, and I look forward to seeing you there on the 28th of October this year. You will be free, right?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I would hope so.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREEN: When you come, I hope you have a chance to see the beautiful stone table and benches that you and "Sissy" installed together in the tribute park at the National Home. It is a beautiful addition.

If you have not seen it, we hope you visit it and can see it, too.

Bill and "Sissy" had a beautiful table and bench engraved, and with it they expressed their gratitude and appreciation in honor of all VFW and Ladies Auxiliary members in the work that you do on behalf of veterans.

This year, the National Home marked its 89th year of caring for the children and families. That is a wonderful tribute to all of you because we certainly couldn't do it without you.

Then on January 7th of next year, the Home will celebrate its 90th birthday. Although it is 90 years old, it is definitely not old, it is 90 years young. For those of you who have not yet made the trip, we hope you will soon.

For those of you who are here that can't make the trip any time soon, we are going to take a little mini visit right now if they will play a video for us.

(Whereupon, the video is played at this time.)

We want to thank Bill and thank all of you for what you provided to the National Home. With your help, so many young people and so many families are being strengthened at the National Home.

We want to encourage you all to make visits to the National Home and see for yourself what we are doing. If you can't do that, again, this afternoon, like Al said, we have a workshop, and you are going to be able to meet a couple of our staff at the National Home. Our Program Director will be there and the Facilities Director will be there to answer any questions.

We will be done before 4:00 o'clock so you can make it to the party this evening.

Now, it is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you all the 2014-2015 National Buddy Poppy child, Grant Gentges.

REMARKS BY 2014-2015 NATIONAL BUDDY POPPY CHILD GRANT GENTGES

BUDDY POPPY CHILD GRANT GENTGES: Good morning. My name is Grant Gentges, and I am 13 years old. I live at the Tennessee

house at the VFW National Home for Children with my mom, Carrie, my brother, John.

I am in the eighth grade, and my favorite subject is social studies and global issues. My interest for the future is Coast Guard instruction.

One of my favorite things is being involved in the 4-H program at the fair. I show my pig "Big Black". I won fifth place in the showmanship.

I really enjoy the fair week and all the good experiences that come from it. I enjoy living at the National Home because of the things I receive and the opportunities that are there.

I like going to the State National meeting. The people that come to the campus and also I like especially the fishing trip.

My great grandfather was in the Korean conflict, and my uncle was in the Vietnam War. He is Commander of a VFW Post. My cousins are in the Marines and stationed in Okinawa.

I am happy to be the Buddy Poppy child so I can thank all the veterans and their families for the sacrifices they have made for our country and freedom. Thank you. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you so much for this present.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREEN: In addition, a brick has been placed in the walkway of the National Home in behalf of Bill Thien.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

COMRADE AL CANTU: Here are some of the pictures of the Commander-in-Chief at the VFW National Home.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a couple of surprises, but they are pleasant surprises.

PRESENTATION BY COMRADE ALFRED LIPPHARDT DEPARTMENT OF GEORGIA

COMRADE LIPPHARDT (Department of Georgia): The Department of Georgia and the Ladies Auxiliary have the pleasure to present a check for \$3,000 to the VFW National Home for Children, and in addition to offer the assistance of these two Georgia State Troopers to escort the Buddy Poppy child around as he solicits for the Home, if that is okay.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: That is great. We appreciate it. That is the way to keep the Home.

We have one more pleasant surprise, Comrades.

PRESENTATION BY COMRADE RANDY COKER

COMRADE RANDY COKER (Department of Virginia): Commander-in-Chief Thien, Comrades, it is my pleasure on behalf of VFW Post 1503 in Dale City, Virginia, to also present a check for \$2,600 to the National Home, and with that I want to challenge each and every Post out there to meet or exceed this, to make the National Home better and better each year. Thank you. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrades.

PRESENTATION BY COMRADE MITCHELL COTA

COMRADE MITCHELL COTA (Department of Louisiana): Good morning, Comrades. The Posts in Louisiana took an offering for the National Home, and we just added a little bit to it, we got \$1,150 from the State of Louisiana. What we have is from the All-American Commanders. Thank you all. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: That is a good job.

At this time, I would like to call on Bruce Hollinger, the Nevada Adjutant/Quartermaster.

PRESENTATION BY COMRADE BRUCE HOLLINGER

COMRADE BRUCE HOLLINGER (Department of Nevada): Herb Schwartzkopf was supposed to do this but he called me an hour ago and said he is on his way back to Kansas with one of his comrades that needs to see his personal physician immediately, so Herb asked me to do this.

On behalf of the Adjutant/Quartermaster Association, we have a small check for the National Home for the services to present to you, Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you so very much. Do you want to tell them how much?

COMRADE BRUCE HOLLINGER (Department of Nevada): The Association decided to donate \$2,500 to the National Home for services. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF MICHAEL DiYESO, PRESIDENT OF FREEDOMS FOUNDATION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Our next guest joins us on behalf of an organization whose mission is one we can all get behind. Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge promotes the ideals and principles of our free society and encourages all Americans to embrace both their rights and their responsibilities, and to contribute to the common good of society.

By recognizing good citizenship through their awards programs and inspiring leaders through education programs, they cultivate civic responsibility in all, strengthening and bolstering our democracy for future generations.

Founded in 1949 by E. F. Hutton, Don Belding, Kenneth Wells, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Freedoms Foundation is located on 85 acres in the heart of Valley Forge. This National educational non-profit welcomes thousands of people a year to participate in programs to encourage engaged, responsible citizenship based on the Bill of Responsibilities authored by Freedoms Foundation in 1985. With nearly 30 Chapters and more than 3,000 volunteers spread across the Nation, Freedoms Foundation is filled with people who wish to pass on a legacy of freedom and democracy, which requires active engaged citizens ready to accept the responsibilities and challenges of self-government.

In fact, each summer since 1999, the VFW's State Voice of Democracy winners have attended a Freedoms Foundation weekend program.

The need for organizations like Freedoms Foundation has never been greater. Civic education is no longer a priority in many schools, as social studies curriculum is squeezed by an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, math and standardized testing. Because of this, many American students are missing fundamental lessons on citizenship and civic responsibility. Freedoms Foundation's educational programs are an investment that lasts a lifetime and one that promises our experiment in limited self-government will not fail.

Representing Freedoms Foundation here today is its President and CEO, Michael DiYeso. Please join me in giving him a warm VFW welcome. (Applause)

REMARKS – MICHAEL DiYESO, FREEDOMS FOUNDATION

MR. DiYESO: Good morning. I would like to start off by thanking the VFW National leadership for the opportunity to speak today and thank you for the opportunity to address this audience.

Not surprisingly, my topic today will be freedoms, and I would like to address that from two perspectives.

I would like to really address it from the perspective to tell you a little more about the Freedoms Foundation but to talk about freedoms which I believe are the foundation of this Nation.

I think I will give 100 percent concurrence by saying that we live in the greatest Nation this world has ever seen. The question is what makes it great? I believe it is the freedoms that we all have, the freedoms that you and each of you have helped to defend. It is that personal freedoms, the political freedoms, the religious and economic freedoms that separate this country from every other one on earth.

If you can imagine, all citizens look at it as you do. They celebrate our heritage, they defended the Constitution, and they will stand up and protect the individual freedoms that we all enjoy. But unfortunately, that's not always the case. Our freedoms are at risk. There are issues like terrorism, immigration policies that don't work for us, government relief, lack of high quality paying jobs. Those are all challenges to our freedom.

But I would like to share with you today, ladies and gentlemen, the greatest threat to our freedoms is apathy. Apathy is something we must address. We see it every day. Our voter registration numbers are down, volunteerism is down. You have experienced that in your organization as we do in ours.

Frustration levels are high, desire to affect change is down. There is a general feeling that how can one person make a difference? I am here this morning to tell you I believe one person can make a difference. I see that every day in Valley Forge.

The question is how do we go about doing it? We believe that we can do it by addressing three things: If we educate, if we recognize and if we challenge.

That's exactly what the Freedoms Foundation in Valley Forge does. We offer our educational programs in civics and in history for

students and teachers. We have a Medal of Honor Roll that is dedicated to the over 3,500 recipients of that highest medal that we offer in our country, that we use not only as a recognition, but we also use that to make tangible teaching tools for our students and teachers.

I would like to digress for a moment and recognize Tom Brown as the Junior Vice Commander of our Pennsylvania Post for his work in helping us make improvements in the Medal of Honor Program, along with many, many friends of the Medal of Honor Program. So, it remains the appropriate tribute for those veterans. Tom, thank you and thank you for your work you have done on our behalf.

We also believe it is important to recognize civic virtue, that we do that through our George Washington Honor of Medal since 1949. We also recognize teachers through our Free Enterprise Educational Award. But most importantly, what we do is each and every person we touch, we challenge. We challenge them to get involved, to get involved in their community, in their church and in the political environment in which they live. In fact, we do that together.

As mentioned earlier, the Freedoms Foundation participates with you on your Voice of Democracy Program which is an outstanding example of education, recognition and teaching our students to research and prepare their essays, and as part of it, to educate them more about our democracy. They certainly are recognized as they go through the process to reach the final conclusion, which hopefully will last for them now for scholarship for college.

They are certainly challenged, and I listen to these essays, and each and every one of these are prepared to take the challenge of responsible citizenship.

But it is as you might imagine, that is what I am here to do. I think they call Missouri the "Show Me State". Let me try to tell you and share with you why we believe these programs work. For over 95 percent of our students who attend these programs increase their knowledge of history, the Constitution and citizenship. That is a very good thing considering they don't get that in school today.

Now, 95 percent of our students register to vote, who are eligible. That is great. The national average is less than 50 percent. 95 percent pursue higher education. My favorite statistic is 75 percent of our students get involved. They get involved in their community, they get involved in their church, and they support local politicians.

The national average for getting involved is less than 20 percent. 75 percent of the students who participate in our program get involved. Today we have impacted the lives of over two million students.

So, ladies and gentlemen, it works. One of the things I would like to do this morning is to ask you to help me reach more students. I am asking you to consider supporting teachers to attend our new Medal of Honor Legacy Program.

Why do I say teachers? Each teacher affects the lives of 150 students. So you can imagine that is great leverage for your investment and it doesn't take a whole lot of teachers to begin to really reach more and more students, which is what we need to do today.

Our Medal of Honor Legacy Program provides education contact, World War II through current conflicts, so they have teachers that are covering it today.

By educating teachers and experts, for example, David Eisenhower, grandson of Dwight D. Eisenhower, is on our campus today. He is leading the World War II context for about 50 teachers who are on our campus today. That is the quality of education that we bring to these programs.

In addition to that, we have a Medal of Honor recipient participating in all the programs. He will have his story and share his experiences with the teachers so they walk away with some real life examples and get an opportunity to meet and greet with a Medal of Honor recipient.

As important, each teacher will leave having been fully engrained in the Medal of Honor character development program, a set of teaching lessons they can bring back to their classroom to help with their quest of developing responsible citizens.

When those teachers leave, they are now the guardians of our democracy. They are prepared with the skills to go back and pass it on to their students, the best tactics and motivating factors to become responsible citizens.

As important, they have firsthand knowledge to teach students appreciation for the sacrifices made by veterans on their behalf.

I would like now to show a short video. These are things that are said by participants and the recipients. Please show the video.

(Whereupon, the video is shown at this time.)

Ladies and gentlemen, there is an opportunity to do more, and I will tell you these programs work. I see it in the eyes of the students and the teachers who attend the program. We need this help. Our country needs this help, and I am extremely concerned as I am sure you are that these things are not taught in school.

We learned of it as young adults. We need to reach those young adults today so they give back and help you defend our freedoms going forward.

We have a booth on Aisle 600. We have a website, Freedomsfoundation.org. You can reach me by e-mail there, and I know that the Programs Department at National can get in touch with us.

If your organization, individually, or any Post is interested in support of the Freedoms Foundation in the future, please do that.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your time and attention. I know you've got a lot of information. I appreciate you listening to me. It goes without saying what I am saying, thank you so much for your service.

I would also like to say most importantly my line. I thank you for the freedoms that you have supported and protected for us and for my family.

God bless you, God bless the soldiers and their families who are in conflicts, and God bless America. Thank you very much. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL AL LUGO VFW DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA RETIREMENT HOME

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Our next guest is here representing a very unique and special endeavor by the VFW Department of Florida. Retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Al Lugo, Jr. is the Executive Director of the VFW Retirement Home in Fort McCoy, Florida.

The VFW Retirement Home is a 501(C)(3) non-profit veterans organization owned outright and operated by the VFW Department of Florida, and it's the only facility of its kind anywhere in the world.

The goal of this facility is to provide a homelike atmosphere to veterans who have proven their loyalty and patriotism by serving our country in foreign lands during time of war. The Home's guiding principle is to provide affordable, independent living accommodations to VFW members, Ladies' and Men's Auxiliary members and their spouses.

The doors to the VFW Home opened in October 1991. The facility is spread out over 42 acres and rests among tranquil oaks and palms. Due to the high demand for independent living accommodations for veterans, the Retirement Home opened an additional 19 rooms in 2006.

Before working at the Retirement Home, Lieutenant Colonel Lugo amassed a long and impressive career in the military, dating back to 1986. He held several key positions over the years, with stops in Germany, Afghanistan and the Pentagon, to name a few.

His awards include the Legion of Merit, four Meritorious Service Medals, three Army Commendation Medals, four Army Achievement Medals, the National Defense Service Medal with Bronze Star, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal and the Armed Forces Service Medal, among others.

Comrades, please give a warm welcome to Lieutenant Colonel Al Lugo. (Applause)

REMARKS BY COMRADE AL LUGO

COMRADE LUGO: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief John, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief John, Adjutant General John, Quartermaster General Bob Greene, National Officers and State Commanders, and a special hello to the great State of Florida and our current Commander Talmadge Markham, a retired First Sergeant and fellow Comrades:

It is an honor and pleasure to be here today to tell you a little bit about the VFW Veterans Village. As the Commander alluded to, the Village is a very tranquil place that takes care of soldiers 24/7 and veterans for the past 23 years.

We changed our name. We were formerly known as the VFW Retirement Home and we updated the name. It sounded a little bit better. Our national slogan states "No one does more for veterans", and we celebrated our 23rd Anniversary this year of taking care of veterans.

The Village has some 42 acres that accommodates 71 rooms. These rooms are apartment complexes with 24/7 kitchen, housekeeping, three home-cooked meals a day, outside patios, and many more amenities.

It is centrally located in the great State of Florida, and less than two hours from Orlando, Daytona Beach, Jacksonville, Tampa and the Gulf of Mexico.

We have two of the ladies that work in our facility. One is Pam Lotman and her husband is a Vietnam veteran, and the other is Sharon Beam, a Gold Star daughter. Her father was killed in Afghanistan. Please stop by and see them. They would love to tell you all about the place.

We love the snow birds. If you have no idea what a snow bird is, you probably are looking at Florida or Arizona. These are the guys that stay away from the snow in the winter months.

It is a phenomenal place and I encourage you to look us up on the website. It is open to all members of the VFW and the Ladies Auxiliary. You know, it has no long-term lease, you can come for a week, come for a day or come for a month.

We want to share with you what we have here as a member of this great organization. Before departing today, I would like to ask the Chief to come up. We have a small presentation for the Chief. Also, as you know, the Chief is a Navy guy. So, as we went on a cruise together with the Ladies Auxiliary, the ladies kind of challenged us to do the Zumba. So, the Chief and I did Zumba for a little bit, and I am so very glad that the National Maritime laws apply and no video of this, because it would have been hard to see.

On behalf of the staff and Board members and myself, I present to you a small token of our appreciation. It says, "Bill Thien, Commander-in-Chief, 2014, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"Commander, thank you for your leadership, mentorship and friendship, July 23, 2014."

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Sir, thank you, Al.

COMRADE LUGO: Chief, now that you and Linda have some time, you can come by and use that key, and we will not charge you too much. Thank you for the opportunity to be here. God bless you all and God bless America.

INTRODUCTION OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY, MAJOR GENERAL JOHN HERRLING

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Al.

The long and admirable record of service of the United States Army is lasting testimony to the solid commitment of the men and women who have worn its uniform. For more than two centuries, they have protected America's values and principles of freedom and whenever called upon by our Nation, U.S. soldiers have served with remarkable sacrifice, bravery and valor.

The VFW holds true to the verity that the effort to preserve and celebrate the Army's history of service to the Nation is essential to the people of this great country. We will never forget. Three years ago, the VFW pledged \$500,000 to the campaign for the National Museum of the United States Army. So far, we have reached 80 percent of our goal and will disburse the final installment this fall.

This Museum will be a place where history, achievement, courage and sacrifice will become real for all people and will be a lasting link to

the millions of American men and women who have proudly worn the uniform of the United States Army. The VFW's commitment helps to ensure this.

We can think of no better way to pay tribute to our soldiers, past, present and future, than to do our part to help safeguard the stories of their dedication as well as the overall spirit of the Army.

A major facet of our mission as an organization is to ensure those who have gone before us in war are remembered and honored properly. This Museum will do just that and much more.

Here today to talk a little more about the Museum is retired Major General Herrling, Executive Director of the campaign for the National Army Museum. (Applause)

REMARKS BY MAJOR GENERAL JOHN HERRLING ARMY HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

MAJOR GENERAL HERRLING: Commander-in-Chief Thien, Adjutant General Hamilton, ladies and gentlemen: I have two purposes here this morning. One is to give you a brief update on the National Museum of the United States Army, and the other is to give the members of the VFW my sincere thanks for their support that began three years ago.

The Army is the oldest and the largest of the military services, and the only one without a National Museum. We do have a number of Post museums and Division museums that are scattered around the country and some overseas. But the Army has decided it wants to have a National Museum and in the National Capitol region to honor the 31 million men and women who have worn the uniform for the past 239 years.

The Army is about people. It is people. On this slide there are four U.S. Presidents and four winners of the Nobel Peace Prize. The Army represents all ranks, all backgrounds, and is all inclusive.

Up in the top right, there is a young MP Sergeant by the name of Leon Hester, who was awarded a Silver Star in Iraq back in 2005. Down in the bottom center is a World War I veteran who's named Melvin York, who won the Medal of Honor. So, the Army is about people, and that's what I will focus on.

The four verbs we are using to describe the Museum: Engage, educate, honor and inspire. I think it is very important today to educate the country on what services, like the Army, provide for their country.

Education: People in high school today don't get a lot of history, particularly history around Armed Forces. This is the artist's concept of what the Museum will look like once it is built. It will be located on a 41-acre campus on the periphery of Fort Belvoir, Virginia between two major arteries. One is Interstate 95, which is the most traveled highway on the East Coast, and Route 1, which used to be the most traveled highway on the East Coast.

The Museum will be on 41 acres, on the boundary of Fort Belvoir, so you will not have to deal with security entering the grounds. This is just again the artist's concept of what the entranceway of the building will look like, and the main lobby, and one of the galleries.

Inside, as you come through the entrance, it has got one unusual aspect. It is called the Experiential Learning Center. The purpose of that

center is to educate middle school and high school kids and staff science technology, engineering and math.

Lockheed Martin put up \$10 million for that purpose, because the United States, which led the technology of this world from 1945 on, is losing that edge and we need to get more young middle school and high school students involved in technology and science.

They are sponsoring this experiential learning center. When you come down into the main lobby, it has normal things that you will find in a Museum. It has got a gift shop; it has a cafeteria, both indoors and outdoors. It has an Army theater, where you will get a 15-minute overview focusing on the Army over those 239 years.

Across from there, there is going to be an Army and Society gallery. The purpose of this gallery is to talk about innovation and intervention, how the country supports its Army and how the Army supports this country. It will depict the Army's culture, social, cultural, technological, scientific, medical and economic contributions to the Nation.

Another gallery will be the soldiers' stories gallery. The Army is about soldiers. These are personal accounts of soldiers representing all eras in the 239-year history of the Army.

The last gallery is fighting for the Nation, and the distance between the top of that gallery and the bottom is 300 feet. It is the length of a football field. At the top, you will start with the Revolutionary War in 1775, and it will take you all the way down to today and the war on terrorism around the world.

I am not going to take you through those 11 wars and 187 campaigns, but the Army, starting with Lewis and Clark in the early 1800s, map of the Louisiana Territory. It was Army engineers who put in canals and railroads across the West. You can read up on that slide, and a lot of the other things that the Army has been involved in, to include in 1947 the act that caused the great diversification of the Armed Forces.

Next is another unique feature of this Museum. It is called the Veterans Home, which we felt building a Museum you needed some place to recognize veterans formally and informally. This is the 7,000 square foot room. It can be set up for a formal function or it can be just a casual gathering place for veterans, their families, Veterans Service Organizations, and others.

The VFW was the first organization to come forward and contribute \$500,000 to this particular facility. You will see on the next slide there is a donor wall on one of the walls in this room, and up on the top of that wall will be the VFW and its logo.

You walk out of that room, across the hall, you walk out to the Medal of Honor rooftop garden. We just felt that we needed a place to recognize the recipients of the Medal of Honor, and that is where this will take place.

There has been lots of support. It started with Congress passing a law authorizing the building of the Army Museum. It has got support from the Commonwealth of Virginia, Fairfax County, where it will be located, and a bunch of Veterans Service Organizations.

Senator Dan Inouye was a very big supporter of this Museum, and he came and spoke publicly at an affair we had two years ago. He talked

about his experience in the Army as a Japanese-American, and what it meant to him, and he was very strong supporter of this.

This is where we are today. The architectural design is 95 percent complete. The design of the galleries and the exhibits that go into the Museum are at 95 percent done. You can see we have raised to date \$85 million, and with another \$30 million hopefully we can break ground sometime late next year.

From the parking lots, there is going to be a promenade walkway into the main Museum building. On the site of that we will have it lined with commemorative bricks, and there are two different sizes of bricks. If you have been a service member or a family member who you think would like to be recognized along that promenade, I think a brick would be a good way to do that right there at the Museum site.

This is how you can help. I am not going to repeat that. You have already helped. We have got, you know, great support at the National level with the VFW, and great support from the VFW Posts from around the country and from individual VFW members.

So, again, I would like to thank you very much. The last slide just says we are online, and if you need more on this Museum or what it is going to be to the American people, can go online. Please go online.

Commander-in-Chief, thank you very much. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thanks for staying with us. We are going to wrap this up for today in just a few minutes. Now, I would like to invite to the stage for a special announcement, Ed Sandrick, Director for the Veterans Channel of Humana, a Marine Corps veteran and a VFW life member of the Judd Kendall Post in Naperville, Illinois.

REMARKS BY ED SANDRICK, DIRECTOR, FOR THE VETERANS CHANNEL OF HUMANA

COMRADE ED SANDRICK: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief Thien. Fellow comrades, it is a pleasure and honor to be here representing Humana. As you know, Humana has a long history of supporting veterans and the military. We have worked in the Tri-Care seven regions, supporting the seven regions of Tri-Care since 1996. We have worked with the VA and operate 38 individual clinics across the country. We are a proud contributor to the entrepreneurship boot camp with veterans with disabilities as a corporate sponsor.

My purpose here, however, is to announce that you all did it once again. A little bit of background. At the Convention in Reno in 2012, over a half million people attended, only 1.5 million steps were recorded. As the show opened, over 4,000 pedometers were issued with just over five million steps recorded. Last year, we did the Walk-It Program in Louisville, and set a goal of five million steps, thinking that would be a stretched goal. Well, you walked nine million steps in Louisville last year.

Once again this year, as last year, you distinguished yourselves with another stellar performance in the Walk-It Program. 1,700 pedometers were issued, and you logged over eight million steps.

Humana is once again proud to contribute \$25,000 to the VFW Veterans Service Program to help you help our veterans and their families. Congratulations, VFW, and thank you for your service. (Applause)

CLOSING CEREMONIES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Sergeant-at-Arms, we will have the closing ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief. Comrades, please rise. National Chaplain, please.

BENEDICTION

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Our Heavenly Father, as we close, we are mindful of the words of the Psalmist spoken in Psalms 23:1-3.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters.

"He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for His name sake." Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, join me in the salute to the Colors.

(Whereupon the Salute to the Colors was had at this time.)

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the closing ceremonies of this session have been completed and your orders have been obeyed, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms. We will recess until 8:00 o'clock a.m. tomorrow morning. Thank you very much.

(Whereupon, the meeting was duly recessed at 11:30 o'clock a.m. to reconvene on Wednesday, July 23, 2014, at 8:00 o'clock a.m.)

THIRD BUSINESS SESSION WEDNESDAY, JULY 23, 2014

(The Third Business Session of the 115th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, meeting at the America's Center Convention Complex, St. Louis, Missouri, was called to order at 8:00 o'clock a.m., with Commander-in-Chief William Thien presiding.)

CALL TO ORDER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I will now reconvene the 115th National Convention.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will, please, conduct the Opening Ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir. Commander-in-Chief, National Officers and comrades, please rise for the Opening Prayer, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States. Comrade National Chaplain.

OPENING PRAYER

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKESON: Our Heavenly Father, we give you thanks as we come to the close of our Convention. We thank you, the Creator of heaven and earth, for allowing us to assemble here to conduct the business of our organization. Please be with us as we travel to our destinations and keep us until we meet again. Amen.

SALUTE TO COLORS AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrades, please face the Flag of the United States and join me in the Pledge of Allegiance.

(Whereupon, Salute to the Colors and the Pledge of Allegiance were given at this time.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the reconvening of this Convention has been completed and your orders have been obeyed, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms. Everyone please be seated.

I would now like to call on Betty Gripp for the final report of the Credentials Committee.

REPORT OF CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE

COMRADE BETTY GRIPP (Department of Arizona): Good morning, Commander-in-Chief, National Officers and delegates: At the close of business at 4:00 p.m. yesterday, July 22, 2014, the total delegates registering for credentials was 13,116.

Total Department Commanders, 45.

Total Past Commanders-in-Chief, 24.

Total National Officers, 50.

That is a grand total is 13,280 delegates. Total registered for the 115th National Convention, 2,192.

Commander-in-Chief, this is my final report.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Betty, for your usual tremendous work, and we certainly will see you next year.

At this time I would like for Wally Hogan to come up here. We would like to release the General Resolutions Committee with my thanks for all the hard work that you have done. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF SERGEANTS-AT-ARMS

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Comrades, standing behind me are the elite, our VFW National Sergeants-at-Arms. I want to express my appreciation to this group of comrades we see annually at our National Convention and our Washington Conference. They are the first ones in the hall, and among the last to leave. They work long hours in order to ensure the success of our National meetings.

These folks are strictly volunteers, so obviously, this is mostly a labor of love for them. I am sure that everyone recognizes what an outstanding job they do for the VFW.

It is now my privilege to introduce the National Sergeants-at-Arms. Bryan P. O'Brien is a life member of Post 2394, in Melrose, Massachusetts. He has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for 15 years. He is a Past All-State Post Commander, Past District Commander and Past County Council Commander. He is the Department of Massachusetts Inspector for 2014-2015.

In 1982, Bryan was named the VFW's National Young Veteran of the Year, and he is the Department of Massachusetts State Chief of Staff. He is a member of the Massachusetts Policemen's Association and has worked for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation for 30 years as a Senior Controller and Supervisor in Boston.

Bryan was recently elected as a member of the New Hampshire Veterans Foundation. He is simply an outstanding leader with ultimate character and integrity.

Gary Barringer has been a Sergeant for 20 years. He is a life member of the VFW, Military Order of the Cootie, DAV, Am Vets, and the National Guard Association. He is also a member of the American Legion and the VVA. He is retired from the North Carolina National Guard after 34 years of service. Gary is also retired from Norfolk Southern Railroad after 22 years.

Gary is the VAV's representative for the Department of North Carolina at the W.G. "Bill" Hefner VA Medical Center in Salisbury, North Carolina. He is a Past Department Commander of North Carolina and the State Sergeant-at-Arms. Plus he has been the Quartermaster of Post 9134 in Rockwell, North Carolina, for over 30 years. Gary is a member of the Rockwell Honor Roll Fire Department where he is also a medical responder. He works as a security guard part time.

Joy Ausman has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for 18 years and is a life member of Lewiston, Idaho, Post 10043 and Cloquet, Minnesota, VFW Auxiliary to Post 3979. She is a Past District Commander

and Quartermaster, and Past Post Commander. She is employed by Clearwater Paper Corporation as the Director of Health and Safety.

Joe Schirmers is our resident golden boy, because he has been a Sergeant for 52 years – that's right, 52 years – and that deserves a separate applause. (Applause)

Joe is a life member of Post 4847 in St. Cloud, Minnesota. His voluntary work spans decades: Minnesota State Surgeon General for 19 year, State Chaplain for 15 years, Big 10 Sergeant-at-Arms for 54 years, and District 6 Officer-of-the-Day for 54 years. He retired from Burlington Northern Railroad with 35 years of service. As a result of more than 49,000 hours of volunteer service at VA Hospitals, he has received the VFW National Hospital Award, Volunteer of the Year Award, the Cootie Supreme Award, and the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013. (Applause)

Jim Galen has been a Sergeant for 13 years and is a life member of Post 6802 in Richmond, Michigan. He is a Past All-State Post Commander and Past All-State Post Quartermaster. He served as the Post Quartermaster for 18 years. Currently, Jim is serving as Michigan's Voice of Democracy Patriot's Pen and Teacher of the Year Director. He is also a Past District 5 Commander. He retired after 30 years of service from General Motors.

Lonnie Garza has been a Sergeant for nine years and is a life member of Post 3413 in San Marcos, Texas. He earned All-American Post Commander Honors four times and a National Recruiter Century Award 16 times. Lonnie retired from the Army in 1987 with 22 years of service as an Infantryman. He presently works for the National Guard's "A" Company of the 636th Military Intelligence Detachment in New Braunfel, Texas.

Keith MacDonald has been a Sergeant for 20 years and is a life member of Post 2275 in El Cajon, California.

He is retired from the United States Navy after 23 and one-half years as a Senior Chief Petty Officer. Keith is a Past All-American Post and District Commander. He was not able to attend the Convention this year, as he has a new job and has to accrue vacation time. Congratulations to Keith on his new position. We look forward to his return.

George Lott has been a Sergeant for four years, and is a life member and Past Post Commander of Lieutenant Robert A. Madden Post 10152 in Ogdensburg, New Jersey, and a Past District 21 Commander. He is an Army combat veteran and a former United States Army Drill Sergeant, and taught basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey. George currently serves as the Department of New Jersey's Sergeant-at-Arms, and has held that position for the last 24 years. George was employed as a police officer in Ogdensburg for 34 years and retired in 2008 as the Chief of Police.

These are the comrades we depend on so much. Sometimes, we forget to express our gratitude, so at this time I want to publicly say "thank you" to each and every one of you. All of you do a superlative job for all of us.

I am proud of the professional way in which you always conduct yourselves and I am honored to have the opportunity to serve with you. On behalf of the entire organization, thank you again for your service. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF "SISSY" BOREL, LADIES AUXILIARY PRESIDENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Now, I am extremely pleased that here to visit our Convention today is a woman with whom I was proud to serve with during the past year.

"Sissy" Borel has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Ladies Auxiliary for many years, and has left an incredible legacy for others to follow for years to come. I admire her deeply. She is a true patriot and an outstanding leader. Please welcome a wonderful woman from Starks, Louisiana, "Sissy" Borel, National President of the Ladies Auxiliary.

(Applause)

GREETINGS BY LADIES AUXILIARY PRESIDENT "SISSY" BOREL

LADIES AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT BOREL: Commander-in-Chief Thien, National Officers and VFW members: It is a privilege for me to be with you this morning and to have this opportunity to greet you one more time as the National President of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

My great thanks go to each and every one of you who helped make this year so amazing for me and for the members of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Just as I am sure our Commander-in-Chief has seen, I have witnessed our incredible membership up close all year. You have done amazing things together, everything from awarding student scholarships to helping veterans with VA claims. You have done it all. I am extremely proud to be a part of the VFW family.

I have never been more committed to our mission than I am today, though my term is nearly at an end. Why? Because our work is not complete, nor will it be complete until every veteran is taken care of based on the standards that suit the heroes of our country. None of us will rest until we have done everything we can to make sure they are honored, respected, listened to, and helped to the fullest extent.

That's why we belong. We all want to be a part of something great, and being a part of the VFW family is the greatest privilege of all.

Commander-in-Chief, congratulations on a job well done. We have truly worked together this year on many important topics, and I am proud to have served with you this year.

To every veteran in this room, thank you for your service. May God bless us in all we do, and may God bless America. (Applause)

ANNOUNCEMENT OF WINNERS OF THE NATIONAL BUDDY POPPY CONTEST

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Now to announce the 2014 National Buddy Poppy Contest winners is Kevin Jones, Director of Programs and National Military Services.

COMRADE KEVIN JONES: Good morning. The Buddy Poppy is, without question, one of the most recognizable symbols around the world. To VFW members, it symbolizes the commemoration of our war dead and

our service to living veterans. For decades, VFW members have distributed the beloved Buddy Poppy to millions of Americans each year.

Today, we are taking a few moments to honor those who have taken Buddy Poppies to the next level. These are individuals and Posts who have used our Buddy Poppies in the creation of inspirational and exceptional works of art and display. The entries were judged by the National VFW Programs Committee Chairman, Christopher Johnston, National VFW Programs Committee members Kenneth Davis, Terry Brunning, Kelly Goddard, Dennis Howland and Charles Sutter, as well as Cheryl Sutter, and the 2013-2014 Ladies Auxiliary Veterans and Family Support Director Deborah Tweet, and that program's 2014-2015 Ambassador, Leona McDermott.

The displays were judged on effectiveness, clarity of theme, suitability, originality, beauty and the number of Poppies used.

Category 1 is for the public promotion of a Poppy campaign.

Honorable Mention goes to Hometown Murray Post 9773 and its Ladies Auxiliary, Huntington, West Virginia. Third place is the George H. Elliott Post 7902 and the Ladies Auxiliary, Osakis, Minnesota.

Second place is Fairview Memorial Post 8677 and its Ladies Auxiliary, Fairview, Illinois.

First place is Pueblo West Post 5812 and its Ladies Auxiliary, Pueblo West, Colorado.

Director Award, Category 1, Ladies Auxiliary, East Huntington Post 9738, Huntington, West Virginia.

Category No. 2 is for the use of Poppies in a memorial or inspirational display.

Honorable Mention goes to Dudley Ives Post 6386 and its Ladies Auxiliary, Ingleside, Texas.

Third place goes to Robert P. Glidden Post 758 and its Ladies Auxiliary, St. Albans, Vermont.

Second place goes to Hugo Matejcek Post 3723 and its Ladies Auxiliary, Owatonna, Minnesota.

First place goes to Overland-St. Ann Memorial Post 3944 and its Ladies Auxiliary, Overland-St. Ann, Missouri.

The Director's Award for Category No. 2 goes to Hometown Murray Post 9773, and its Ladies Auxiliary, Hometown, Illinois.

Category No. 3 is for the artistic or decorative use of Poppies.

Honorable mention goes to Eugene H. Truax Post 4393, and its Ladies Auxiliary, Northfield, Minnesota.

Third place goes to Ladies Auxiliary to West Tawakoni Post 2559, West Tawakoni, Texas.

Second place goes to Nelson-Scofield Post 4452 and its Ladies Auxiliary, Cannon Falls, Minnesota.

The first place winner in Category 3 goes to Martin-Courtney Post 4835 and its Ladies Auxiliary, Creve Coeur, Illinois.

The Director's Award for Category 3 goes to Crawford County Post 4549 and its Ladies Auxiliary, Robinson, Illinois.

Category 4 is for using Poppies in a memorial or inspirational display by Junior Girls or Sons of the VFW unit.

Honorable mention goes to Junior Girls Unit to Ladies Auxiliary to Wichita Memorial Post 3115, Wichita, Kansas.

Third place goes to Junior Girls Unit to Ladies Auxiliary, General Hill Post 3601, in Paris, Illinois.

Second place to Junior Girls Unit to Ladies Auxiliary, Mechanicsburg Memorial Post 6704, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.

The first place winner is Junior Girls Unit to Ladies Auxiliary to Fridley Post 363, Fridley, Minnesota.

The Director's Award for Category No. 4 goes to Junior Girls Unit to Ladies Auxiliary to Junker-Ball Post 1864, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Thank you all.

This marks the 14th consecutive silent auction we have had at the Convention. This year 52 Departments donated items, many reflective of their home states and commonwealths. The purpose of the auction is to raise money for issues that are close to the hearts of the VFW and its Auxiliaries. And this year's recipient will be the VFW National Home for Children.

I am very proud to announce that this year's auction garnered a total of \$7,225, and I am pleased to present this check to the 2014 Buddy Poppy child, Grant Gentges, Al Cantu and Patrice Green from the VFW National Home for Children. (Applause)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREEN: This will not take very long. I wanted to stay with what our wonderful "Sissy" Borel talked about, the privilege of service in this organization. I just wanted to tell you, each and every one of my staff members and myself at the National Home feel extremely privileged to be working at the National Home and helping the families and children of our veterans. It is all because of what you do. Thank you so very much for your generosity, and we are wishing you all safe travels home. Thank you so much. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF MILITARY ORDER OF THE COOTIE SUPREME COMMANDER MARK NEWMAN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: A trip to almost any VA Hospital will reveal the importance of the work of the Military Order of the Cootie. Each year the Cooties spend thousands of hours bringing comfort to our hospitalized veterans. Their commitment to "keeping 'em smiling in beds of white" is a grand tribute to the service and sacrifice of all veterans.

Our next guest was elected Supreme Commander of the Military Order of the Cootie at the organization's 94th Supreme Scratch held in Louisville last July.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the Supreme Commander of the Military Order of the Cootie of the United States of America, Mark Newman, from the great state of Delaware.

REMARKS BY MOC SUPREME COMMANDER MARK NEWMAN

MOC SUPREME COMMANDER NEWMAN: Thank you, Chief. In normal Cootie fashion, thank you for that lousy introduction.

I would like to have all members of the Military Order of the Cootie to please rise. Chief, I present you your honor degree of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. For those that don't know or never heard of us,

we are the Military Order of the Cootie. We ARE the honor degree of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

We visit our hospitalized veterans, our heroes and "keeping 'em smiling in beds of white", and we visited and participated with our VFW National Home for Children.

Let me tell you this: No one does it better than the MOC or the MOCA. Chief, this year we have recruited 554 new Cooties, reinstated 293 Cooties, gained 425 new life members, and our overall membership now stands at 15,054.

We have installed 60 new Pup Tents and a new Grand, the Grand of Iowa. We are working with the Grand of Massachusetts.

Our motto is "Keeping 'em smiling in beds of white." We have driven 1.8 million miles, made over 16,000 visits to over 305,000 patients. We spent over 170,000 hours providing \$1 million in gifts, amounting to over \$4.6 million total hospital credits. That is 33 percent above the goal we had set.

This year, the MOC and the MOCA have presented over 400 wreaths to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arlington Cemetery.

For the first time that I can remember, and a memorable year for me, this is the first time I have ever seen the Commander-in-Chief and the Ladies Auxiliary National President at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It was very honorable to see that. (Applause)

This year, the MOC and the MOCA's special project was for our VFW National Home for the education fund.

The books for the children were getting worn and used, and needed replacement. This year between the MOC and the MOCA, we have raised \$17,000 for that fund, and we will award the check to her at our Convention. We additionally are raising funds to repair our Military Order of the Cootie Monument at the National Home that is at the entrance to our ball field.

The MOC and the MOCA have been a very, very responsible participant in our National Home. The Grands of Minnesota and Wisconsin provided a Halloween party for our children.

For the 85th year, the Grands of Florida and Michigan have provided a Christmas party. I am going to tell you right now, to see the smiles on those kids' faces, man.

And for the 31st year, the Grand of Ohio has provided Easter treats for our children. The Grand of Texas provided the National Home this year with a pickup truck, a \$35,000 pickup truck with a plow on the front and a tilted bed on the back. This was needed because of the amount of snow they get.

I want everyone to know here, and, Chief, we will let you know, too, that whatever we did this year, we kept in line with the Cooties and we had a heck of a lot of fun doing it. I want to thank all of you and thank you for the privilege, and thank you for the honor, Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Comrade Newman.

At this time I would like to call on Adjutant General Hamilton to announce the Past Commanders-in-Chief attending this Convention.

INTRODUCTION OF PAST COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Before I do it, I would like to make one quick announcement, and thank you. I would like to thank some people that really worked awfully hard to help put the Salute to America, the America celebration together last night. I hope you enjoyed it.

That was a huge deal and, of course, we got Budweiser to underwrite \$100,000 of that. It didn't cost us much, if anything. I want to thank Jerry Newberry, Vanessa Kane, Diane Putthoff, in particular, and a host of other people. Thanks for your hard work. (Applause)

Now, let me introduce to you the Past Commanders-in-Chief that are attending this Convention.

- 1974-1975, from Kansas, John Stang.
- 1983-1984, Clifford G. Olson, Jr., from Massachusetts.
- 1985-1986, from Minnesota, John S. Staum.
- 1988-1989, from Louisiana, Larry W. Rivers.
- 1989-1990, from Wisconsin, Walter G. Hogan.
- 1991-1992, Robert E. Wallace from New Jersey.
- 1992-1993, John M. Carney, from Florida.
- 1993-1994, from Illinois, George R. Cramer.
- 1994-1995, from Arizona, Allen F. "Gunner" Kent.
- 1995-1996, from Massachusetts, Paul A. Spera.
- 1997-1998, from Ohio, John E. Moon.
- 1998-1999, from Montana, Thomas A. Pouliot.
- 1999-2000, from New Hampshire, John W. Smart.
- 2000-2001, from Georgia, John F. Gwizdak.
- 2003-2004, from Connecticut, Edward S. Banas, Sr.
- 2004-2005, from Tennessee, John Furgess.
- 2005-2006, from Missouri, James Mueller.
- 2006-2007, from Alaska, Gary L. Kurpius.
- 2007-2008, from New Jersey, George J. Lisicki.
- 2008-2009, from Texas, Glenn M. Gardner, Jr.
- 2009-2010, from Wisconsin, Thomas J. Tradewell.
- 2010-2011, from Oregon, Richard L. Eubank.
- 2011-2012, from Massachusetts, Richard L. DeNoyer.
- 2012-2013, from Florida, John E. Hamilton.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: You are not done yet, sir.

NOMINATIONS FOR NATIONAL HOME TRUSTEES

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: I will now read the nominations for the National Home Board of Trustees.

There are four nominations for District 5 for 2014-2020, representing Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

Kenneth Thie has been a VFW National Home life member since August 9, 2001. He is endorsed by the VFW Department of Florida.

Michael "Bruce" Edwards has been a VFW National Home life member since December 9, 2002. He is endorsed by the VFW Department of North Carolina.

Jeffery Friar has been a VFW National Home life member since September 30, 2009. He is endorsed by the VFW Department of North Carolina.

Darlene Mays-Tittman has been a VFW National Home life member since June 19, 1973. She is endorsed by the Department of Virginia Ladies Auxiliary.

There is one nomination for District 8 for 2014-2020, representing Illinois and Indiana:

Michael McGrath has been a VFW National Home life member since October 14, 2010. He is endorsed by the VFW Department of Illinois.

PRESENTATION OF LEGION OF HONOR BRONZE MEDAL FROM CHAPEL OF FOUR CHAPLAINS TO COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN

COMRADE TED BOWERS: Comrades, I am the representative for the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia.

On January 23rd, 1943, the USAT Dorchester carrying troops left New York Harbor bound for Greenland. Just after midnight on February 3rd, an enemy submarine fired a torpedo. It struck the Dorchester, destroying the electrical supply, releasing clouds of steam and ammonia gas. Many on board died instantly. Some were trapped.

The testimony of the survivors tells us that the sole order and fragment of hope during this chaos came from four chaplains, who calmly guided men to their boat stations. They opened the storage locker and distributed jackets. When the supply of life jackets was exhausted, the four chaplains either gave away or forced upon other young men their own life jackets.

As the Dorchester sank, the chaplains gathered together and led the men around them in prayer and a hymn, and they linked their arms together in brotherhood, and with their heads bowed in prayer they sang "Beneath the Waves."

It was a heroic act and it was especially significant because of the identity of the four young men: Two Protestant ministers, a Catholic Priest and a Jewish Rabbi.

The Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia serves as a memory of these brave men and carries their message of interfaith, cooperation and selfless service to every part of our country.

To recognize and encourage acts of volunteerism, brotherhood and sacrifice among Americans of every age in every station in life, the Chapel established a Legion of Honor Program. The Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion Award is given in recognition of the exceptional selfless service on the part of an individual who contributes to the well-being of his or her community and to a spirit of interfaith cooperation.

It is my proud honor to present the Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion Award to our Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, William A. Thien. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, Reverend Bowers, for those kind words. I humbly accept this.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE VFW 115TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: I move that the proceedings of the Veterans of Foreign Wars 115th National Convention be submitted to the Speaker of the House for printing as a House document in accordance with Public Law 620, of the 90th Congress, approved October 2, 1968, and entitled as Title 44, United States Code Section 1332.

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL NEWBERRY: I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: It has been seconded. We have a motion that has been made. It has been properly seconded that we submit these proceedings to the Speaker of the House. Is there any discussion on the motion? All in favor will signify by the sign of "aye"; all opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion carries.

NOMINATON AND ELECTION OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: At this time we will have nominations for Commander-in-Chief. The Chair recognizes Past Commander-in-Chief Gary Kurpius for the purpose of a nomination.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, National Officers and delegates to this 115th National Convention.

Two years ago in Reno, Nevada, I had the privilege of making the nomination for John Stroud, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Last year in Louisville I had the honor of presenting his qualifications for your consideration for the office of Senior Vice-Commander-in-Chief.

Today, I stand with pride, with confidence, and with optimism to place the nomination once again the name of John Stroud for the high office of National Commander-in-Chief for the ensuing year.

Twice before, I had the honor of presenting before you the accomplishments of this man and expounded upon his credentials and contributions that this great organization has enjoyed for so many years.

You have seen the results. You have experienced his enthusiasm for the Veterans of Foreign Wars and you have witnessed his appeal for veterans in active duty and military issues.

During the past few years, our Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief has led the members of the VFW with dignity and served with distinction as our representative.

John is an intelligent, highly energetic comrade who is not afraid to let anyone know what is right for our veterans and our country.

He will listen to the grass roots of this great organization, and he will ensure their voice and views will be heard. John has the necessary knowledge, experience, education, and most importantly, the dedication to our country and to our veterans, and our Veterans of Foreign Wars organization.

Please join me in supporting John for the high office of Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars for the ensuing year. (Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RICHARD EUBANK: I am Richard Eubank, Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from Post 3965, Springfield, Oregon. I stand before you today as a witness for the passion that John Stroud has for defending America's veterans, and the compassion for her defenders. I want to second the nomination for John Stroud as Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, 2014-2015.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Are there any other nominations for Commander-in-Chief? Are there any other nominations for Commander-in-Chief?

COMRADE BRUCE HOLLINGER (Post 8336-Nevada): Commander-in-Chief, I am Bruce Hollinger, Post 8336, Nevada. I move that the nominations be closed and the Adjutant General be instructed to cast one unanimous ballot for John Stroud, as the next Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

COMRADE THOMAS (Post 3632 Arizona): I second that motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a motion made and seconded that nominations be closed. All in favor of the motion will signify by saying "aye"; those opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion carried.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I cast one unanimous ballot for the next Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, John Stroud from Nevada.

REMARKS BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT STROUD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT STROUD: I thank you, Comrades, for this honor. I can't tell you how excited I am to lead this great organization.

With that being said, we will proceed, and I think the Sergeant-at-Arms has something for me to do. God bless you all. Thank you.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: It is an honor for the National Sergeants to escort you, your lovely wife, Mary, your family and your friends, and the delegates and comrades of this Convention around the hall, sir. Mr. Maestro, the United States Air Force.

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I will have nominations for the office of Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Is there any nomination for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF CLIFF OLSON: Good morning. My name is Cliff Olson, Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from VFW Post 8699, Massachusetts.

Commander-in-Chief and comrades, it is quite an honor to come before this Convention and nominate a candidate for any office, but even more a responsibility to the organization which we all serve. The responsibility is that when we nominate a comrade for any office, we are looking at the future leader of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

This was so true last year when I had the privilege of placing the name of John Biedrzycki for the office of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. I told you then that he was truly the right man for the position he now holds. I said that we were endorsing a man that would be our Commander-in-Chief in just two short years.

This man entered the Army in 1969. In the same year while he was serving our country, he became a member of the VFW, and VFW Post 418 in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, where he remains today as a Legacy Life Member. He has held positions of leadership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars at all levels for the past 43 years.

My comrades, this man has more than met the criteria for the position he now holds.

In this short year, he has attended over 35 VFW major events and visited 30 of our Departments and three continents. He has attended many Post and District meetings in his own Department. He did all this while he considered it was a pleasure and a wonderful learning and humbling experience to visit with his fellow veterans.

He has gained much knowledge in his visitations with the many political leaders that he has met during his travels. Comrades, many of those that will come up here to nominate someone today will tell you of the many offices they have held and what they have accomplished in the rise of the position they now hold.

My friends, I have read his many positions and I have read about his appointments along with the many successful elected offices he has held, but I just do not have the time to cover them all.

Let me just say that this comrade, in my opinion, is perhaps one of the most qualified men that we have ever had in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I firmly believe that he will be amongst the most knowledgeable and dedicated leaders that we in the East have ever put forward.

So, Comrades, it is indeed an honor and a distinct pleasure to place in nomination for the high office of Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief the man that we know as "Big John", the man who has a tremendous history in the VFW, the man that has been married to the same woman for over 43 years.

She is a Past Department President and a Past National Council Woman from Area A.

This man truly has a history of service and success. He is a retired educator, an All-State Post Commander, and All-State Post Quartermaster. He was named as the VFW Young Veteran of the Year, and he is an All-American Department Commander from the Department of Pennsylvania.

His eligibility to the VFW was by serving with the 7th Infantry Division in Korea. I wish I had the time to read his entire biography so you would know and appreciate this comrade's dedication and knowledge of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The time is limited, my comrades, so it is my pleasure to place before this Convention the name of John A. Biedrzycki for the high office of Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief for the year 2014-2015. Thank you. (Applause)

COMRADE ALLEN JONES (Post 21-Pennsylvania): I am Allen Jones, Past Department Commander of Pennsylvania, and a member of VFW Post 21 in Connellsville, Pennsylvania, proudly seconds the

nomination of John Biedrzycki for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Are there any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? I am sorry. Microphone No. 1, please.

COMRADE ROBERT EILER (Post 8805 Pennsylvania): Good morning. I am Robert Eiler, National Council member from Pennsylvania and a delegate from Post 8805, Aliquippa, Pennsylvania.

On behalf of all of the comrades of Pennsylvania and the Sisters in Pennsylvania, I am very proud to second the nomination of John A. Biedrzycki, a great friend, a great mentor, and he will be a wonderful Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Are there any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Are there any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Hearing none, I recognize Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE RUTH FAIRCHILD: I am Ruth Fairchild, Past Department Commander of Pennsylvania, and a delegate from Post 315, New Castle, Pennsylvania. I move that nominations be closed for Senior Vice Commander in Chief and the Adjutant General cast one unanimous ballot for John Biedrzycki.

COMRADE GARY SMITH (Department of Pennsylvania): I second that motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Okay. We have a motion on the floor, and there is a second. All in favor of the motion will signify by saying "aye"; those opposed to the motion "nay". The motion carries.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: As Adjutant General, I cast one unanimous ballot for John Biedrzycki as Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief for 2014-2015.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Comrades, you have elected John Biedrzycki as Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief-Elect, it is an honor for the National Sergeants to escort you and your lovely bride around the hall, along with your friends and the delegates at this Convention.

Mr. Maestro, the United States Army.

REMARKS BY SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT BIEDRZYCKI

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT BIEDRZYCKI: Thank you so much. To the delegates at the 115th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, I thank you for this honor. I thank you for your trust, I thank you for the confidence that you have placed in me.

You know, I wish to congratulate and mention to our new Commander-in-Chief John Stroud of Nevada, and to the next Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief to be shortly elected, Brian Duffy, an Irishman from Kentucky, and to all of you here today I pledge my spirit, my strength and my commitment in the service of America's real heroes, our Nation's veterans and their families.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Commander-in-Chief Bill Thien of Indiana for all of his support, his advice and confidence that he

placed in me during this past year. I know it is said that family and friends are the true measures of a man's wealth. If that is correct, then I am truly the wealthiest man alive.

With your indulgence, I wish to recognize just a few people and introduce those I consider to be the richest in my life.

To the officers and delegates of the Eastern States Conference, Past Chiefs Paul Spera, George Lisicki, Bob Wallace, John Smart, Ed Banas, Rich DeNoyer, and especially Cliff Olson for nominating me. Thank you for your support and guidance and your friendship.

To my Post, Bell Post 418 in McKees Rocks, District 29 and the Department of Pennsylvania and its Ladies Auxiliary, and to all the officers and delegates, Past State Commanders and Past State Presidents of the Department of Pennsylvania VFW, thank you for your support.

I especially want to thank Past Commander Allen Jones for his guidance and wisdom and mentorship, and Past Commander Bob Eiler.

To my son and daughter, my daughter-in-law and my son, John, and my daughter Beth are home with my grandchildren. I thank them for their understanding and support of the VFW activities. I must take this point of personal privilege and wish a happy birthday -- it happens every time I get installed -- to my seven-year-old grandson, Max, who is watching at home online, and my lovely little granddaughter, Molly.

Finally, to my wife Bette Jean, who her unwavering love and unconditional support for the past 45 years is more than one man could deserve.

She is a Past State President, a Past Council member, but she is truly "The Wind Beneath My Wings."

And finally, to you, my comrades and my sisters that are in the room, I have had an extraordinary opportunity to meet and spend time during my travels this past year. Thank you, thank you for your kindness and courtesies, and allowing me to learn and share in your activities and service and concern for our Nation's true heroes, America's veterans. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We will now open the nominations for the office of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN GWIZDAK: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, officers and delegates to the 115th Convention of warriors: They say that eagles and leaders are alike, because they do not flock and you find them one at a time. Today, the eagle has landed.

Comrades, I rise this morning to place the name of Comrade Brian Duffy, VFW Post 1170, Middletown, Kentucky, in nomination for the position of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Brian served in the United States Air Force as an engine mechanic on F-4 "Phantom" fighter aircraft and later as a flight engineer on the same C-141 "StarLift" transport aircraft.

His deployments included Grenada, Panama, Desert Shield, Desert Storm.

Upon his return from Grenada in 1983, he joined the VFW and is a Gold Legacy Life Member. He achieved All-American status at the Post, District and Department levels, having served as Department Commander in 2006-2007.

He served as a member of the National Council of Administration from 2012 to 2014.

After serving in the Air Force, he was employed by several airlines as a flight engineer instructor and moved to Kentucky in 1988 after joining the United Parcel Services Airlines.

Rising through the ranks, he served as an Assistant Chief Pilot with UPS, flying worldwide as an instructor Check Captain on the Boeing 757 and Boeing 767 aircraft until his most recent retirement.

Brian has proven his leadership while in the Air Force as a flight engineer. In the private sector as a UPS 767 Captain and instructor pilot, and in the VFW for being a Triple Crown All-American VFW Commander, he is a true veteran's advocate and a comrade who has a genuine passion for our organization, and sincere compassion for those who serve.

He has proven he is qualified to assume the duties of this high position. He will represent us well. We would want him to stay, as he travels around to represent himself and the warriors of this great Nation. Brian and his wife, Jean, reside in Louisville and have two children. His daughter is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, and his son is attending the University of Kentucky.

Brian's concept of service is summed up in his credo: One vision, one voice, one VFW.

The success and growth of the VFW depends on our ability to communicate mission of service to our warriors, veterans and communities.

Once they know our mission, they, too, will embrace the VFW spirit of service.

He is a firm believer that dedicated people working together can accomplish anything that they do. He looks forward to your endorsement and vote this morning.

So, the record is straight, I am Past Commander in Chief John Gwizdak, a delegate from Post 5080, Georgia. It is my great honor and privilege to nominate a warrior, a patriot, a comrade, and a true friend, Brian Duffy, from Kentucky as Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. (Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN CARNEY: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I rise to second the nomination of Brian Duffy for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars for 2014-2015.

Having known Brian Duffy for many years, I find that he is an organizer, a listener and one that is certainly concerned about the veterans of this country. Brian has been involved and has been an organizer for the Wounded Warrior Project in the Department of Kentucky.

He has been a believer in America Honor Flights. He continues to get involved as an individual organizer to make sure there is one veteran and that's you and I that belong to this organization and that it is you and I have the support of an individual like Brian Duffy.

Indeed, I am pleased and honored to second the nomination of Brian Duffy.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Are there any other nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Are there any other nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Are there any other nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief? If not, I recognize Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE MARTHA CASSITY (Department of Kentucky): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Martha Cassity, a delegate from Post 6182 and the Department Commander of Kentucky. I move that nominations be closed and that the Adjutant General cast one unanimous vote for Brian Duffy.

COMRADE CARL KAELIN (Post 1170 Kentucky): I am Carl Kaelin, a delegate from Post 1170, mission accomplished. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a motion on the floor and a second that nominations be closed and the Adjutant General cast one unanimous ballot for Brian Duffy as Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

All those in favor will signify by the sign of "aye"; those opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion carried.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: As Adjutant General, I cast one unanimous ballot for Brian J. Duffy as Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, 2014-2015.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: It is an honor for the National Sergeants to escort you and your wife and your family and friends around this hall. Mr. Maestro, let's hear that beautiful sound of music, the United States Air Force.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Comrades, you have elected Brian Duffy as Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Would you like to say a few words.

REMARKS BY JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT DUFFY

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT DUFFY: Well, good morning, Comrades. When you get up in front of the microphone here, you get pretty nervous. I was telling the Chaplain that the butterflies are starting to line up to take flight. Then the Chaplain gave me a note and it says, "Be still."

I am still knowing not only I am with friends, but I am with the best kind of friends, my comrades.

I know there are many members of the Ladies Auxiliary here, and to each and every one of you, thank you for the honor, the trust and the confidence that you have placed in me to be Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. (Applause)

I am also joined by my wife, Jean. Jean, thank you, and my daughter Carrie. Our son is away at school and could not be with us.

Just as we were in uniform, families make it possible for us to complete our mission. I would like to thank all of them. To Past Commander-in-Chief John Gwizdak and Past Commander-in-Chief Jack Carney, thank you both for the nomination and for being my friend.

Back home and not able to be with us today is Past Commander-in-Chief Jim Nier, who will be my Budget Chairman. Jim, we wish you the best and Kimmie as she rehabs from her foot injury.

To my comrades and Auxiliary members of the Southern Conference, of course, my Department of Kentucky, a comrade sitting over here in the State's Colors, as they say in Kentucky, and my home District, District 6, which is the greater Louisville area, my Post, Middletown Post 1170, I can't thank you enough for all the support that you have given me and all the opportunities that you have afforded me as I progress through my VFW career.

I just retired from the UPS as an airline pilot. I am truly pleased to have been able to have a career that I truly loved as an airline pilot, but in a parallel way I have had another career as a VFW member, now I continue in that career full time as I close the doors on my flying career.

Thirty-some-odd years ago, just like each and every one of you have done up here or you have done in some Post somewhere, and that Post I walked in was Post 6590 in Cooktown, New Jersey.

It took me a while, but there was a mentor, and like many of you, some of these folks are no longer with us. But they are with us in a different way. For me, that first mentor was Bob Aker, and along with Bob I would acknowledge Donnie Wynn, then when I made the move back to Louisville, Middletown Post 1170, Norm Lander and Jess Phillips. They are not physically with us.

I want to take a minute to recognize them and let you all know that you never, never know that comrade that walks into your Post, what you can mean in their life. Whether they reach the point of being a Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief or just become a very active member in your Post, you truly, truly can make a difference as they did for me.

I would also like to acknowledge with us today, and I am thrilled to have her with us, Past National President from Kentucky, Marjorie Watson. I am very proud to also have with us today for this wonderful moment, Colette Bishop, who will be serving as Junior Vice President. I look forward to that.

Gary Kurpius, the class of 2006, with John Stroud, he must have done something right in 2006, because he got both of us motivated. Gary Kurpius, you have meant a lot along the way.

To the entire class of 2006, I am looking forward to the close of 2016. I thank you very much for what you have done and what you will do in the future.

Commander-in-Chief Bill Thien, as you move back to the sunny side of the river, as I look across some great trails and visit with you, I hope you can see your way to come back to Louisville as well.

I really look forward working with you two gentlemen. Thank you all again, and God bless. (Applause)

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF QUARTERMASTER GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We will now open the nomination for the office of Quartermaster General. Is there any nomination for Quartermaster General?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN GWIZDAK: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, officers and delegates to this Convention: I am John Gwizdak, Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from Post 5080 in Lake City, Georgia, and also the Quartermaster of the Department of Georgia.

I am truly honored to place in nomination for the position of Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the name of Robert Greene, who is currently serving in that position.

Bob Greene was elected Quartermaster General by the National Council of Administration in April 2012. He was re-elected by the VFW membership in July 2012 at the National Convention in Reno, and again last year in Louisville.

He has served with distinction and with confidence and expertise to continue to perform the duties of his position.

Most importantly, he has earned the respect and trust of the officers and the general membership.

His VFW eligibility is a result of service with the United States Army from May 1970 to October 1971, with a tour of duty in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne Light Weapons Infantry Unit.

He was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge, the Bronze Star, the Air Medal and the Vietnam Service Medal and the Vietnam Campaign Medal. He is a Legacy Life Member of Post 7397 in Lenexa, Kansas.

He earned a degree in business administration in 1977 from the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and came to work for the VFW National Headquarters in 1978.

He was first employed as an Accounting Manager, and he has held three Directorships. He was Chief Information Officer and Assistant Quartermaster General for seven years. In his capacity as Assistant Quartermaster, he managed directly or indirectly every department reporting to the Quartermaster General's Office.

I think we would all agree that with the National challenges we face in the VFW, both today and tomorrow, that it is imperative that we have a Quartermaster General with the experience and leadership capabilities to meet those challenges and turn them into opportunities.

Robert Greene has the experience of 36 years at the National level of our organization. Through his many years of successful employment, the VFW has been strengthened and our membership has been better served by his being there. His passion for the success of our organization is vision for the future, and his personal attributes of loyalty and integrity, along with his professionalism and job expertise makes him uniquely qualified for this position.

Simply put, he is a comrade for the job. Therefore, it is with much honor and personal pride I nominate Robert B. Greene, Post 7397, Kansas, for the position of Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for 2014-2015. Thank you, delegates. (Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JAMES MUELLER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Jim Mueller, Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from Post 5077 in Missouri. I am pleased and honored to second the nomination of Robert B. Greene, an individual who has served not only his country in Vietnam, in the United States Army, but has served this great organization of ours, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, with 36 years of VFW financial experience for the betterment of the VFW.

All that said, I have had an opportunity to work for and learned from the past six Quartermaster Generals in the history of this organization.

He has directly or indirectly managed every Department reporting to the Quartermaster General.

Bob has a strong work ethic. He is honest and trustworthy. I sincerely trust Bob to guide this organization of ours to the best of his ability.

We face some tough times ahead of us, and he is the best individual to help us face those challenges in the future. It is with honor and my pleasure that I second the nomination of Robert B. Greene for the high office of Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the ensuing year 2014-2015. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Are there any other nominations? Are there any other nominations? Are there any other nominations? Hearing none, I recognize Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE BRUCE FISCHBACH (Post 7397-Kansas): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Bruce Fischbach, State Commander of Kansas, and a delegate from VFW Post 7397. I move that the nomination cease for Quartermaster General and a unanimous ballot be cast by the Adjutant General for Robert B. Greene for the office of Quartermaster General.

FROM THE FLOOR: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Department of Kansas, Post 8873, I second that motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a motion on the floor and a second that the nominations be closed and the Adjutant General cast one unanimous ballot for Robert B. Greene as Quartermaster General. All those in favor will signify by the sign of "aye"; all those opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion is carried. Comrade Adjutant General.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: I cast one unanimous ballot for Bob Greene as Quartermaster General for the year 2014-2015.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, it is an honor for the Sergeants to escort you and your wife around the hall for this delegation at the 2014 National Convention.

Mr. Maestro, the United States Army.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Comrades, you have elected Robert Greene as Quartermaster General. Quartermaster General Greene, would you like to say some words?

REMARKS BY QUARTERMASTER GENERAL-ELECT GREENE

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL-ELECT GREENE: Good morning, Comrades and Sisters and special guests. Thank you for the trust you have placed in me by electing me Quartermaster General. I will try to not let you down and I will do everything I can to ensure this organization has a secure financial future.

I want to thank Bill Thien for his leadership he has shown this year, and I look forward to working with John Stroud and John Biedrzycki and all the rest of the team for 2014-15.

To the delegates again, thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Quartermaster General. Thanks also to the Department of Kansas and my Post 7397, Lenexa, Kansas.

If you have questions, comments or concerns, please corner me or my staff, and we are here to serve you and we will do everything that we can to earn the trust that you have placed in us. (Applause)

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I will now open the nominations for the office of Chaplain. Is there any nomination for the office of Chaplain?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TOMMY TRADEWELL: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Tommy Tradewell, a delegate from Post 6498, and I proudly rise to nominate a young lady from Wisconsin. Charlene Cobb was first elected Wisconsin State Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in June 2003. She continues to serve as our State Chaplain. She is a Legacy Life Member of Darien VFW Post 10173.

She joined in March 1997 upon her retirement and returned to Wisconsin, after having earned an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal while serving on the USS Nimitz, during Operation Southern Launch.

Charlene has served as the Post Commander, Post Quartermaster, District Chaplain and District State Youth Activities Chairman, and in 2006-2007 she did serve as the National Chaplain for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Charlene entered the seminary August 2005, while working full time and serving as the State Chaplain. She graduated with a Master's of Divinity from Central Baptist Theological Seminary in May 2012.

Charlene is a retired U.S. Navy Traffic Control Chief Petty Officer that has been stationed around the globe on bases in Virginia, Spain, Arkansas, California, Maine, Tennessee, Bermuda, Alaska and Washington.

Charlene is currently a County Veterans Service Officer in Sheboygan County in Wisconsin. She assists our veterans and their families with their dealings with the Federal and our State government.

She is getting firsthand education on the issues that our servicemen and women are facing in the agency, and the actions that are available to help and also where some of the shortfalls are in the benefits and health that are needed.

I believe that she has the capacity to make the difference in the lives of our veterans and their families, and she truly embodies our motto, "No one does more for veterans."

Charlene brings considerable knowledge and experience to the table. It is my honor to nominate Charlene Cobb as our National Chaplain 2014-2015.

COMRADE BRUCE SORENSEN (Post 7534 Wisconsin): Good morning, Comrades. I am Bruce Sorensen, a delegate from Post 7534, Wisconsin. It is a great privilege to stand before you today and second the nomination for a person that is qualified spiritually, will serve this organization admirably. Therefore, I second the nomination for Charlene Cobb for the National Chaplain position for 2014-2015.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Are there any other nominations for Chaplain? Any other nominations for Chaplain? Any other nominations for Chaplain? Hearing none, I recognize Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE JOHN GIESE (Post 6375 Wisconsin): I move the nominations be closed and the Adjutant General be instructed to cast one unanimous ballot for Charlene Cobb as the National Chaplain for 2014-2015.

COMRADE MIKE EGGLESTON (Post 8834 Wisconsin) Comrade Commander-in-Chief, my name is Mike Eggleston, a member of VFW Post 8834, Wisconsin. I second that motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a motion made and seconded that nominations be closed and the Adjutant General cast one unanimous ballot for Charlene Cobb as Chaplain. All those in favor, please signify by the sign of "aye"; all those opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion carries.

Comrade Adjutant General.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: As the Adjutant General, I proudly cast one unanimous ballot for Charlene Cobb, National Chaplain, 2014-15.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: National Chaplain-Elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, it is an honor for me and the Sergeants-at-Arms to escort you and your delegation at this Convention around the room. Mr. Maestro, the United States Navy.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I was getting a little concerned that we were not going to get the Navy in there, but we did.

Comrades, you have elected Charlene Cobb as National Chaplain. Chaplain Cobb, would you like to say any words?

REMARKS BY NATIONAL CHAPLAIN-ELECT

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN-ELECT COBB: Good morning, Comrades. I would just like to say thank you very much for your support. It is truly an honor to serve this great organization in any capacity, and I look forward to serving as your National Chaplain 2014-2015.

I would just like to say thank you to the State of Wisconsin that have been wonderful support over the years of my term as State Chaplain, also willing to help with any of the programs and projects that we were working on. I truly appreciate all of the help and all of the support and mentoring that I received from the State of Wisconsin and from my Post.

It is a small little Post in Delavan, Wisconsin, but the guys welcomed me with open arms back in 1997 when I first came home and wanted to join the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

When I was stationed in Alaska, the fun place to be was at the VFW, and at that point in time I wasn't eligible for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and I had to be signed in. So, after earning my eligibility for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, that was the first thing I did when I retired was to join the VFW.

I have not been sorry to be a part of this great organization. We truly are the organization that no one does more for our veterans. I am proud to be your National Chaplain for 2014-2015. Thank you very much. (Applause)

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I will now open the nomination for the office of Judge Advocate General. Is there any nomination for Judge Advocate General?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LARRY RIVERS: Thank you, Commander. My name is Larry Rivers, and I am a delegate from VFW Post 1736 in Alexandria, Louisiana.

I rise to this podium to place the name in nomination for Daniel J. Nail for the office of National Judge Advocate General. He is a life member of the VFW, and a member of our organization since 2004 when he joined Post 7755 in Bourg, Louisiana. He served as Post Commander of his Post in Bourg for two terms, and he served a term as District Commander of District 3 in Louisiana.

Then as a practicing attorney in Louisiana, he has practiced law since he graduated from law school in 1973. He earned his eligibility to the VFW through his service in the United States Army and stationed in Korea. He rose to the rank of Captain in the United States Department of the Army.

Later in his VFW career, he transferred to Post 5097 in Thibodaux, Louisiana, where he also served as Post Commander.

He is a Certified State and National Recruiter, and has earned All-State Commander, Post Commander honors in Louisiana.

Dan and his wife, Linda, are both committed to our cause. In fact, Dan's wife, Linda, with the Louisiana VFW Ladies Auxiliary, will serve as President in the 2014-2015 year.

Dan has been the Judge Advocate in Louisiana since 2010, and he has been an invaluable member to our Department. With his knowledge, his training and his experience, he is qualified to serve in this office.

On behalf of the Department of Louisiana, the VFW Southern Conference, and his fellow VFW members in his Post and District, I am honored to nominate Dan J. Nail, a practicing attorney, for the office of National Judge Advocate General.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GLENN GARDNER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Glenn Gardner, a Past Commander-in-Chief and a delegate from Post 3359, Garland, Texas. It is with a great deal of pleasure and honor that I, on behalf of the 14 Southern states, second the nomination of Daniel J. Nail for the office of Judge Advocate General for the year 2014-2015.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Are there any other nominations for Judge Advocate General? Any other nominations? Any other nominations? Hearing none, I recognize Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE MITCHELL COTA (Department of Louisiana): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Mitchell Cota, State Commander of the Department of Louisiana, Post 6706. I move the nominations be closed and that the Adjutant General be instructed to cast one unanimous vote for my friend, Dan Nail.

COMRADE RAY BASS (Department of Louisiana): Commander-in-Chief, I am Ray Bass, State Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief for the State of Louisiana. I second that motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a motion on the floor and a second that the nominations be closed and that the Adjutant General cast one unanimous ballot for Daniel J. Nail as Judge Advocate General. All those in favor will signify by the usual sign of "aye"; all opposed, "nay". The "ayes" have it.

Comrade Adjutant General, you will do your duty.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Pursuant to the power and authority vested in me, I cast one unanimous ballot for Daniel J. Nail for Judge Advocate General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2014-2015 year.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Judge Advocate General-Elect, it is a privilege for the National Sergeants to escort you and the delegates around the hall. Mr. Maestro, the United States Army.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Comrades, you have elected Daniel J. Nail as Judge Advocate General. Would you like to say a few words, Judge Advocate General-Elect Nail?

REMARKS BY JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL-ELECT

JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL-ELECT NAIL: I certainly would. I want to say thanks, of course, first, to my wife. She has been my mainstay, my support in the VFW for everything that I have tried to do, everything that I have been successful with. Some of the things I tried to do were not successful.

Of course, I would like to thank my Post for their support, the officers of the Department of Louisiana. I am excited about this. I have to tell you it is the high point of my career. I have practiced law for 40 years, and this is it for me, the greatest challenge and the best opportunity to practice law the way I do and the way I want to.

I sincerely thank you all for the opportunity to serve you as your Judge Advocate General. Thank you. (Applause)

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF NATIONAL SURGEON

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I will now open the nomination for the office of Surgeon General. Is there any nomination for Surgeon General?

COMRADE JOHN JOHNSON (VFW Post 341 District of Columbia): Good morning. I am John Johnson, Department Commander for the District of Columbia. I am pleased and proud and excited to nominate Dr. Robert "Bobby" Lane for the position of National Surgeon. Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to walk around with the Steering Committee from the Eastern States Conference, and I was given some instructions: "Keep it brief, keep it short and get off the stage."

I will keep it in the same vein, but I really have to make you comfortable and realize what you are getting from Dr. Robert "Bobby" Lane as Surgeon General. So, if you will bear with me.

Dr. Bobby Lane is a 27-year Army retired medical officer. What is most important to me is that ten of those years were spent as an enlisted man. Also, more importantly, Bobby Lane is a CEO of For Government

Contractors, small contracting firms, but more importantly specializes in medical health. His goal is to provide the work in medical and to focus on effectiveness and improvement in healthcare quality. This is his usual avocation.

I have worked with him daily in his particular business, so it ties directly to the health of our veterans. You can't get more than that. He is passionate about health; he is passionate about taking care of veterans. So, with that I submit his name for nomination as the National Surgeon General.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you, John.

COMRADE ARNE SHAW (VFW Post 341 District of Columbia):

Good morning. I am Past Department Commander of the District of Columbia, Arne Shaw. It is an honor and a privilege to second the nomination for Dr. Robert "Bobby" Lane.

We in the District of Columbia are very proud of Bobby Lane, and I am sure that you guys will be proud of him also. Thank you.

COMRADE BILL BENNETT (Post 346 District of Columbia):

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Bill Bennett, a delegate from District of Columbia Post 346. I move the nominations for Surgeon General be closed and that the Adjutant General be instructed to cast one unanimous ballot for Comrade Bobby Lane for Surgeon General.

COMRADE HERMAN SALLEY: I am a Council member and a delegate from Post 2979. I second that motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We have a motion and a second that nominations be closed and the Adjutant General cast one unanimous ballot for Robert Lane as Surgeon General.

All those in favor will signify by the usual sign of "aye"; all opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it.

Comrade Adjutant.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: Pursuant to the power and authority vested in me, I cast one unanimous ballot for Robert Lane for Surgeon General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2014-2015 year.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Surgeon General-Elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, it is an honor for the Sergeants to escort you and your lovely wife, with the delegation from the District of Columbia, around the hall.

Mr. Maestro, the United States Army.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Comrades, you have elected Robert Lane as Surgeon General. Would you like to say a few words, sir, Surgeon General Lane?

REMARKS BY SURGEON GENERAL-ELECT

SURGEON GENERAL-ELECT LANE: Good morning, Comrades, ladies and gentlemen. I consider this a distinct honor and a pleasure and privilege, and I will serve you well as Surgeon General. I have but one mantra, and that is to believe that health and wellness over the treatment of illness and disease. It is something that we have to kind of embrace as people, and we don't really have it. But I am going to do all I can to do my part. I want to thank each and every one of you, especially the Eastern

States Conference and the District of Columbia. Thank you very much.
(Applause)

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEWLY ELECTED COUNCIL MEMBERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I will now call upon the Adjutant General to announce the newly-elected National Council of Administration members.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: All newly-elected Council members will please rise. The Commander-in-Chief-Elect will now present caps and badges to the newly-elected Council members.

They are:

George Jones – Alabama
Terry Callahan – Arkansas
Daniel Duffy – Florida
Pledge Cannon – Georgia
Claud Wyatt – Kentucky
Fred Wesley – Louisiana
Johnnie Richard – Mississippi
Jason Schoolcraft – North Carolina
Donald Fenter – Oklahoma
Melvin Hugh Gunter – South Carolina
Darryl McPheron – Tennessee
Lazaro “Larry” Velasquez – Texas
Kim DeShano – Virginia
Robert Caruthers – West Virginia

ANNOUNCEMENT OF APPOINTMENTS BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT STROUD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Let me please call on Commander-in-Chief Elect John Stroud for his announcement of appointed officers for the ensuing year.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT STROUD: My appointments for the term for which I'm elected are:

Adjutant General – John E. Hamilton of Florida
Chief of Staff – Merlin “Bruce” Hollinger of Nevada
Inspector General – Raymond K. Thomas of Arizona
Sergeant-at-Arms – Bryan O'Brien of Massachusetts

INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: We will now proceed with the installation of officers.

National Sergeant-at-Arms, you will escort the installing officer to a position on my right.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade, Commander-in-Chief, I have the honor to present Comrade Past Commander-in-Chief Gary Kurpius, who has been officially appointed the Installing Officer.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the term for which you and your subordinate officers were elected or appointed has now expired. It is my duty to ascertain the following. Have officers for the ensuing year been duly elected?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: They have.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: Have the books of the Adjutant General and the Quartermaster General been examined and approved by the National Council of Administration?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: They have.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: Does the Adjutant General have on file proof of eligibility for all officers to be installed during this installation?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: He does.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: Are the funds in the hands of the Quartermaster General and ready to be turned over to his successor when duly installed?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: They are.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: Have you the Charter in your possession?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: I have.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: You will now surrender the gavel to me.

Commander-in-Chief William A. Thien, you have now been relieved of your duties as Commander-in-Chief of the organization. It is proper to remind you that in assuming the Chair of Past Commander-in-Chief, it will be your duty and privilege to counsel and otherwise assist your successor through the experiences you have gained during your term of office. You will now station yourself at my right.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now present the officers' elect at the altar as the Assistant Adjutant General reads the list of officers to be installed.

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL NEWBERRY: The officers to be installed are as follows:

Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief: John A. Biedrzycki

Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief: Brian J. Duffy

Adjutant General: John E. Hamilton

Quartermaster General: Robert B. Greene

Chaplain: Charlene Cobb

Judge Advocate General: Daniel J. Nail

Surgeon General: Robert Lane

Chief of Staff: Bruce Hollinger

Inspector General: Raymond K. Thomas

Sergeant-at-Arms: Bryan O'Brien

Newly-elected Council Members:

Alabama – George Jones

Arkansas – Terry Callahan

Florida – Daniel Duffy

Georgia – Pledge Cannon

Kentucky – Claud Wyatt

Louisiana – Fred Wesley

Mississippi – Johnnie Richard

North Carolina – Jason Schoolcraft
Oklahoma – Donald Fenter
South Carolina – Melvin Hugh Gunter
Tennessee – Darryl McPheron
Texas – Lazaro “Larry” Velasquez
Virginia – Kim DeShano
West Virginia – Robert Caruthers
Commander-in-Chief – John W. Stroud

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O’BRIEN: Comrade Installing Officer of the National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the officers-elect are in proper position for installation.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: National Officers-Elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I will administer to you the Officers’ Obligation. You will raise your right hand, touch the Flag of our country with your left hand and repeat after me:

(Whereupon, the Officers’ Obligation was given at this time.)
Comrade Chaplain.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Almighty God, our God and Divine Protector, give Thy blessings upon these, our comrades, who now become fellow officers. We beseech Thee, O, Lord, who art ever present amongst us, grant wisdom unto them, so that in their deliberations they continue to favor Thee, our glorious country and to better our organization. May Thy strength sustain them, may Thy power preserve them. May Thy hand protect them in the faithful and fruitful performance of their duties. Amen.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: As you were. National Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now escort the officers to their respective stations.

National Officers of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, you now occupy the position of honor to which your comrades have elected you. Learn well the responsibilities entrusted to you so that you may intelligently discharge the duties you are to undertake.

The By-Laws and Ritual of our organization prescribe in detail the duties of your respective offices. By virtue of the confidence placed in you, through your election or appointment, we assume that you will acquaint yourselves thoroughly with your duties. You may be seated.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will escort the Commander-in-Chief to the rostrum.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief John W. Stroud, before administering your obligation, it is proper to remind you of certain duties.

You will be held personally responsible for the Charter of this organization, and at the end of your term of office you will deliver it to the officer appointed to install your successor.

It is your duty to see that all National Officers perform their duties to the best of their ability. You shall keep yourself informed on all proposed legislation, which may affect the welfare of potential and actual comrades of this organization. Strive for adoption of only those measures which will be beneficial.

You will be required to devote all of your time to the many duties of your office. You are expected to make a special study of the Congressional Charter, By-Laws and Ritual of this organization so that you

may render firm and impartial decisions on important questions referred to you.

As Commander-in-Chief, you will be regarded by your comrades and by the general public as typifying wise and vigorous leadership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. May all your efforts and accomplishments bring credit to your administration and to our organization.

Comrade John W. Stroud, are you willing and ready to assume your solemn obligation?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT STROUD: I am.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: You will raise your right hand, touch the Flag of our country with your left hand, give your name as I touch your hand and repeat after me.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT STROUD: "In the presence of Almighty God, and the officers and delegates of this Order here assembled, I, John W. Stroud, do hereby solemnly promise that I will faithfully discharge to the best of my ability the duties of the office of Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States to which I have been elected in accordance with the By-Laws and Ritual of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

"I solemnly promise that at the close of the term to which I have been elected, or sooner if so ordered by proper authority, I will surrender immediately to only the duly authorized person or persons the National Charter, all records, money and other properties of this organization in my possession or under my control.

"I do further solemnly promise that I will be fair and impartial in my actions toward all comrades, and I will always strive to promote the best interest of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. So help me God."

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KURPIUS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I now place in your possession our Charter. Also, I present you with this gavel, which is the emblem of your authority. Use it firmly, but with discretion.

All National Officers, please stand, stretch forth your right hand and repeat after me: "Comrade Commander-in-Chief John W. Stroud, to you I pledge my sincere allegiance."

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, officers and delegates of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I now proclaim the National Officers duly installed and this organization in working order for the ensuing year. (Applause)

PRESENTATION OF PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAPEL PIN AND GOLD LIFE MEMBERSHIP CARD TO BILL THIEN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT STROUD: I will now present the Gold Life Membership Card to Past Commander-in-Chief William A. Thien. (Applause)

Comrade Past Commander-in-Chief Thien, from your Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, we are honored to present you a bronze cap. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you so much, and thank you to everybody. I appreciate it.

ADJUTANT GENERAL HAMILTON: At this time I would like to call on Renee Simpson, Department of Wisconsin, for the presentation to the Chief representing the Department Commanders for 2013-14.

COMRADE RENEE SIMPSON (Department of Wisconsin): Thank you. Past Commander-in-Chief, on behalf of our group, we thought we would give you something that your wife will not have to dust. Here is a quilt made by a veteran for a veteran. Remember, it is to keep you warm. It is a gift from all of us. Thank you for all your love and support. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you so much.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT STROUD: Chief, do you have something for me?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Yes. It is called the Commander-in-Chief's pin. I kind of like punching holes in a new suit. (Laughter) Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT JOHN W. STROUD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT STROUD: I want to thank all the delegates to this 115th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for your faith and trust in me to lead our great organization in the coming year.

My sincere gratitude goes out to the Comrades and Sisters of the Western Conference for your continued support, comradeship and friendship, to the VFW Department of Nevada and its Ladies Auxiliary, and especially to District 4 and Post 2313, for all of your hard work, dedication and sacrifice to make this special journey possible.

To the wonderful Comrades, Sisters, Past Commanders-in-Chief and Past National Presidents that I have had the opportunity to meet over the past two years, in my travels as the Junior and Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, thank you for warmly and graciously welcoming me into your Departments. I have been extremely grateful for your lifelong dedication and commitment to the goals and successes of the organization in all of its projects and programs.

I would like to recognize Past Commander-in-Chief Jim Nier, who at the Nevada Department Convention in 1998, put his hand on a young Post Commander's shoulder and said, "I have been watching you, and I think you are going to make a fine State Commander someday."

Then again at the National Convention in Cincinnati in 2004, when he said, "I am still watching you, and I think you should consider running for National Office." Thank you, Chief. I am certain I would not be standing here today if not for your encouragement.

To the Past Commanders-in-Chief from the Western Conference, Richard Eubank, Gary Kurpius, Tom Pouliot and "Gunner" Kent, and John Stang thank you for your mentorship, guidance, encouragement and friendship.

Many of my fellow Past State Commanders from the 2006-2007 "Veterans First" year are also here. The bonds of comradeship and

friendship that we formed will never be broken, and I am so glad to see you here today.

To Past Commanders-in-Chief John Hamilton and Bill Thien, it has been my sincere honor to have had the opportunity to serve with you these past two years. Thank you for your service, your outstanding leadership, and your unparalleled devotion to our great organization.

To our new National President Ann Panteleakos and all your officers in your centennial year, thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the Ladies Auxiliary does to make the VFW better.

To Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief John Biedrzycki, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy, National Officers and Council of Administration, I am excited to have the opportunity to serve with you, so let's get ready to kick the tires and light the fires because we are going to break the sound barrier and get this job done!

To the Adjutant General and Quartermaster General, I want to offer my most sincere gratitude to you and your staffs in the Kansas City and Washington Offices. Thank you for ensuring that No One Does More For Veterans than our VFW!

And to the Department Commanders of Dream Team 2014-2015, I am counting on you to partner with Johnny's Angels to continue the great work of our predecessors, and to reach new heights of accomplishments and successes for our great organization.

I have some very special guests with me today.

My big brother, Bill Stroud, United States Navy Vietnam Veteran and VFW Life Member, and his daughter and my niece, Crystal, who's a Ladies Auxiliary member.

My sons, Andrew and John, Jr., both members of the Men's Auxiliary. John is also a Past Unit Commander of the Sons of the VFW.

My daughters, Teri and Jennifer, who are both Life Members of the Ladies Auxiliary. Jennifer is also a Past Unit President of the Junior Girls.

And last, but certainly first in my heart and soul, my best friend and love of my life, the Past Nevada Department President and the woman I am proud to call my wife, Mary Stroud. Thank you all for sharing this memorable day with me. I love each and every one of you. (Pause)

Comrades, we meet today as a nation still at war abroad and in crisis at home over at the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense.

The VA is a healthcare system worth saving that right now must identify and fix what's broken, that needs to hold people appropriately accountable to the fullest extent of the law, and a system that must restore the faith of veterans in their VA.

The Nation lost the previous VA Secretary primarily because he put too much trust in the employees below him and the information they sent, employees who lied to him, who cooked the books, and some who may have even broken the law.

We are confident that Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson, and nominee Bob McDonald, if he is confirmed as the new Secretary, will not make that same mistake.

As an organization, the VFW welcomes the intense media and Congressional attention this crisis in care and confidence has produced, because attention brings scrutiny, and scrutiny demands accountability.

Over at the Pentagon, they have to fight a war in Afghanistan and a budget battle on Capitol Hill. Our concern for troops in harm's way is paramount, and a shrinking defense budget and the looming threat of sequestration in 2016 doesn't make our country any safer or our enemies any less dangerous.

Ending sequestration was the top VFW legislative priority until the current crisis in care and confidence over at the VA overshadowed everything:

From the potential downsizing of the Army from its wartime high of 570,000 soldiers to 420,000;

To balancing more of the Nation's deficit on the backs of military service members and retirees;

To the impact of sequestration on the VA and the veterans' programs operated by other federal agencies;

To the release of five Taliban prisoners in exchange for Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl;

And the reorganization of those agencies tasked with recovering and identifying our missing-in-action.

It's just a damn good thing the VFW knows how to multitask!
(Applause)

One of the best things about being a National Officer is I get to brag about the VFW wherever I go, to the troops, to veterans, their families, nonveterans and politicians, too.

I get to educate them about the true definition of a Veterans Service Organization, about the VFW's nationwide cadre of 1,400 service officers who in the past two years helped 205,000 veterans recoup \$5.9 billion in earned compensation and pension from their government.

And we provide this service for free, and we do it whether they were VFW members or not, and if their claim is rejected or rated too low, the VFW will even represent them before the Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington, again for free.

That's what being a Congressionally-chartered Veterans Service Organization is all about, but our paying it forward doesn't end there.

The VFW volunteers give more than 11 million hours annually at VA's 1,400 medical facilities.

We award \$3.2 million annually in sixth through twelfth grade patriotic scholarship competition.

We have provided \$7.5 million free telephone connections between deployed personnel and their loved ones back home.

We have hosted two million military and their families at departure and homecoming ceremonies.

Through our wonderful Unmet Needs program, we have provided about \$5 million in grants to help more than 3,500 military families through emergency financial situations.

Our wonderful Ladies Auxiliary has donated \$30 million in cancer research over the past decade.

The VFW Department of Europe answered a call for help from the U.S. European Command to send six comrades to the French Coast to operate a Visitor's Center for hundreds of American D-Day veterans and thousands of visitors who were in Normandy for the 70th anniversary of the landing.

Pennsylvania VFW Post 764 raised \$165,000 to help build a "smart house" for retired Marine Corps Sergeant Doug Vitale, who lost both legs to an IED explosion in Afghanistan in 2011.

To 25 VFW Posts along the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine for their support of fellow VFW comrades who were "walking off the war."

To VFW Kansas and Team Rubicon who deployed to Baxter Springs, Kansas, to assist upwards of 75 uninsured homeowners with debris removal and repair assistance after a devastating tornado struck in April.

To Minnesota VFW Post 1816 for donating \$10,000 to help fund veterans' resource centers on two Central Lakes college campuses.

And to VFW Post 2485 in the Philippines, who for 20 years were the sole caretakers of the former Clark Air Base cemetery until a VFW National Resolution urged its official transfer to the American Battle Monument Commission in May.

Those are just a few of the great things I get to brag about, comrades, because that's what our VFW gives back to America.

"No one does more for veterans" isn't just a catchy phrase, it's who we are as an organization, it's who we have always been.

When our founders returned home from the Spanish American War and later, the Philippine Insurrection, they came back to a government that provided virtually zero assistance for their service-connected wounds, illnesses and injuries.

We, the VFW, we changed that! And that's a true story worth telling again and again.

Comrades, I was a First Sergeant stationed at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada when after a very long duty day that stretched into the late evening hours, I decided I deserved a beer. The NCO Club was closed, so I headed for home. As I drove out the gate, I noticed VFW Post 10047 not far away with a sign that read, "Active Duty Military Welcome."

Back in the day military folks wearing fatigues were barely able to stop for bread and milk, so a social stop was definitely against the regulations. But right then and there, this First Sergeant made a command decision that the VFW was a military outfit and that it was okay for me to go inside, so I stopped, walked in, and was immediately welcomed into the fold.

The primary job of every First Sergeant is to care for junior enlisted and NCOs and their families, and to advise the unit commander on their status. This responsibility includes promoting retention, professional military education, morale, welfare and health, and as situations warrant, providing a little positive reinforcement or discipline where needed.

When I learned that was exactly what the VFW was all about, but on a much larger scale, I wanted to be a part of it. I was soon elected as the Post Junior Vice Commander, and the following year I was elected Post Commander of the largest post in Nevada, one that grew to more than 1,000 members that year. And the rest is history.

Comrades, I share my story to encourage you to tell your own stories to others. A great part of the VFW story involves the relevance between different generations, and the ability to educate others about who we are, what we do, and what we do it for.

First of all, let's take relevance. What's the difference between a 30-year-old Fallujah veteran and a 90-year-old D-Day veteran? The answer, nothing.

They were both young when they went off to war, and they were both a lot older when they came home to an America who, for the most part, couldn't relate to their experiences because they either never served in uniform or they never served "over there."

That, Comrades, is relevance, and similar to how we greet Vietnam veterans with a "Welcome Home." We need to extend the same to the new generation and also ask how the VFW can help in their transition.

We have business owners and CEOs and comrades with hiring authority within our ranks, and we also have contacts with the movers and shakers of every community.

We can lend a very sympathetic ear to their readjustment issues, and we can help guide them to the VA and elsewhere for help.

Nothing this generation is going through is new. We just need to be there to let them know that we understand, that we get it, that we exist to serve others, to pay it forward to every new generation, and that they can learn from our transitioning successes and even more so from our disappointments.

Right now the VFW has 200,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in our ranks, but multiply that number by 10 and that's how many potential comrades are now VFW eligible, and we need them, because right now the VFW also has 400,000 members who are over the age of 80, and God bless them for making our great organization what it is today.

The first three goals I am setting for the organization is for every comrade to bring in one new member, just one, and reinstated members count, too.

That is not an unachievable goal, nor is it unrealistic. It is absolutely imperative that our great organization get an infusion of new blood immediately.

One thing I've learned over the years is that the VFW's membership problem isn't in recruiting, it's in retention. Ask anyone who's ever been a military recruiter and they'll say their job ends when the dotted line is signed. That's because recruiters only focus on the front door. They have plenty of personnel specialists back on base who are tasked with the retention part.

Retention, Comrades, is why the VFW has now had 22 consecutive years of negative membership growth, and retention is a problem only we can solve.

We must stop the hemorrhaging or the VFW will cease to exist, and America and its veterans, service members, their families, and our communities, will be poorer because of it.

The VFW helped to ease my transition from military to civilian life, but the great majority of eligible servicemen and women don't have the foggiest idea of who we are, what we do, or who we do it for.

To this very day they don't know that it was the VFW who led the charge to create a new GI Bill, a Family Caregiver Act, Traumatic Injury Insurance, a bullet-proof Stolen Valor Act, concurrent receipt, a lower

Guard and Reserve retirement age, and advance appropriations for VA healthcare.

They don't know or remember that it was the VFW who convinced the airlines to eliminate airline baggage fees for troops traveling under orders, made sure that all military and VA healthcare programs were recognized under the new Affordable Care Act, or got the Distinguished Warfare Medal eliminated.

To this day military service members, and I dare say most veterans, continue to believe that it was a generous Congress or Pentagon that created all these great Quality of Life programs out of the kindness of their hearts.

And to this very day they probably don't fully comprehend the impact of sequestration on their military and veteran Quality of Life programs, but the VFW does!

Comrades, it was the VFW that helped to create all these new programs and benefits, and we still have a lot more to do as the war in Afghanistan winds down, more troops become veterans and lawmakers keep targeting Pentagon people programs as a means to balance the federal budget, and the potential impact all this could have on the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Comrades, the camaraderie between our brothers and sisters in arms exists because we understand each other. We understand their experiences, challenges, setbacks and concerns. A strong membership enables us to tackle the tough issues and get them addressed and corrected.

A strong membership keeps the doors of the Congress and the White House open and receptive to what the VFW has to say. A strong membership also keeps your state legislatures open to better ways of taking care of our veterans, service members and their families.

As such, we must turn this declining membership trend around. We need to do a better job of mentoring, nurturing and motivating our new members to stay and become actively involved in the programs at the Post and legislatively in their state capitals and in Washington.

And we must do more to make our Posts more family friendly. We must create a healthier atmosphere where all members want to bring their spouses and children for family events.

We need to more aggressively enhance our relationship with the Student Veterans of America, which now has more than 1,000 chapters on college and university campuses throughout the country, to include a dozen right here in the Greater St. Louis Metropolitan Area.

We need to help these young veterans wade through the VA claims system. We need to tell them that it was the VFW that helped to create the Post-9/11 GI Bill that now has one million enrollees.

And we need to challenge them and their Post-9/11 Generation to make things better, to pay it forward to the next generation of combat veterans who will also return home believing no one understands them.

The VFW relates, comrades, and it doesn't matter when or where you served. The only thing that matters is you served honorably and that you served "over there."

Reach out to every veteran in every community. Tell them the VFW Story. Thank them for their service, and let them know that we have

them and their family's best interests at heart and in the forefront of our day-to-day operations.

With the proposed military drawdowns, we will soon have hundreds of thousands of young heroes separating from the service. The already jammed VA system is going to become even more crowded, and these warriors and their families are going to need training, education, jobs, healthcare, and in some cases, disability compensation. The Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliaries are going to make sure they get it, because no one does more for veterans!

Comrades, in closing, I ask for your support of my three goals:
To recruit just one new member each;
To share the VFW story with all who'll listen;
And to get involved.

And we must never, ever, forget the 50 million Americans who have worn the uniform of our Nation, the one million who have died in defense of our freedoms, the 83,000 who are still missing and unaccounted for, and all of their families who continue to burn a candle of hope, to include the family of one U.S. Marine Sergeant still being held in a Mexican jail.

I want to share a short poem that has inspired me for years, and I hope it inspires you as well. It is called "The Essence of Passion."

"Passion is powerful. Nothing was ever achieved without it, and nothing can take its place. No matter what you face in life, if your passion is great enough, you will find the strength to succeed. Without passion, life has no meaning. So put your heart, mind and soul, even into your smallest acts, This is the Essence of passion. This is the secret to life."

This is my challenge, and I ask for the support of each and every one of you to join me in defending freedom's defenders!

God bless you and your families. God bless our beloved Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliaries.

God bless and protect every soldier, sailor, Airman, Marine, Coast Guardsman, Reservist and National Guardsman guarding the gates of freedom today.

And may God continue to bless these United States of America!
Thank you very much. (Applause)

MOTION TO CLOSE CONVENTION

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: At this time, we will entertain a motion to adjourn the Convention.

COMRADE DAVID PROHASKA (Post 4434 Michigan): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am David Prohaska, a delegate from Post 4434, Michigan.

There being no further business to come before this Convention and the officers having been duly elected and installed for the ensuing year, I move that the 115th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States be closed sine die.

COMRADE KEVIN JONES (Post 7356 Missouri): I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: You have before you a motion, properly seconded, to close the 115th VFW National Convention. Is there

a question on the motion? Is there a question on the motion? Is there a question on the motion?

Hearing none, all those in favor will please signify by the usual sign of "aye"; all opposed "nay". The "ayes" have it. The motion carries. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will proceed with the Closing Ceremonies.

CLOSING CEREMONIES

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, Commander-in-Chief. Captain of the VFW National Honor Guard, advance and retrieve the flag of the United States of America.

(Whereupon, the Colors are retired at this time.)

Comrade Chaplain Dickerson, the Benediction, please.

BENEDICTION

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DICKERSON: Our Heavenly Father, we give you thanks as we come to the close of our Convention. We thank you, the Creator of Heaven and earth, for allowing us to assemble here to conduct the business of our organization. Please be with us as we travel to our destinations and keep us until we meet again. Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the Closing Ceremonies for the 115th National Convention have been completed, and your orders have been obeyed, sir.

ADJOURNMENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Thank you. On the way out, don't forget to get your tickets for this afternoon's reception. The 115th National Convention is closed. We are adjourned sine die.

(Whereupon, the 115th National Convention was duly adjourned sine die at 11:20 o'clock a.m.)

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO NATIONAL BY-LAWS, MANUAL OF
PROCEDURE & RITUAL CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL
BY-LAWS, MANUAL OF PROCEDURE AND RITUAL
115TH NATIONAL CONVENTION, JULY 20 – 23, 2014
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI**

B-1 (Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS
Sec. 102 – Applications – Affiliation of New Members.

Amend Sec. 102 – Applications – Affiliation of New Members., National By-Laws, under **Members-At-Large**, in the second sentence, by replacing \$35.00 with \$45.00 and \$21.00 with \$26.00. Also, replace \$14.00 with \$19.00. (Approved)

B-2 (Proposed by Department of Virginia)

ARTICLE I - MEMBERS
Sec. 111 – Life Members.

Amend Sec. 111 – Life Members., National By-Laws, by adding the following at the end of the section:

“(e) Legacy Life Members: VFW Life Members have the option of paying an additional fee to enroll in the Legacy Life Membership program. Legacy Life Membership enables VFW Life Members to leave a lasting mark – a legacy – to their Post and Department. Legacy Life Membership is available in three tiers – Bronze (\$400), Silver (\$800), and Gold (\$1,200). Legacy Life Members receive entitlements in accordance with current program policies. Posts and Departments share in Legacy Life Membership by receiving in September an annual disbursement, ad infinitum, from National Headquarters in an amount not less than \$6.00 each for every Bronze, \$12.00 for every Silver, and \$18.00 for every Gold Legacy Life Member on the roles as of the immediately preceding June 30.” (Rejected)

M-1 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE II – POSTS
Sec. 217 – Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office.

Amend Sec. 217 – Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office., Manual of Procedure, by removing the sections titled **Nomination**, **Election**, and **Poll System and Preprinted Ballot**. and replacing with the following:

“**Nomination**. Prior to the opening of nominations, the Post shall decide which form of election shall be used, unless the Post By-Laws specify the

manner of election.

Any nominee shall have the opportunity to decline nomination for the office to which they have been nominated before nominations are closed. A member making the nomination of an absentee for any office shall have presented to the Adjutant, in writing, the consent of the member being nominated prior to the opening of nominations. Nominations of Post Officers shall open in March and remain open until the Post is ready to vote, provided, however, that when a poll system is used, as hereinafter described, nominations must be closed at the meeting prior to the election to allow the Adjutant to prepare a printed ballot.

Election. Post officers shall be elected in April. Balloting for Post officers may be conducted by open vote or written secret ballot (handwritten or printed) at a regular Post meeting, or, if required by Post By-Laws or authorized by Post vote prior to the opening of nominations, by a poll system. Absentee ballots and proxy votes are prohibited.

A majority vote of all votes cast, except where otherwise designated, shall be necessary to elect. If there be no election on the first ballot, the name of the comrade receiving the lowest number of votes shall be dropped and so on in successive ballots until an election is made.

Poll System. The Post shall determine where and during what hours the polls shall be open for members in good standing to cast their vote; and shall determine the procedure for tallying the votes; and the procedure to be followed in the event of a tie. Due notice of any election to be conducted pursuant to poll system including the time and place for voting, shall be provided to members in good standing within reasonable time prior to the date of the election. That notice shall contain the names of the candidates. The candidate receiving the greater number of votes cast shall be the winner." (Approved)

M-2 (Proposed by Department of Pennsylvania)

ARTICLE II - POSTS

Sec. 218 – Officers and Chairmen, Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 218 – Officers and Chairmen, Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under **(a) Officers.** (7) **Chaplain.**, by deleting "of him" in mid-sentence. (Approved)

M-3 (Proposed by Department of Virginia)

ARTICLE II - POSTS

Sec. 220 – Vacancies and Removal of Elective Officers or Committee Members.

Amend Sec. 220 – Vacancies and Removal of Elective Officers or Committee Members., Manual of Procedure, under **Vacancies.**, by adding the following as a third paragraph:

“Should a vacancy occur in the office of Junior Vice Commander or any other elected office not specified above, the Commander will, at the next regular meeting declare the position vacant and announce the intent to hold nominations and elections at the subsequent regularly scheduled or special meeting of the Post. If it is the intent to conduct said nomination and election at a special meeting, the Commander will ensure compliance with Section 203 of the National By-Laws.” (Rejected)

M-4 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE II – POSTS

Sec. 221 – Voting.

Amend Sec. 221 – Voting., Manual of Procedure, in the second sentence, by removing “pre-printed ballot” and replacing with “poll system”. Also removing the last sentence of the section. (Approved)

B-3 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 415 – Eligibility to Office.

Amend Sec. 415 – Eligibility to Office., National By-Laws, in the first paragraph, by removing “except as provided for in Section 515 of these By-Laws”, at the end of the second sentence. (Rejected)

B-4 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 416 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 416 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National By-Laws, (a), by removing “Judge Advocate, Surgeon” and in (b) adding “Judge Advocate, Surgeon” after “Adjutant”. (Rejected)

M-5 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 416 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 416 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., Manual of Procedure, in the first sentence, by adding “Judge Advocate, Surgeon,” after “Adjutant” and adding “Service Officer,” after “Chief of Staff”. (Rejected)

M-6 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 417 – Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office.

Amend Sec. 417 – Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office., Manual of Procedure, in the first paragraph titled **Order of nominations and elections.**, by removing “Judge Advocate, Surgeon”. (Rejected)

M-7 (Proposed by Department of Pennsylvania)

ARTICLE IV - DISTRICTS

Sec. 418 – Officers: Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 418 – Officers: Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under (a) **Officers.** (8) **Chaplain:**, by replacing the second sentence with the following:

“The Chaplain shall perform such other duties as may be incident to the office or as may from time to time be required by the laws and usages of this organization or lawful orders from proper authority.”
(Approved)

M-8 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 418 – Officers: Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 418 – Officers: Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under (a) **Officers.** (1) **Commander.** f., by adding “Judge Advocate, Surgeon” after “Adjutant”. (Rejected)

B-5 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS

Sec. 515 – Eligibility to Office.

Amend Sec. 515 – Eligibility to Office., National By-Laws, in the first paragraph, by removing the last sentence. (Rejected)

M-9 (Proposed by Department of Pennsylvania)

ARTICLE V - DEPARTMENTS
Sec. 518 – Officers: Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 518 – Officers: Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under (a) **Officers**. (6) **Chaplain**., by replacing the second sentence with the following:

“The Chaplain shall perform such other duties as may be usually incident to the office or as may from time to time be required by the laws and usages of the organization or lawful orders from proper authority.”
(Approved)

B-6 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS
Sec. 522 – Council of Administration – Composition, Powers and Duties.

Amend Sec. 522 – Council of Administration – Composition, Powers and Duties., National By-Laws, under (a) **Composition**., in the fifth sentence, by removing “Latin America/Caribbean”. (Approved)

B-7 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE VI – NATIONAL
Sec. 615 – Eligibility to Office.

Amend Sec. 615 – Eligibility to Office., National By-Laws, by removing the last sentence of the section. (Rejected)

B-8 (Proposed by Department of Pennsylvania)

ARTICLE VI - NATIONAL
Sec. 618 – Officers: Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 618 – Officers: Duties and Obligations., National By-Laws, under (h) **Chaplain**; by replacing the second and third sentences with the following:

“The Chaplain will be familiar with the Ritual and shall conduct the annual memorial service held in connection with the National Convention. The Chaplain shall perform such other duties as may be incident to the office or as may from time to time be required by the laws and usages of the organization or lawful orders from proper authority.”
(Approved)

B-9 (Proposed by Department of Oregon)

ARTICLE VI - NATIONAL
Sec. 621 - Voting.

Amend Sec. 621 – Voting., National By-Laws., in the last sentence, by removing “Demeter’s Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure” and replacing with “the current edition of Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised.” (Rejected)

B-10 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE VI – NATIONAL
Sec. 623 – National Council of Administration, Department Members – Election, Vacancies and Removal.

Amend Sec. 623 – National Council of Administration, Department Members – Election, Vacancies and Removal., National By-Laws, at the beginning of the first paragraph, by removing “At the close of the 113th National Convention”.

Amend second paragraph titled **Election:**, by removing the entire second paragraph to include “Transition Schedule”. (Approved)

B-11 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE VIII – UNIFORMS, BADGES, ETC.
Sec. 801 – Adoption of Seals, Emblems, Badges and Insignia.

Amend Sec. 801 – Adoption of Seals, Emblems, Badges and Insignia., National By-Laws, in the last paragraph, by removing the last sentence and replacing with the following:

“Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States shall have sole and exclusive rights to its seals, emblems, badges and insignia and its seals, emblems, badges and insignia shall not be used without written consent of the Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.” (Approved)

B-12 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE VIII – UNIFORMS, BADGES, ETC.
Sec. 803 – Manufacture and Use of Seals, Emblems, Badges, Insignia and Uniforms.

Amend Sec. 803 – Manufacture and Use of Seals, Emblems, Badges, Insignia and Uniforms., National By-Laws, by removing the entire section and replacing with the following:

"The seals, uniforms, emblems, badges and insignia of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, or goods bearing same, shall be manufactured only on order of or with the express written consent of the Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Such written consent shall be the sole discretion of the Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States unless otherwise directed by the Commander-in-Chief, the National Council of Administration, or National Convention.

No subordinate unit, member or person shall engage, by contract or otherwise, for the manufacture of such seals, uniforms, badges, emblems or insignia, or goods bearing same, unless such written consent has been obtained.

No person shall be entitled to use or wear any seal, emblem, badge, insignia, or uniform of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States unless a member in good standing or unless such written consent has been obtained.

No member or other person shall use or wear any seal, emblem, badge, insignia or uniform of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States while engaged in any commercial or political activity in such a manner as likely to falsely convey that such activity is approved or endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

The design of seals, uniforms, emblems, badges and insignia and goods and services using such seals, uniforms, badges, emblems or insignia shall be as provided in the Manual of Procedure.

Ownership of all seals, badges, emblems and insignia shall remain vested in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the right to use or wear such seals, badges, emblems, insignia or uniforms shall be a license only which shall be automatically revoked when such person ceases to be a member or authorization is revoked." (Approved)

M-10 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE VIII – UNIFORMS, BADGES, ETC.

Sec. 803 – Manufacture and Use of Seals, Emblems, Badges, Insignia and Uniforms.

Amend Sec. 803 – Manufacture and Use of Seals, Emblems, Badges, Insignia and Uniforms., Manual of Procedure, by removing the entire first paragraph titled **Authority to Manufacture**. (Approved)

B-13 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE VIII – UNIFORMS, BADGES, ETC.

Sec. 805 – Trademarks; Service Marks, Publications.

Amend Sec. 805 – Trademarks; Service Marks, Publications., National By-Laws, at the end of the second paragraph, by adding

"Quartermaster General of the" before "Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States." (Approved)

M-11 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE IX – DISCIPLINE
Sec. 903 – Procedure for Disciplinary Actions.

Amend Sec. 903 – Procedure for Disciplinary Actions., Manual of Procedure, under (i.) **Procedure –Disciplinary Hearing Requested**, 1.

Appointment of Panel, a. President, at the beginning of the second sentence, by removing "He" and replacing with "The President" and adding the following at the end of the paragraph:

"The Panel President shall not discuss the merits of the case with members of the panel prior to the Hearing." (Approved)

B-14 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE IX – DISCIPLINE
Sec. 904 – Appeal.

Amend Sec. 904 – Appeal., National By-Laws, under section titled **Appeals to the National Council of Administration.**, by removing the second paragraph. (Approved)

B-15 (Proposed by Department of Kansas)

ARTICLE IX - DISCIPLINE
Sec. 907 – Penalties.

Amend Sec. 907 – Penalties., National By-Laws, by adding the following at the end of the section:

"7. A member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States whose membership has been terminated from the Military Order of the Cootie by the Supreme Commander and the Supreme Council of Administration (all Documentation will be forwarded to the Commander-in-Chief via the Department and for determination of VFW membership status, the Post and Auxiliary.) Their membership to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States will be terminated effective immediately." (Rejected)

B-16 (Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group. Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

ARTICLE IX – DISCIPLINE
Sec. 907 – Penalties.

Amend Sec. 907 – Penalties., National By-Laws, by adding the following at the end of the section:

“Except as provided in Section 905, no penalty in a disciplinary action will be effective if an appeal is current and not finally adjudicated. The penalty shall be carried into effect at such time as a decision is final and by execution of a Special Order by the Commander-in-Chief or the National Council of Administration.” (Approved)

M-12 (Proposed by Department of Oregon)

ARTICLE X – RULES OF ORDER
Sec. 1001 – Rules of Order Governing All Meetings.

Amend Sec. 1001 – Rules of Order Governing All Meetings., Manual of Procedure, in the first paragraph, second sentence, by removing “Demeter’s Manual of Parliamentary Law and Procedure” and replacing with “the rules contained in the current edition of Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised.”

Amend last sentence in the first paragraph, by removing “Demeter’s” and replacing with “the current edition of Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised.” (Rejected)

B-17 (Proposed by Department of Florida)

ARTICLE XIII – MENS AUXILIARY
Sec. 1301 – Formation.

Amend Sec. 1301 – Formation., National By-Laws, in the second paragraph, by removing the first sentence and adding the following as third and fourth paragraphs:

“A Department, if the by-laws of the Department having jurisdiction so provide, may form and issue charters to Mens Auxiliaries Districts. The issuance of charters is not mandatory, rather, this will be decided by individual Departments. The Department shall establish geographical boundaries of Mens Auxiliary Districts and such Districts shall align with current District boundaries established, as well as current District numbers coinciding.

A charter shall be issued by the Department Commander to such Districts as the Department determines to establish. The charter shall be signed by the Department Commander and countersigned by the Department Adjutant.” (Rejected)

B-18 (Proposed by Department of Maryland)

ARTICLE XIII – MENS AUXILIARY

Sec. 1302 – Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 1302 – Eligibility., National By-Laws, by adding the following at the end of the second paragraph:

“No person with an other than honorable discharge may be eligible for membership in the Men’s Auxiliary.” (Rejected)

R-1 (Page 3) (Proposed by Department of Florida)

RITUAL COMMEMORATIVE TRIBUTES – THE DATES

Amend Chapter Title – Commemorative Tributes – The Dates, Ritual, by removing “January 27-Signing of the Vietnam Peace Accord in 1973.” and adding the following date in chronological sequence: “March 29 – Vietnam Veterans Day.” (Rejected)

R-2 (Page 15) (Proposed by Department of New York)

RITUAL OPENING POST CEREMONIES - PRAYER

Amend Chapter Title – Opening Post Ceremonies – Prayer, Ritual, under **Chaplain:**, by removing the sixth sentence and replacing with the following:

“We ask Thee to Bless the residents in our National Home for Children and help us to fulfill our duty toward them.” (Rejected)

R-3 (Page 15) (Proposed by Department of Pennsylvania)

RITUAL OPENING POST CEREMONIES - PRAYER

Amend Chapter Title – Opening Post Ceremonies – Prayer, Ritual, under **Chaplain:**, in the sixth sentence, by replacing “widows” with “surviving spouses”. (Rejected)

R-4 (Page 15) (Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief)

RITUAL OPENING POST CEREMONIES – PRAYER

Amend Chapter Title – Opening Post Ceremonies – Prayer, Ritual, under **Chaplain:** in the sixth sentence, by replacing “widows and children in” with “children, families and staff of”. (Approved)

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND
INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AT THE 115TH NATIONAL CONVENTION,
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI**

Resolution No. 201 (Submitted by Department of Washington)

POST COMMANDER ACCESS TO ONLINE MEMBERSHIP

WHEREAS, the Post Commander needs ongoing up to date status of their Post members eligibility in order to achieve 100% membership; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that access to their current National online Post membership be granted to the present Post Commander, as well as the Post Quartermaster. (Dismissed)

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL RESOLUTIONS**

Resolution No. 301

**AMENDMENT TO SECTION 230101 AND 230102 OF THE
CONGRESSIONAL CHARTER OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS
OF THE UNITED STATES**

WHEREAS, women have displayed distinguished service since the Spanish-American War and will make up twenty (20) percent of the United States Active Duty forces by 2015; and

WHEREAS, the Congressional Charter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States identifies the organization as a national association of men who as soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen served this nation in wars, campaigns, and expeditions on foreign soil or in hostile waters, is a federally chartered corporation; and

WHEREAS, U.S. military leaders formally lifted the ban on women serving in combat positions in January 2013, overturning the 1994 Pentagon rule that prevented women in combat roles, and have become an integral part of the military as stated by U.S. Defense Secretary; and

WHEREAS, to date, over 800 women have sustained combat injuries and 157 women have paid the ultimate sacrifice defending our country in Iraq and Afghanistan alone; and

WHEREAS, to preclude any misunderstanding that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is not an all-male organization, and women veterans maintain a critical role in the furtherance of the programs and purposes of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we recognize that combat veterans are defined by their dedicated service and sacrifice rather than gender, and recommend to Congress that Section 230101 (a) of the Congressional Charter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States replace "men" with "veterans."

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that in Section 230102 subsection (3), change the word "widow" to "surviving spouses." (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 302

EQUALITY FOR ALL VETERANS' SPOUSES AND FAMILY MEMBERS

WHEREAS, the Ladies Auxiliary was established as a national association of eligible members whose eligibility was determined within the confines of the eligibility of men who as soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen served in our Nation's wars, campaigns and expeditions on foreign soil or in hostile waters; and

WHEREAS, the demographics of the US Armed Forces have considerably changed to include a more prevalent role for women in combat; and

WHEREAS, on August 22, 1978, at the convening of the 79th National Convention, delegates took steps to clarify its eligibility criteria to allow for women; and

WHEREAS, there is no current national association for the spouses and family members of our Nation's female veterans; and

WHEREAS, to accommodate an increasingly important demographic and to ease the financial burden in creating a second national association; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars goes on record in supporting the transformation of our national association, known as the Ladies Auxiliary, to make suitable accommodations for the male spouses and male family members of all eligible service members; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Adjutant General and the Ladies Auxiliary National Secretary be directed to work in concert, developing suitable language for by-law amendments, to be presented at their respective conventions in the year 2015; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW supports any additional efforts by the Ladies Auxiliary to create an association name and protocols that are gender neutral. (Approved)

Resolution No. 303

SUPPORT EFFORTS TO INCLUDE 74 SAILORS KILLED ON
USS FRANK E. EVANS ON THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL
"WALL"

WHEREAS, Public Law 96-297, (94 Stat, 827) authorized the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund to construct a memorial to honor and recognize armed forces service in the Vietnam War; and

WHEREAS, the memorial fund relied upon the Department of Defense to compile the list of names and the criteria for those persons to be memorialized; and

WHEREAS, as of February 1981, the Department of Defense established four distinct criteria for names to be included on the memorial; and

WHEREAS, the Frank E. Evans having just completed a long tour of shore bombardment off the coast of Vietnam was ordered to operate with a multinational SEATO (South East Treaty Organization) task force of 40 ships in the South China Sea. Exercise "Sea Spirit" was one of the largest exercises in the history of the SEATO and in a "Show of Force" demonstration to the North Vietnam and the Communist World. The nature of Sea Spirit was to protect and escort the convoy under various types of opposition. HMAS Melbourne an Australian air craft carrier led the task force. The exercise was cancelled when Melbourne & Evans came into collision. The 73 sailors from the Evans were listed as missing with one body recovered. The actual position of the collision was Latitude 08 degrees-59.2 N & Longitude 110 degrees-47.7 E this position corresponds to less than 200 miles South East of Vietnam mainland. The task force was on a base course 220 degrees; and

WHEREAS, Secretary of Defense shall (as defined in Section 101 (2), of Title 38 United States Code), veterans who died as a direct or indirect result of military operations in Southeast Asia and whose names are eligible for inclusion on the memorial. Congressman Adam B. Schiff presented evidence and petitions in an audience with The Secretary of The Navy Mabus. The evidence submitted of the tragic accident that destroyed the Frank E. Evans and killed 74 of her Sailors on June 3, 1969. The evidence included actual position, course and reason for being there, Secretary Mabus whole heartedly agreed. He is currently petitioning the Secretary of Defense, whose office serves as the final decision authority to review the case and consider the points we have raised; and

WHEREAS, the criteria for the Vietnam Service Medal and the criteria for the inclusion of the names on "The Wall" is the same. The Frank E. Evans was awarded the Vietnam Service Medal for the collision date along with the ships that came to her rescue. The ships that came to the Evans aid were USS Everett F. Larson DD830, USS Kearsarge CVS 33, USS Walke DD723, USS James E. Kyes DD787 plus tug Tawasa ATF 92. The tug was sent to pull the remaining after half of the ship to Subic Bay. The ships, the men on the ships and sailors killed on the Evans because

where they were and why, earned the Vietnam Service Medal; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we fully support a favorable decision to the Department of Defense to include the 74 names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Passage of this resolution in no way commits any liability or costs to the Veterans of Foreign Wars. (Approved)

Resolution No. 304

VFW FLAG

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is proudly patriotic and unflinching in their pursuit of worthy and honorable causes; and

WHEREAS, the recent worldwide controversy regarding flags being banned on new certain brands of motorcycles needs to be clarified; and

WHEREAS, a great number of VFW members are prominent motorcycle riders, including people who yearly attend Rolling Thunder, the world's largest one-day veterans event-and single largest day Motorcycle Rally; and

WHEREAS, our own Tommy Tradewell, VFW National Commander-in-Chief 2009-2010, is unashamed of his biker pride, is perhaps the first National Commander of any veterans organization to be an avid motorcyclist; and

WHEREAS, the flag color and movement increases awareness, visibility and reduces accidents; and

WHEREAS, Patriot Guard Riders provide distinctive flag bearing escort for veterans/military functions and funerals; and

WHEREAS, flags on motorcycles proudly exhibits patriotism causing large number of veterans/military to salute that flag-which commands respect to the motorcycle operator and machine; and

WHEREAS, the vast majority of motorcycle riders, dealership employees, stockholders and corporate personnel are honorable characters; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Wisconsin Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, that we strongly suggest that the motorcycle manufactures determine policy regarding flag size, location, material, mounts and duration; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that manufacturers state their patriotic position on the United States flag and flags of all nations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the motorcycle industry share its research on aerodynamics, various flag sizes and accessories; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that flags be promoted on motorcycles and other motor vehicles for Flag day, June 14, Fourth of July and every day; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all motorcycle dealerships be congratulated for recommending that their customers live the freedoms that veterans sacrificed and in some cases died for; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that each of us here-signed is afforded the courtesy of a written response from the motorcycle manufactures stating positions upon our concerns; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all Veteran's organizations and auxiliary's be inspired to do likewise and be encouraged to alert their respective National organizations to pursue these concerns. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 305

OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/STORM MEMORIAL

WHEREAS, the over 500,000 U.S. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines who dutifully answered the call to serve our country in uniform from August 1990 through March of 1991, bravely and aggressively expelled Iraqi Forces from the kingdom of Kuwait, and in so doing, liberated that sovereign nation from extreme violence, occupation, and tyranny; and

WHEREAS, over 300 of those brave men and fifteen women served and died as a result of their commitment to freedom and democracy and the above stated goals; and

WHEREAS, H.R. 503 introduced by Congressman David (Phil) Roe TN-1 seeks congressional authority for approval to construct a Desert Shield/Desert Storm Memorial on federal land to forever remember the significance of Operation Desert Shield/ Desert Storm, for not just our citizens but for future generations of Americans and citizens from around the globe; and

WHEREAS, the National Desert Shield/Desert Storm Memorial, located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., will commemorate the service of those 500,000 plus U.S. Service members who served our country honorably throughout this campaign, as well as memorialize the over 300 Americans who paid the ultimate price in pursuit of this just cause; and

WHEREAS, the National Desert Shield/Desert Storm Memorial Association will bear all of the burden of raising 100% of the proceeds for The National Desert Shield/ Desert Storm Memorial through private

sources and donations, with the goal date for the completion of the memorial to be in the year 2016 in order to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States endorses building the National Desert Shield/Desert Storm Memorial, as a lasting tribute to the bravery, courage, commitment, service, and sacrifice exhibited by the members of our Armed Forces living and deceased. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 306

RESTORATION OF FULL CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF MILITARY PERSONNEL CHARGED WITH FELONIES

WHEREAS, the U.S. Constitutional Rights pertaining to Due Process, contained in the Bill of Rights are understood as applying to all citizens and non-citizens within the continental United States of America, even illegal immigrants and terrorists awaiting trial in federal courts; and

WHEREAS, the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees "Equal Protection Under the Law" for all citizens and non-citizen charged with felonies, even illegal immigrants and terrorists held for trial; and

WHEREAS, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) as found in Title 10 of the United States Code, chapter 47 provides for standards of proof, punishment, and other legal issues that differ from that of civilian courts in order to maintain what the military sees as good order and discipline; and

WHEREAS, in the litigation of felonies of certain military personnel; the military courts, and Courts of Appeal for the Armed Forces (CAAF) have rendered decisions adverse to the defendant, due to a difference in Due Process under the law, than those prosecuted in Federal Criminal Courts; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Code > Title 18 > Part 1 > Chapter 13 > 242 recognizes abuse of authority, and provides sanctions for those that under color of Law, deprive anyone of any rights or privileges secured or protected by the U.S. Constitution or laws of the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, in U.S. v. Behenna, (A military Court Martial) the plaintiff argued unsuccessfully before the various military Appeals Courts, that the prosecution violated the "Brady disclosure" in that they withheld exculpatory evidence (Expert witness supporting Self defense) in violation of:

"Article 46, UCMJ.

(2) The President's rules provide that:

(3) The trial counsel must disclose to the defense the existence of evidence known to the trial counsel, which reasonably tends to:

(A) Negate the guilt of the accused of an offense charged.

Defendant was ultimately denied certiorari by the U.S. Supreme Court, leaving no further appeals. These were appeals that would have set aside the guilty verdict, had it been held in a U.S. Federal Court; and

WHEREAS, 1st Lt. Behenna's Court Martial, conviction, sentencing, and appeals up to the Supreme Court; demonstrates that there is no further appeals for military personnel, having been denied their Constitutional Due process rights. Rights every individual on American soil enjoys, except those who have put their lives on the line to protect those very rights; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America, that we support that Congress pass a law that will afford all members of the military the same Due Process under the law, that every citizen enjoys whenever they are charged with a felony. A felony that if convicted will cost that member of the military, the loss of those rights for which they have stood in the gap to protect. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 307

**SUPPORTING HR 1726 & S1174, CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDALS
FOR THE 65TH INFANTRY REGIMENT**

WHEREAS, as mandated by Congress on March 2, 1899 authorized the first body of native troops in Puerto Rico and was officially organized in 1901; and

WHEREAS, during World War I, the infantry defended the Panama Canal and upon their return to Puerto Rico in 1919 was renamed the 65th Infantry Regiment; and

WHEREAS, in 1950, after arriving in Pusan, Korea, the 65th Infantry joined the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division and were amongst the first infantry to meet the enemy on the battlefields of Korea; and

WHEREAS, the 65th Infantry bravely defended their regiment against the Chinese People's Liberation Army who had joined the war on the North Korean side, allowing the U.S. 1st Marine Division to retreat back to Hungnam, averting a potential catastrophic disaster; and

WHEREAS, throughout the course of the Korean War, Puerto Rico proportionally suffered more casualties than a majority of the states; and

WHEREAS, over the span of WWI, WWII and the Korean War, the 65th Infantry earned ten Distinguished Service Crosses, 258 Silver Stars, 628 Bronze Stars, more than 2,700 Purple Hearts and many other individual awards; and

WHEREAS, the 65th Infantry fought bravely as they loyally defended America against all enemies while facing discrimination, segregation and unusual obstacles; and

WHEREAS, national organizations, cities and states across the country have joined the national effort in procuring the Congressional Gold Medal for 65th Infantry Regiment; and

WHEREAS, the United States Congressional Gold Medal, considered the most distinguished, is an award bestowed by the United States Congress and is, along with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the United States; it is given to persons who have performed an achievement that has an impact on American history and culture that is likely to be recognized as a major achievement in the recipient's field long after the achievement; by every measure, the Borinqueneers are such individuals; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States strongly urges our 113th Congress to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment known as the Borinqueneers for their dedicated service to our country. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 308

SUPPORT THE ERECTION OF A MEMORIAL TO DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM VETERANS IN WASHINGTON, DC

WHEREAS, the proposal for such a memorial has already been presented to the United States Senate in Senate Bill 995 and the United States House of Representatives in HR 503; and

WHEREAS, the project will be totally funded from private donations; and

WHEREAS, the only item needed from the federal government is an appropriate piece of public property on the National Mall which to construct the monument; and

WHEREAS, to add impetus to beginning this project, the support of a major Veterans Support Organization is desirable; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, declares its support of such a monument to the veterans of Desert Shield/Desert Storm. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 309

SUPPORT THE ERECTION OF A MEMORIAL TO DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM VETERANS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

WHEREAS, the proposal for such a memorial has already been presented to the United States Senate in Senate Bill 995 and the United States House of Representatives in HR503; and

WHEREAS, the project will be totally funded from donations; and

WHEREAS, the only item needed from the federal government is an appropriate piece of public property on which to construct the monument, whether on the National Mall or not; and

WHEREAS, to add impetus to beginning this project, the support of a major Veterans Support Organization is desirable; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, declares its support of such a monument to the Veterans of Desert Shield/Desert Storm. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 310

ACCEPT THE HONOR AND REMEMBER FLAG FOR THE AMERICAN GOLD STAR MOTHERS AND FAMILIES

WHEREAS, it is in our nation's best interest to promote awareness of American lives lost in defense of our country; and

WHEREAS, the American flag is the main symbol promoting aforementioned awareness, it shall never be replaced at any funeral, ceremony, celebration or event of any kind; and

WHEREAS, the Honor and Remember flag has been created by a Gold Star family out of the pain of the loss of their hero. It is to be only an additional remembrance and comfort for the Gold Star families, while assisting the American flag in heralding the cost of freedom; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we accept the Honor and Remember flag solely as an additional support to the American flag in promoting the awareness of American heroes lost defending our country, in the name of the American Gold Star mothers and families. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 311

EXPAND THE DATES OF ELIGIBILITY FOR THE ARMED FORCES EXPEDITIONARY MEDAL

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense recognized service of the United States Armed Forces personnel in the Republic of Vietnam from 1 July 1958 to 3 July 1965, by awarding personnel the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; and

WHEREAS, Executive Order 11231 establishes the Vietnam Service Medal as recognition of service in the Republic or contiguous airspace or contiguous waters from 3 July 1965 to 28 March 1973; and

WHEREAS, service in the Republic of Vietnam during Operation Frequent Wind during 29 to 30 April 1975, was recognized by awarding eligible personnel the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; and

WHEREAS, Armed Forces personnel originally receiving the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for service in the Republic of Vietnam during either from 1 July 1958 to 3 July 1965 or 29 to 30 April 1975, are now qualified to receive the Vietnam Service Medal in lieu of the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; and

WHEREAS, after the Paris Peace Accords were signed 27 January 1973 and the last combat troops were withdrawn from the Republic of Vietnam on 29 March 1973 there were members of the United States Armed Forces remaining in Thailand and on ships in the coastal waters of Vietnam in support of the South Vietnamese Army from 29 March 1973 until Operation Frequent Wind thus placing United States personnel in harm's way, but not recognized by a campaign or service; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, petition Congress to direct the Secretary of Defense to authorize the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for those that served in Thailand and on the ships in the coastal waters of Vietnam from 29 March 1973 to 30 April 1975 in support of the South Vietnamese Army. (Approved)

Resolution No. 312

**EXPAND THE DATES OF ELIGIBILITY FOR THE
VIETNAM SERVICE MEDAL**

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense recognized service of the United States Armed Forces personnel in the Republic of Vietnam from 1 July 1958 to 3 July 1965, by awarding personnel the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; and

WHEREAS, Executive Order 11231 establishes the Vietnam Service Medal as recognition of service in the Republic or contiguous airspace or contiguous waters from 3 July 1965 to 28 March 1973; and

WHEREAS, service in the Republic of Vietnam during Operation Frequent Wind during 29 to 30 April 1975, was recognized by awarding eligible personnel the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; and

WHEREAS, Armed Forces personnel originally receiving the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for service in the Republic of Vietnam during either from 1 July 1958 to 3 July 1965 or 29 to 30 April 1975, are now qualified to receive the Vietnam Service Medal in lieu of the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; and

WHEREAS, after the Paris Peace Accords were signed 27 January 1973 and the last combat troops were withdrawn from the Republic of Vietnam on 29 March 1973 there were members of the United States Armed Forces remaining in Thailand and on ships in the Vietnam coastal waters in support of the South Vietnamese Army from 29 March 1973 until Operation Frequent Wind thus placing United States personnel in harm's way, but not recognized by a campaign or service; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, petition Congress to direct the Secretary of Defense to authorize the Vietnam Service Medal for those that served in Thailand and on the ships in the coastal waters of Vietnam from 29 March 1973 to 30 April 1975 in support of the Vietnamese Army. (Approved)

Resolution No. 313

SOLICIT CONGRESS TO UPDATE THE NATIONAL CHARTER SECTION
230102

WHEREAS, the 2014 Manual of Procedure and Ritual Member's obligation state in part, "I will bear true allegiance to the Constitution of the United States of America"; and

WHEREAS, the VFW pledge on the back of the membership application states in part, "I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of the United States of America"; and

WHEREAS, we, as enlisted veterans, swore an Enlistment Oath or as officers, swore and Oath of Office to bear allegiance to the Constitution of the United States of America; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, solicit the Congress to change the National Charter Section 230102 to read in part, "to maintain true allegiance to the Constitution of the United States of America, and fidelity to its Government and laws." (Approved)

Resolution No. 314

REQUESTING THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS TO REQUEST A
CHANGE IN CONGRESSIONAL CHARTER TO INCLUDE ALL

WHEREAS, Section 230101-Organization (a) Federal Charter states: "Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States..., a national association of men..." is outdated as the gender of "men" is not exclusive to veterans of the America's foreign wars; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars to request a change in the congressional charter changing the word, "men" to "comrades" in the above section and in all others where the word "men" appears in the charter. (Rejected)

RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Resolution No. 401

SUPPORT THE TROOPS AND THEIR MISSION IN THE WAR ON TERRORISM

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States supports the President of the United States and our military and intelligence agencies in their mission to identify and destroy terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere; and

WHEREAS, it is critical that the Administration and Congress provide the military with the resources necessary to succeed in battle, as well as to properly care for those who return home wounded, ill or injured, and their families; and

WHEREAS, it is equally critical that U.S. intelligence agencies be properly resourced in order to identify threats to U.S. security and interests by organized extremist groups or lone individuals, both foreign and domestic; and

WHEREAS, it is essential that the Administration and Congress heed the expert counsel of field commanders regarding future troop buildups or reductions, and modernization initiatives. This includes working together in a bipartisan manner to end the draconian effects of sequestration; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support the President and the brave men and women in uniform who prosecute the war on terrorism, and that we call upon the Administration and Congress to provide the military and intelligence agencies the necessary resources to defeat our enemies. (Approved)

Resolution No. 402

SECURE AMERICA'S BORDERS

WHEREAS, America's security is threatened by foreign nationals intent on doing harm who enter the U.S. illegally, as well as those who enter legally but intentionally overstay their work, education or tourist visas; and

WHEREAS, physical barriers are being erected along 670 miles of our 2,000-mile border with Mexico, but are virtually nonexistent along the 5,500-mile border we share with Canada, or along 12,000 miles of U.S. coastline; and

WHEREAS, the Customs and Border Protection workforce has increased to 60,000 to operate its 328 sea, land and air Ports of Entry, and

to provide a physical monitoring and enforcement presence along America's southern border; and

WHEREAS, increased surveillance, enforcement, intelligence collection assets and economic support to border states has helped to reduce violent crime and led to the deportation of almost 775,000 illegal immigrants over the past two years, more than half of whom for criminal convictions other than immigrations violations; and

WHEREAS, more must still be done to secure America's borders; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Administration and Congress to fast-track funding for the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice to expedite all initiatives to secure America's borders from all threats, foreign and domestic; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we insist the U.S. government continue to aggressively identify and deport illegal aliens who commit crimes. (Approved)

Resolution No. 403

HALT ROGUE NATION WMD PROGRAMS

WHEREAS, the greatest threat to American security are weapons of mass destruction—and the technology by which to make and employ them—in the hands of North Korea and Iran, as well as nonaligned terrorist organizations; and

WHEREAS, the Administration and Congress must remain suspicious of the actions and motives of North Korea and Iran, who repeatedly reject diplomatic attempts to reduce tensions and normalize relations; and

WHEREAS, North Korea continually breaks earlier agreements by conducting underground nuclear detonations, test firing missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, and by stating it no longer honors the 1953 armistice, which is a direct threat to South Korea. North Korea is also a known exporter of ballistic missiles and its technology to countries unfriendly to the United States, notably Iran, Syria and Libya; and

WHEREAS, Iran's nuclear program is a major contention with the Western world due to suspicions that Iran could divert the civilian nuclear technology to a weapons program. This has led the UN Security Council to impose serious sanctions against Iran to further isolate it from the international economic scene. The 2014 initiative to temporarily ease oil exporting sanctions in exchange for Iran shutting down its nuclear work should be viewed with great skepticism until independently verified; and

WHEREAS, nonaligned terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, continue to demonstrate with deadly consequences their ability to strike globally without remorse; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we call upon the Administration and Congress to do all within their power to halt the nuclear weapons development programs of North Korea and Iran, and to stop the transfer of nuclear weapons technology and material to terrorist states and organizations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we support and encourage the U.S. Government to penalize all American companies and corporations that conduct business with North Korea and Iran. (Approved)

Resolution No. 404

KEEP DEFENSE BUDGET RELEVANT

WHEREAS, America's Number #1 priority is to defend herself and her citizens, yet efforts to lower defense spending below 5 percent of Gross Domestic Product will jeopardize the Defense Department's ability to properly train, equip and field a military that can defeat all enemies, as well as safeguard vital U.S. interests around the globe; and

WHEREAS, today, defense spending is approximately 20 percent of the entire federal budget, but it accounts for almost 50 percent of discretionary spending. Many nondefense special interest groups would prefer more defense dollars be rerouted to social programs. To the VFW, if the purpose of a social program is to help save lives, then a strong military is the best social program in America; and

WHEREAS, the nation's economic recovery plan is forcing the Defense Department to reduce its overall budget by at least \$487 billion over the next decade, an amount that is doubled by sequestration. To rein in costs, DOD is implementing a number of in-house initiatives to lower the size of the active force by more than 100,000 troops, and is recommending that Congress close excess installations, eliminate aircraft and ships, overhaul the current military retirement system, and shift more healthcare costs onto military dependents and retirees; and

WHEREAS, once our war in Afghanistan ends, it is inevitable that the military will shrink in terms of installations, manpower and material, but bringing the troops home will not make the world less dangerous or our enemies any more predictable. It is crucial that any proposed reduction not jeopardize America's security or break faith with those who serve or have served her in uniform. A nation that cherishes its freedom and supports the troops can afford to do both; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we strongly urge Congress to end sequestration and to provide the necessary funding equal to not less than 5 percent of GDP for the

readiness, training, modernization, healthcare, and quality of life initiatives for the armed forces of today and tomorrow. (Approved)

Resolution No. 405

BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENSE A NATIONAL SECURITY PRIORITY

WHEREAS, the greatest strategic threat to the United States is an attack by one or more ballistic missiles armed with nuclear or other warheads of mass destruction. The United States today remains completely vulnerable to this form of attack; and

WHEREAS, the Cold War ballistic missile threat to the United States continues to subside because of changes in strategic relationships; however, continued modernization programs and the worldwide proliferation of technology has led other nations like North Korea and Iran to possess or develop ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear, biological or chemical warheads; and

WHEREAS, ballistic missile defense systems have a proven capability to be able to detect, intercept and destroy ballistic missiles in flight. Yet, despite the growing threat of rogue nations, unstable third world countries and nonaligned terrorist organizations, the United States still has no strategic missile defense system to protect our country and her citizens from attack; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support the continued development, testing and deployment of ballistic missile defense systems to protect our country and our deployed military forces; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call upon the Congress to fully fund ballistic missile defense Research & Development programs as a national security priority. (Approved)

Resolution No. 406

SUPPORT THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

WHEREAS, the Republic of Korea is a historic democratic ally of the United States, a valuable trading partner, and a key link in the northeast Asia defense chain. Numerous treaties are in force with the Republic of Korea concerning economic and technical cooperation, education, maritime matters, trade and commerce, and the Mutual Defense Treaty, that was enacted on November 17, 1954; and

WHEREAS, its neighbor, however, continues to maintain an extremely large and forward-deployed military force capable of launching no-notice offensive operations against South Korea; and

WHEREAS, North Korea's "supreme leader," a 30ish European-

educated Kim Jong-un, has expanded upon the same aggressive path established by his father and grandfather. He purged his inner counsel of three defense ministers and four army chiefs of staff—the most prominent of whom was his uncle—and replaced them with officers more loyal to him; and

WHEREAS, North Korea continues to escalate tensions in the region by test launching potentially nuclear-capable missiles and conducting underground nuclear explosions. It is a known exporter of ballistic missiles and its technology to countries unfriendly to the United States, notably Iran, Syria and Libya, and it periodically deploys its armed forces along the demilitarized zone and the Joint Security Area in Panmunjom; and

WHEREAS, the continued unpredictability of North Korea makes the presence of U.S. ground and air forces inside the Republic of Korea even more critical as a deterrent to aggression; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the government of the United States to maintain a substantial military presence in South Korea, and to increase military aid and assistance through modern weaponry and technology to help promote peace and stability in the region. (Approved)

Resolution No. 407

SUPPORT THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON TAIWAN

WHEREAS, the Republic of China on Taiwan is a historic democratic ally of the United States, a valuable trading partner, and key link in the Western Pacific defense chain; and

WHEREAS, the Taiwan Relations Act (PL 96-8) codifies the policy of the United States to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character to bolster peace and stability in the cross-strait environment; and

WHEREAS, on January 1, 1979, then-President Carter terminated diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Taiwan, and instead established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in an attempt to help maintain peace, security and stability in the Western Pacific. This loss of diplomatic status prevents the President of Taiwan from receiving the same respect and courtesies afforded other Heads of State who visit the U.S.; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Administration and Congress to strictly adhere to the concepts of the Taiwan Relations Act by approving the sale of state-of-the-art military equipment, weapons and technology to maintain an adequate defense capability; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call upon the Administration and Congress to support the admission of the Republic of China on Taiwan into the United Nations, and to afford the President of Taiwan the same respect and privileges due other visiting Heads of State. (Approved)

Resolution No. 408

PRESERVE THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE

WHEREAS, the United States of America is still a nation at war, but congressional budget decisions have forced the Department of Defense to reduce spending by \$487 billion over a 10-year period, an amount that is doubled by a looming sequester that is on temporary hold until fiscal year 2016; and

WHEREAS, to offset expenses in its operations and maintenance and modernization accounts, DOD in the near-term is recommending to retire weapons systems, further reduce troop strength, limit military pay raises, increase healthcare deductibles and copayments, create an indexed TRICARE for Life enrollment fee, and make the Defense Commissary Agency more self-sufficient; and

WHEREAS, the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission is tasked with reviewing all DOD pay, retirement and Quality of Life programs, as well as those programs provided by the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor and others. The Commission is required to submit its recommendations to the president in February 2015; and

WHEREAS, DOD's FY 2015 budget recommendation to lower troop numbers, retire weapons systems and reduce benefits is the direct result of a military struggling to survive a budget crisis that will continue to grow the longer Congress is unable to end the sequester. The cumulative impact of DOD's action, in combination with a better civilian economy, could impact both recruiting and retention, and possibly threaten the continued viability of the All-Volunteer Force; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we will redouble our efforts to work with Congress and the administration to preserve the all-volunteer force, to end the sequester, and to help bring some financial stability to a military that will continue to operate in a very dangerous and unpredictable world; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Department of Defense to hold off any unilateral actions to eliminate or reduce military pay and benefits until after the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission report is submitted. (Approved)

Resolution No. 409

LINK MILITARY PAY INCREASES TO PRIVATE-SECTOR INCREASES

WHEREAS, military pay raises are linked by law to the increase in private-sector wages, as measured by the Employment Cost Index (ECI); and

WHEREAS, annual military pay raises were capped in the 1990s at one-half percent below private-sector growth, which in 1999 resulted in a military pay gap of 13.5 percent below private-sector wages; and

WHEREAS, to help close the gap, Congress directed military pay raises from fiscal years 2000-2006 to be one-half percent above private-sector wage increases, and raises from FY 2007-forward to match the increase in the ECI, unless Congress authorized an additional increase; and

WHEREAS, the 1.7 percent military pay raise for FY 2013 matched the ECI, but the Pentagon, in its campaign to slow the growth of military compensation due to budget constraints and the sequester, recommended that future pay increases be limited, despite knowing it could restore a double-digit military pay gap similar to the past; and

WHEREAS, over the objections of the VFW and many other veteran and military service organizations—but with the approval of Congress—the new “slow the growth” initiative took effect with the FY 2014 military pay increase of 1 percent, even though the ECI increase was 1.5 percent. The Defense Department has requested another 1 percent increase for FY 2015; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we call upon Congress to maintain military base pay comparability with private-sector wages by requiring DOD to match the annual ECI increase. (Approved)

Resolution No. 410

PRESERVE MILITARY TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

WHEREAS, the military’s Tuition Assistance program is an invaluable in-service benefit for all service members in every rank, especially for noncommissioned officers who are highly encouraged to have an associates or bachelor’s degree before being selected for promotion into the Top 3 ranks, and for company grade officers who are required to have advanced degrees before being eligible for promotion to field grade; and

WHEREAS, in early 2013, the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps deemed TA to be a non-priority and suspended their programs in an effort to control personnel-related costs in a budget-constrained environment. The VFW intervened by working with Congress to fully reinstate TA on

behalf of the estimated 300,000 service members who rely upon the benefit annually to advance their personal and professional development goals; and

WHEREAS, since the military highly encourages or requires its members to have civilian degrees, Congress must not allow the services to eliminate TA funding or to require individual Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen or Marines to use their Department of Veterans Affairs-funded GI Bill programs while they are still on active-duty; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the military services to fully fund and maintain their Tuition Assistance programs, and for Congress to work with DOD to develop TA policies that will ensure the program remains a quality professional development and military retention tool. (Approved)

Resolution No. 411

ENSURE DOD COMPLIANCE WITH TAP MANDATE

WHEREAS, the goal of the military's Transition Assistance Program is to ease the difficult transition from active duty into civilian life by offering job-search assistance, advice on available educational and healthcare programs and other earned benefits; and

WHEREAS, Congress mandated TAP pre-separation counseling for all service members, and for the military to develop additional tracked curricula focused on education, employment, vocational careers and entrepreneurship in collaboration with the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Education and Labor, as well as with the Small Business Administration; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense has implemented a new TAP curriculum for separating service members, but in congressional testimony, DOD said it does not regard the additional curriculum tracks to be part of their TAP mandate. In addition, not every military installation permits nationally-accredited veterans' service organizations to participate in pre-separation or TAP briefings; and

WHEREAS, transitioning service members lose their access to TAP resources once they separate, which is when they may need those resources the most; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge DOD to include the additional curriculum tracks in its mandatory pre-separation counseling, and to incorporate nationally-accredited veterans' service organization representation in all programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we request Congress to require DOD and its partner agencies to periodically update their TAP information

and procedures to maintain program relevancy, and to allow veterans to access TAP resources after separating from the military. (Approved)

Resolution No. 412

PROVIDE DD-214S TO ALL RESERVE COMPONENT MEMBERS

WHEREAS, all active, Guard and Reserve veterans are eligible for VA medical care, as well as compensation and pension, if a service-connected injury occurred while on active duty; and

WHEREAS, eligibility for other VA benefits is based on presenting proof of active military service in the form of a DD Form 214. According to Title 10, U.S. Code, a member of the Guard or Reserve can only receive a DD-214 if they serve 90 days of continuous active duty, although Service Secretaries have the authority to issue the forms for shorter time periods; and

WHEREAS, the Guard and Reserve constituted one-quarter of all ground forces deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 13 years, and half of all Air Force airlift, yet similar to the active force, not every Reserve Component member has had the opportunity to deploy much less be activated for 90 consecutive days; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to delete the 90-day activation requirement in Title 10, U.S. Code, and provide the DD Form 214 to all Reserve Component members who separate or retire under conditions other than dishonorable. (Approved)

Resolution No. 413

LOWER RESERVE COMPONENT RETIREMENT PAY AGE TO 55

WHEREAS, 12 years of conflict enabled the Reserve Component to evolve from a strategic reserve to an operational force that provided a quarter of all ground troops and half the airlift to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, yet the retirement age requirement did not evolve accordingly. Current law stipulates that Reserve Component members who complete 20 or more qualifying years of honorable service must wait until age 60 before they are eligible to receive military retirement pay; and

WHEREAS, the FY 2008 defense bill did reduce the retirement pay age by 90 days for every 90 activated, but only for those Guardsmen/Reservists who earned active credit after Jan. 29, 2008, therefore exempting the equally honorable service of hundreds of thousands of Reserve Component members who were activated between 9/11 and Jan. 28, 2008; and

WHEREAS, the active force cannot meet its national military commitments without the 1.1 million men and women who serve in the

Reserve Components—the Army and Air National Guard, and the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard Reserves—who collectively represent one-half of America's total military strength; and

WHEREAS, a truly seamless and integrated total force is one that does not make rigid distinctions among active, Guard and Reserve forces, and one that provides a retirement benefit equal to their contributions; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Congress and the Administration to lower the Reserve Component retirement pay eligibility age from 60 to 55.

(Approved)

Resolution No. 414

CORRECT FY 2008 NDAA RESERVE RETIREMENT PAY PROVISION

WHEREAS, since Sept. 11, 2001, America's reliance on its Reserve Component has been unprecedented in our nation's history. Almost 900,000 Reserve Component members have served on active duty since 9/11—including more than 300,000 who have served multiple tours; and

WHEREAS, Reserve Component retirees are eligible to begin receiving their military retirement pay at age 60, but in an effort to recognize their service, the fiscal year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act allows National Guard and Reserve members to lower their retirement pay eligibility age by three months for every 90 days served on active duty after Jan. 29, 2008; and

WHEREAS, the overwhelming majority of Reserve Component members, however, are ineligible to credit their active service toward an earlier retirement because they were activated prior to the NDAA's Jan. 29, 2008, implementation date; and

WHEREAS, the NDAA also failed to include a carryover provision, which means no early retirement credit is granted unless the 90-day activation occurred within the same fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, this inequity discounts the dedication and sacrifice of our Reserve Component members serving at home and abroad; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to enact legislation to fix the FY 2008 NDAA and retroactively grant early retirement credit, with a carryover provision, to all Reserve Component members who were activated in support of a contingency operation from 9/11 forward. (Approved)

Resolution No. 415

PROVIDE FULL CONCURRENT RECEIPT OF MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY AND VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION

WHEREAS, Congress passed legislation in 2004 that allowed for the gradual phase-in of full concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation for service-connected injuries or disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the 10-year phase-in period ends this year, which means military retirees with 20 or more years of service and a 50-percent or higher VA disability rating will no longer have their military retirement pay reduced by the amount of their VA disability compensation; and

WHEREAS, the law does not provide the same equity to service-connected disabled military retirees with VA ratings of 40 percent or below, or Chapter 61 retirees who were medically retired with less than 20 years, regardless of VA disability rating; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support legislation for the full concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and VA disability compensation without offset and regardless of rating percentage. (Approved)

Resolution No. 416

MST INCIDENT REPORTING AND TREATMENT

WHEREAS, the American Journal of Public Health reports that the Military Sexual Trauma rate among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans exceeds 15 percent of women and almost 1 percent of men. Still, the Defense Department's annual report on Sexual Assault in the Military Services indicated that only 2,420 females reported being sexual assaulted in fiscal year 2011; and

WHEREAS, it is widely held that a far greater number of MST victims do not come forward while on active duty due to embarrassment, lack of command action when they do file reports, or for fear of personal and/or professional reprisal, to include perceived "red flags" in their military personnel folders; and

WHEREAS, DOD's "Zero Tolerance" campaign has made great strides to encourage prevention efforts and tighten field reporting and managerial oversight, to include providing restricted and unrestricted options for reporting a sexual assault. DOD has begun keeping records that provide evidentiary support of the assault and its effect on service members, and has taken steps to improve the actions of first responders as well as to provide confidential counseling and other specialized treatments, yet many MST victims are not aware of such services, which

could help alleviate mental health issues commonly associated with sexual assault; and

WHEREAS, although the Department of Veterans Affairs does not require MST victims to have first reported an incident or to have a VA disability rating before receiving treatment, more can still be done inside DOD with regards to prevention, treatment and reporting; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge DOD to continue strengthening its "Zero Tolerance" campaign by encouraging all MST victims to report their attacks, to provide victims with proper medical and mental health care, and to aggressively investigate every reported incident and punish their attackers as appropriate. (Approved)

Resolution No. 417

REPEAL SBP/DIC OFFSET

WHEREAS, the surviving spouses of retired military members who die from service-connected conditions are entitled to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. However, if the military retiree was also enrolled in the Defense Department's Survivor Benefits Plan (SBP), the surviving spouse's SBP benefit would have a dollar-for-dollar offset by the amount of DIC benefits; and

WHEREAS, SBP and DIC payments are paid for two different reasons. Similar to life insurance, SBP is purchased by the retiree and is intended to provide 55 percent of his/her retirement pay to the surviving spouse. DIC is a modest indemnity compensation benefit of \$1,215 per month that is paid to surviving spouses whose loved ones died from service-connected conditions; and

WHEREAS, no other federal retiree's surviving spouse has such an offset penalty, but more than 61,000 surviving military spouses are affected by this "widow's tax"; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to repeal the Survivor's Benefit Plan and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset. (Approved)

Resolution No. 418

CREATE A UNIFIED MILITARY MEDICAL COMMAND

WHEREAS, Army, Navy and Air Force medical professionals provide the highest level of care to all eligible service members, dependents and retirees, yet a 2006 Defense Department proposal to create a Unified Medical Command continues to be ignored due to

interservice rivalries and perceived mission and cultural differences between the services; and

WHEREAS, military medicine operates in a joint world, from contingency and humanitarian deployments to meeting the healthcare needs of more than 9 million multiservice beneficiaries with 59 inpatient hospitals and 364 clinics; and

WHEREAS, despite the unwillingness of the services to discuss a joint command, some universal medical processes and operations have already merged. Research is aligned under the Army Medical Research and Material Command at Fort Detrick, Md.; all medics and corpsmen are trained at Fort Sam Houston, Texas; information management and technology, facilities management, contracting and procurement, and logistical and financial support services are being consolidated; and 45 percent of total beneficiaries are now being served by the Defense Health Agency, which was activated on Oct. 1, 2013, to merge military medicine in six major markets—San Antonio, the National Capitol Region, Hawaii, Colorado Springs, and in Washington State's Puget Sound and Virginia's Tidewater Region; and

WHEREAS, the military medical commands can no longer afford a parochial attitude, not with a downsized military, reduced defense budget, threats of new base closure rounds, a continued high operations tempo, and the still unfulfilled requirement to create one interoperable electronic medical record between DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Defense Health Agency has proven that the future of military medicine is in jointness. The services need to stop resisting and start discussing how to get there from here; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Department of Defense to use the Defense Health Agency as a springboard toward creating a Unified Medical Command.
(Approved)

Resolution No. 419

CREATE A SEARCHABLE DOD MILITARY AWARDS DATABASE

WHEREAS, in an attempt to satisfy congressional concern in the aftermath of the Supreme Court overturn of the Stolen Valor Act of 2005 and the subsequent passage of the new Stolen Valor Act of 2013, the Defense Department created a Military Awards for Valor website at <http://valor.defense.gov/Home.aspx>; and

WHEREAS, the DOD website lists all recipients of the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross and Air Force Cross, but the list of Silver Star recipients only goes back to Sept. 11, 2001. Also missing are photos of the recipients and hyperlinks to their medal citations, military-issued press releases or base newspaper articles, as applicable; and

WHEREAS, all military decorations are government-issued, yet there is still no government-run, searchable military decorations database to properly preserve for posterity who earned what award, therefore enabling con artists to falsely claim someone else's valor for personal gain; and

WHEREAS, America's wars of past and present have produced thousands of true military heroes who were properly recognized for their selfless service and bravery, and untold more whose heroic actions died with them in battle. The Stolen Valor Act was enacted to protect those few who survived, and the memories of those who did not, from false heroes who seek public acclaim and personal gain during an era of great public respect for the military institution as a whole, and for those men and women who wear or have worn the uniform; and

WHEREAS, a searchable military decorations database is the only responsible way to properly document the medals the military issues, which would also help the Department of Veterans Affairs in their mission to provide healthcare, disability compensation and burial services to eligible veterans; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Department of Defense to create a searchable military decorations database to properly document for posterity our nation's true heroes. (Approved)

Resolution No. 420

PROTECT POW/MIA FULL ACCOUNTING MISSION FUNDING

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is deeply committed to achieving the fullest possible accounting of 83,000 missing Americans that include approximately 73,600 from World War II, 7,900 from the Korean War, 1,640 from the Vietnam War, 126 from the Cold War, and 6 post-Vietnam that include Operations Eldorado Canyon (1), Desert Storm (2) and Iraqi Freedom (3); and

WHEREAS, the FY 2010 National Defense Authorization Act requires the Defense Department to begin identifying a minimum of 200 sets of remains by 2015; however, the congressional mandate came without additional funding or personnel. Beginning with FY 2012, the Administration began proposing significant budget increases that would double the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command's budget to \$143.9 million by FY 2016; and

WHEREAS, whether programmed budget increases come to fruition remains to be determined, especially since it appears the two largest accounting organizations—JPAC and the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO)—might merge into one organization; and

WHEREAS, mission accomplishment is what's important to the VFW, not organizational structure, yet full congressional funding for all organizations involved in the Full Accounting Mission is critical to meeting and exceeding the congressional mandate. Full funding is even more important if recovery operations in North Korea ever resume after a now nine-year interruption due to U.S. safety and security concerns; and

WHEREAS, without additional funding to meet the expanded requirements, JPAC could be forced to postpone or cancel difficult recovery sites in favor of potentially more productive locations, such as mass burials or multi-crewman aircraft crashes. Full funding enables JPAC to efficiently plan, resource and accomplish its worldwide mission to recover, identify and return to their families all missing American service members from all wars and conflicts; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we call upon Congress to fully fund the requested amounts for all DOD organizations involved in the Full Accounting Mission. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 421

CALL FOR MORE UNILATERAL POW/MIA ACTIONS BY VIETNAM

WHEREAS, 2,583 Americans were listed as missing and unaccounted-for at the end of the Vietnam War. As of February 2014, the number of missing has been reduced to 1,643 due to a combination of increased U.S. Government emphasis, better research and identification technology, stronger diplomatic ties with host governments, and onsite access; and

WHEREAS, Vietnam had a comprehensive wartime and post-war process to collect and retain information and remains, and according to the National League of POW/MIA Families, this unilateral effort enabled the Vietnamese to locate and return remains to U.S. custody, along with records that continue to offer significant potential; and

WHEREAS, onsite joint field operations are also achieving increased results. The process now includes both U.S.-led Joint Excavation Teams and Vietnamese-led Recovery Teams assisted by fewer Americans who are experts in their fields of forensic science, EOD and medical. This formula allows a greater number of teams to "increase the pace and scope of field operations," as requested by Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, increased military-to-military relations is also benefiting the Full Accounting Mission. U.S. Navy assets are increasingly allowed to participate in underwater survey and recovery operations, which has long been advocated for by the VFW; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we encourage Vietnam to continue to expand the number and

frequency of Vietnamese-led recovery operations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in this cooperative effort, that we urge Vietnam to continue to authorize its officials to locate and release immediately to the United States all records relating to Americans missing from the Vietnam War, and to urge the Vietnamese people to turn over the remains of Americans or information on American burial sites, and any reports of live American servicemen. (Approved)

Resolution No. 422

REDESIGNATE THE POSITION OF SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
TO THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY AND MARINE CORPS

WHEREAS, on November 10, 1775, the Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia passed a resolution directing that two battalions of Marines be raised for the service as landing forces with the fleet, thereby establishing the Continental Marines and signifying the birth of the United States Marine Corps; and

WHEREAS, Marines throughout our Nation's history have often been called upon to be the first into battle, and they have accepted this duty without hesitation, and with a sense of honor and esprit de corps that is second to none; and

WHEREAS, throughout the 238-year history of the Navy and Marine Corps, they have fought side by side as a cohesive team against any interest that would do or cause harm to this Nation; and

WHEREAS, the Marine Corps is the only service in the Department of Defense without a specific service Secretary, as the Secretary of the Navy serves as both the Secretary of the Navy and Secretary of the Marine Corps; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support legislation to redesignate the position of the Secretary of the Navy to the Secretary of the Navy and the Marine Corps. (Approved)

Resolution No. 423

USS LIBERTY RECOGNITION

WHEREAS, the United States Navy conducts worldwide operations in support of foreign policy objectives. In June 1967, the technical research ship USS LIBERTY (AGTR-5), was supporting such objectives patrolling in international waters of the eastern Mediterranean; and

WHEREAS, on June 8, 1967, following hours of surveillance, the USS LIBERTY was attacked without provocation by Israeli air and naval

forces. The coordinated, concentrated attack resulted in the deaths of 34 Americans and 171 wounded; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of their heroic efforts to save their ship, USS LIBERTY crewmembers were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, 11 Silver Stars, two Navy Crosses, and the ship's captain, Navy Cmdr. William. L. McGonagle, was awarded the Medal of Honor; and

WHEREAS, despite the heroism of ship and crew, the Navy has yet to establish a memorial to the USS LIBERTY, although two other ships similarly attacked without provocation and with fewer casualties (the USS STARK and USS COLE), have memorials; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support legislation to direct the Navy to recognize the USS LIBERTY with a permanent memorial at its home port of Norfolk Naval Base, Va.; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW also supports legislation to direct the Navy to recognize the heroism of the crew of the USS LIBERTY by naming a new guided-missile destroyer the USS MCGONAGLE and a littoral combat ship the USS LIBERTY; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge these recognition efforts to occur on or before June 8, 2017, the 50th anniversary of the attack.
(Approved)

Resolution No. 424

SUPPORT THE STATE OF ISRAEL

WHEREAS, the State of Israel is a historic, democratic ally of the United States of America, and a key link in the defense of democratic principles in the Middle East; and

WHEREAS, Israel's neighbors continue to escalate tensions by firing short-range rockets into nearby towns and villages; and

WHEREAS, Iran is one America's and Israel's foremost enemies, and continues to be one of the most serious threats to regional stability due to its conventional military forces, ballistic missiles, nuclear research and proliferation, and as an exporter of terrorism; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the United States Government to continue to support the State of Israel by approving the sale of state-of-the-art military equipment, weapons and technology to help them maintain an adequate defense capability in order to survive as a nation. (Approved)

RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS SERVICE

Resolution No. 601

ADEQUATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BUDGET

WHEREAS, there are about 21.6 million living veterans; and

WHEREAS, more than 2 million men and women have served in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11/2001; and

WHEREAS, VA anticipates that enrollment in the Veterans Health Administration will grow to nearly 9 million veterans; and

WHEREAS, more than 6 million of those veterans will be seen by VA for health care services; and

WHEREAS, even though appropriations for VA continue to increased, they have not kept pace with demand and the rate of inflation; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States that we urge the Congress of the United States authorize appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs which fully fund and maintain the integrity and enhancement of veteran entitlement programs and health care system. (Approved)

Resolution No. 602

OPPOSE VA PHARMACEUTICAL CO-PAYMENT INCREASES

WHEREAS, veterans, other than those with a service-connected disability rating of 50 percent or greater, those who are receiving medications for their service-connected conditions or those whose incomes fall below the non service-connected pension threshold, must pay a co-payment for each 30-day supply of medications obtained through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and

WHEREAS, there have been repeated proposals to raise the pharmaceutical co-payment, placing an undue hardship on many veterans; and

WHEREAS, in 2010, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, using his statutory authority, raised the pharmaceutical co-payment from \$8 to \$9 for each 30 day supply for priority groups 7 and 8, and authority to raise it again in the future exists; and

WHEREAS, the increase in costs of the benefit would likely cause many veterans to turn away from the VA health care system and would

serve to inequitably balance the federal budget through veterans programs; and

WHEREAS, pharmaceuticals are part of the VA's standard health benefits package and must be provided to all eligible veterans; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we oppose increases in the VA pharmaceutical co-payment. (Approved)

Resolution No. 603

MAKE CHAMPVA PAYMENTS FAIR TO PROVIDERS

WHEREAS, the fees paid under the CHAMPVA medical insurance to providers of medical services are less than the fees paid by private insurance; and

WHEREAS, these reimbursement rates are subject to a pending rate cut of 24 percent under the Balanced Budget Act of 1997; and

WHEREAS, many private medical providers will not accept CHAMPVA, and TRICARE because of the inequity of payment; and

WHEREAS, the government plans are the only insurance that many 100 percent disabled and retired military personnel have and the proposed reductions will prevent veterans and their dependents from adequate medical treatment and care; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support legislation and regulations requiring that CHAMPVA, TRICARE and other plans providing medical care for retired and disabled veterans be kept competitive with private insurance providers. (Approved)

Resolution No. 604

VA MEDICARE SUBVENTION

WHEREAS, the VFW views it as essential that the VA health care system provide qualifying veterans with timely and accessible care; and

WHEREAS, the VA collects third party payment for treatment, but current law prevents VA from collecting from the Medicare Trust Fund; and

WHEREAS, a large number of VA's patients are Medicare eligible; and

WHEREAS, VA's ability to deliver health care efficiently, effectively and at lower cost than does the private health care industry

ensures that Medicare will be billed at lower rates than private health care providers; and

WHEREAS, the diversion of Medicare eligible veterans from the private sector to VA will result in both lower costs to Medicare and greater reimbursements to VA; and

WHEREAS, it is now absolutely essential that VA be authorized to collect federal dollars to supplement its annual appropriations to ensure adequate funding for the Veterans Health Administration; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support enactment into law of legislation authorizing VA to collect and retain Medicare reimbursement dollars from care that is provided to non-service connected veterans who are Medicare eligible and who seek care through the Veterans Health Administration. (Approved)

Resolution No. 605

CONSIDER TREATMENT FOR A PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE CONNECTED CONDITION AS A CLAIM FOR VA COMPENSATION

WHEREAS, many service members have suffered from diseases that are recognized to be presumptive; and

WHEREAS, veterans suffering from diseases which include many types of cancer, as well as diabetes and other chronic diseases may not be aware that they may be eligible for service connection, even if they are being treated in a VA facility; and

WHEREAS, many VA medical facilities are not currently staffed or equipped to provide appropriate counseling to veterans or their families on how to file a claim for service connected benefits; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to enact legislation requiring that treatment by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for a condition or disease recognized as presumptively service connected will be considered to be an informal claim for service connection for compensation purposes. (Approved)

Resolution No. 606

EXTENDING GULF WAR PRESUMPTIONS, REGISTRY AND HEALTH CARE TO AFGHANISTAN THEATER VETERANS

WHEREAS, many service members have served in Operation Enduring Freedom; and

WHEREAS, these veterans have served under circumstances similar to those serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, and the first Persian Gulf War; and

WHEREAS, Afghanistan was not considered part of the Southwest Asia theater of operations during Operation Desert Storm and the VA did not include Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, veterans of Afghanistan are suffering from similar undiagnosed conditions as those who have served in Iraq; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress and the VA must support research to verify whether service members who served in Afghanistan are subjected to the same environmental hazards as those who served in Iraq, so that appropriate benefits, including eligibility for compensation based on undiagnosed illnesses, and medical care eligibility, will be provided, retroactive to the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that while research is ongoing, allow veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom access to the Gulf War Registry Health Exam. (Approved)

Resolution No. 607

NURSING HOME ELIGIBILITY

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States has called upon Congress to enact legislation to regulate and expand eligibility for VA health care and provide all veterans with mandated access to the full continuum of VA health care services which include nursing home care; and

WHEREAS, current VA regulations extend VA eligibility for nursing home care to those veterans who are service-connected at 70 percent or above or those seeking nursing home care for a service-connected disability; and

WHEREAS, the demand for VA nursing home care is increasing as the veteran population continues to age; and

WHEREAS, VA nursing home care units are VA hospital-based and provide an intensive and extensive level of nursing home care supported by the clinical specialties and other services within the host hospital; and

WHEREAS, VA nursing home care is considered the "safety net" for VA outpatient services such as residential care, respite care, hospital-based home care, adult day health care, homemaker/home health aid services and other extended care programs; and

WHEREAS, VA, through their own statements, recognizes the

difference in eligibility for nursing home care and inpatient hospital care as inconsistent with the principles of sound medical practice, which support continuity of care for veterans; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to establish a standard VA nursing home entitlement for all veterans. (Approved)

Resolution No. 608

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY HEALTH CARE

WHEREAS, since 2000, more than 287,000 service members have sustained Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) including those that served in Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and New Dawn; and

WHEREAS, veterans with blast injuries, blunt trauma, motor vehicle accidents, and falls are at risk for TBI which often goes unrecognized; and

WHEREAS, even mildly injured TBI patients may have long-term mental and physical health consequences; and

WHEREAS, there has been universal recognition that veterans with severe TBI will need a lifetime of intensive services to care for their injuries and many VA medical facilities are not currently staffed or equipped to provide the necessary and appropriate screening, or quality health care services to veterans suffering from TBI; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to provide sufficient funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that appropriate screening, diagnostic services, treatment and life-long case management services are available to every veteran suffering from TBI; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase research pertaining to, screening methods, diagnostic tools, and more effective treatments for traumatic brain injury patients to ensure that TBI veterans are receiving quality standardized treatment and rehabilitation care available. (Approved)

Resolution No. 609

PTSD AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has indicated that treating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and providing Mental Health Care among returning war veterans is one of its highest priorities, and the VA operates a nationwide network of nearly 200 specialized PTSD outpatient treatment programs; and

WHEREAS, the early and accurate screening, diagnosis and treatment for PTSD, depression, substance use, and other mental health disorders, yields optimal patient outcomes, and statistics have shown that these conditions, left untreated or poorly treated, can lead to increases in suicide attempts or suicides among a host of other negative consequences; and

WHEREAS, a total number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans diagnosed with PTSD as of March 2013 is 270,000; and

WHEREAS, available research has not sufficiently evaluated the clinical effectiveness of treatment programs for veterans diagnosed with and/or suffering from the effects of traumatic brain injuries, PTSD, and adequate research into the brain's response to internal and external influences that could result in mental illness has yet to be undertaken; and

WHEREAS, VA expects an increase in PTSD conditions as Veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan after multiple tours of duty; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we strongly urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to continue to adequately staff VA mental health treatment and research programs.
(Approved)

Resolution No. 610

VA SERVICES FOR WOMEN VETERANS

WHEREAS, the number of women joining the armed forces of our country continues to increase every year; and

WHEREAS, as of FY 2012, 583,580 women veterans were enrolled within the VA health care population, and 57 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan female veterans have received VA care, and female veterans use more primary and mental health services than their male counterparts; and

WHEREAS, the number of enrolled women veterans is expected to double in the next two to four years making it essential that VA continue to staff and equip its facilities to meet their specific health care needs; and

WHEREAS, VA has made a push to increase the gender specific awareness and training for its medical staff and health care providers; and

WHEREAS, many VA facilities are providing gender-specific health care services to include counseling and care for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) whether due to combat, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), or another form of trauma; and

WHEREAS, VA has hired and trained full-time Women Veteran

Program Managers who are charged with improving care and access for women veterans; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we acknowledge that VA has improved its medical staff gender-specific training as well as the care and services provided to women veterans, but we urge VA to continue to monitor and enhance their health care services available to women veterans at all VA facilities by improving privacy and security within medical facilities and providing adequate mental health care services to include ongoing training of individuals specifically assigned to meet the needs of women to include care for MST and PTSD; and place the highest priority on women veterans programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to improve outreach and expand programs for women veterans to close critical gaps, allow women to choose their VA healthcare provider and continue to offer a full-range of services designed to meet their current and future needs. (Approved)

Resolution No. 611

**EXTEND SERVICE CONNECTION PRESUMPTION
TO BLAST SURVIVORS**

WHEREAS, the Global War on Terrorism has placed tens of thousands of service members in harm's way; and

WHEREAS, the nature of the conflict these men and women face is frequently guerrilla-style combat where the enemy is widely known to use improvised explosive devices (IEDs); and

WHEREAS, much of the attention has been focused on the apparent physical wounds, there are many unseen effects of blast trauma, which could include brain injuries, long-term hearing and balance issues, chronic pain, air embolisms, and injuries mistaken for personality disorders; and

WHEREAS, some effects associated with blast injuries may not become manifest immediately allowing the service member to return to the field, only to have their ability to fulfill their duty dramatically affected by the long-term effects of the blast; and

WHEREAS many injuries are difficult to diagnose and our men and women in uniform can suffer from these disabilities for many years after the blast; and

WHEREAS, a large number of veterans have been identified as having been evaluated or treated for a condition possibly related to a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) at a VA medical center from the start of OIF/OEF/OND; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to approve a presumption of service connection for the conditions associated with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). (Approved)

Resolution No. 612

**TINNITUS AND HEARING LOSS
PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE CONNECTION**

WHEREAS, veterans of the armed services who served in combat or in a position (e.g. member of a gun crew on board Navy ships) or certain occupational specialties have a high incidence rate of hearing loss or tinnitus as a direct result of acoustic trauma; and

WHEREAS, many pre-service and discharge examinations, particularly for World War II and Korean Conflict veterans, were usually accomplished with the highly inaccurate whispered-voice test; and

WHEREAS, veterans, in those cases, were not afforded a comprehensive audiological examination upon entrance and discharge from the military services; and

WHEREAS, in recent years the second leading disability granted service connection by VA was for hearing loss or tinnitus; and

WHEREAS, in 2005 the Institutes of Medicine (IOM) released a study that showed that nearly all service members are exposed to acoustic trauma at some point during their military service and that many experience hearing loss and/or tinnitus as a result, often years after service. However, "after the fact, hearing loss or tinnitus incurred as a result of military service cannot be distinguished with certainty from subsequent noise-induced hearing loss..." Given these findings, reasonable doubt must be resolved in favor of veterans who suffered acoustic trauma in service; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, we urge Congress and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to grant service connection on a presumptive basis for any veteran diagnosed after discharge with hearing loss or tinnitus when the evidence shows that the veteran participated in combat or worked in a position or occupational specialty likely to cause acoustic trauma. (Approved)

Resolution No. 613

HEARING LOSS COMPENSATION

WHEREAS, veterans of the armed services who served in combat have a high incident rate of hearing loss usually associated with acoustical trauma; and

WHEREAS, in the practice of granting disability compensation there is a long-standing precedent that ratings not be offset by the function artificially restored by prosthesis; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs has the authority to grant service connection for disabilities associated with combat-related diseases or injuries even if medically undocumented at the time of service; and

WHEREAS, many veterans have incurred extreme hardships through undocumented acoustic trauma related to combat service or occupational duty; and

WHEREAS, hearing aids are considered a prosthetic device necessary for good quality of life; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to amend the Schedule for Rating Disabilities to provide a minimum compensable evaluation for any service connected hearing loss for which a hearing aid is medically indicated. (Approved)

Resolution No. 614

VA CLAIMS BACKLOG

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a backlog of 1.8 million claims for compensation, pension, education benefits and appeals; and

WHEREAS, due to the increasing complexity of claims, the need for compliance to Court of Veterans Appeals decisions claims, and the continued increase in the number of claims received each year the backlog has continued to grow; and

WHEREAS, because of substantial backlogs of claims and appeals cases, 75.1 percent of rating cases have been pending for more than 125 days and take, on average, over 266 days to complete. Appeals have increased to over 177,000 and pend, on average, over 1,100 days before the Board of Veterans Appeals makes a decision; and

WHEREAS, VA IT initiatives are still being developed and, to date, have not had a significant impact on improving either timeliness or quality; and

WHEREAS, decades of staffing freezes and neglect within VA contributed to current backlogs and decreased timeliness; and

WHEREAS, Congress in recent years has provided increased funding for staffing at VA and improved oversight. Yet, the attrition of new hires and retirement of journeymen claims processors continues to

challenge VA's ability to train and maintain a technically proficient workforce; and

WHEREAS, after decades of study, Congressional hearings, changes of VA leadership, altered workflow, amended work processes, sporadic IT development as well as countless pilot programs and experimental initiatives, it is clear that there are no easy, simple or quick solutions that lead to the rapid reduction of the backlog; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to continue to exercise its oversight capacity and provide the resources necessary to hire, train and sustain a workforce sufficient to overcome the backlog and provide quality and timely service to those claiming benefits or appealing decisions from VA; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Congress continues its oversight of VA IT initiatives to ensure that they are constructive, relevant and effective in streamlining claims processing and improving quality of entitlement decisions. (Approved)

Resolution No. 615

IMPROVE EDUCATION BENEFITS FOR SURVIVORS

WHEREAS, the Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance Program (DEA) provides educational support to eligible dependents (spouse or children) of a service member who died on active duty or a veteran who died or is permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability; and

WHEREAS, while DEA benefits increase annually, they fail to increase at the same rate as tuition; and

WHEREAS, according to the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, the average cost of attendance, including tuition, fees, and room and board, at a four-year public university is estimated at \$18,391 for the 2013-2014 academic year, while the DEA benefit for the same period is \$9,027; and

WHEREAS, the Gunnery Sgt. John David Fry Scholarship has made Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits available to surviving children, but excludes surviving spouses; and

WHEREAS, while nothing can repay the enormity of the loss and sacrifice of military survivors, providing a quality educational benefit will provide them the opportunity to build a meaningful and productive future for themselves and their children; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to increase DEA benefits to reflect the rising

cost of education, with future increases indexed to reflect the average cost of attendance as reported by the Department of Education.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to expand the Gunnery Sgt. John David Fry Scholarship to include all surviving dependents of Post-9/11 GI Bill eligible service members. (Approved)

Resolution No. 616

BURIAL PLOT ALLOWANCE

WHEREAS, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pays certain burial benefits at the death of a veteran who dies from a service connected disability. VA pays a different burial benefit and plot allowance on behalf of a wartime veteran who dies from a non-service connected condition; and

WHEREAS, the cost of funeral expenses in the private sector have increased nearly seven times over since 2001 and the current VA benefit is \$2,000 for a service connected death, and \$700 burial and \$700 plot allowance for a qualifying non-service connected death; well below the cost in the private sector; and

WHEREAS, Congress should provide the resources to meet the changing needs of burial benefits and bring burial allowances and plot allowances to the same proportionate level they were when the benefits were joined in 1973; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress increase all burial benefits to what the *Independent Budget* recommends: the service connected burial benefit, non-service connected burial benefit and the plot allowance for those veterans who do not have access to a state or national veterans cemetery should be increased to \$6,160, \$1,918, and \$1,150 respectively; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the service connected burial benefit, non-service connected burial benefit and the plot allowance for those veterans who have access to a state or national veterans cemetery but chose burial in a private cemetery should be increased to \$2,793, \$854, and \$1,150 respectively; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress should provide the resources required to meet burial needs of all veterans who have served their country so honorably and faithfully. (Approved)

Resolution No. 617

VETERANS AFFAIRS PENSION MANAGEMENT CENTERS

WHEREAS, the Pension Management Centers were established in 2001; and

WHEREAS, the Pension Management Centers are tasked with the processing responsibilities for live and death pension applications and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation; and

WHEREAS, this tasking is not being accomplished in a timely, accurate manner; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General Office of Audits and Evaluations conducted a review of the Pension Management Centers dated March 30, 2011 which revealed untimely processing of original death pension claims and Internal Revenue Service and Social Security Administration Income Verification Matches; and

WHEREAS, the workload report from mid-February 2014 continued to show that 44 percent of original claims took more than 125 days to process and 99.9 percent of Income Verification Reports were pending more than 125 days; and

WHEREAS, the veterans and dependents who depend on the benefits being overseen by the Pension Management Center are those individuals most in need; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we express our concerns about the services being delivered by the Pension Management Center and urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to return control of all pension claims to the original VA regional office of jurisdiction. (Approved)

Resolution No. 618

HOMELESS VETERANS PRIORITIES

WHEREAS, despite a severe economic recession, homelessness among veterans has significantly decreased due to coordinated efforts across multiple agencies of government and the ambitious goals of President Obama and Secretary Shinseki to eliminate homelessness among veterans by 2015; and

WHEREAS, solving this problem has become more challenging as the number of female service members has increased within the military, as it has resulted in a growing number of female veterans experiencing homelessness, many of whom have dependents in their care; and

WHEREAS, programs operating on the federal level seek to assist local and state homeless veteran agencies and programs, partially using funds granted by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Grant and Per Diem program and the Department of Labor (DOL) Homeless Veterans Reintegration program; and

WHEREAS, recently implemented programs such as VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and the joint Housing and

Urban Development and VA's Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program are showing signs of success in not only reducing homelessness, but also in providing desperately-needed case management and other measures to prevent homelessness; and

WHEREAS, the VA acknowledges its obligation to maintain comprehensive assistance to veterans who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to the best of its capabilities; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the President and Congress to continue addressing homeless veterans as a priority by increasing the availability of affordable housing, ensuring the opportunity to earn an adequate income through increased educational and employment opportunities and training, and by expanding access to health-care services; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress should fully-fund all veteran homeless programs, to include the VA's Grant and Per Diem program, and DOL's Homeless Veterans Reintegration program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VA should periodically review the economy so as to take into account instances of inflation to adequately adjust Grant and Per Diem program rates as necessary for sufficient operation of homeless veteran assistance programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA programs extended to homeless veterans be equipped with the staffing and resources necessary to respond to the growing needs of a diverse veterans population, including women, dependents, the elderly, and disabled; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that preemptive measures to address homelessness are developed and utilized to prevent and minimize the risk of possible homelessness that current service members and veterans face; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that where a veteran/survivor has countable income in addition to Department of Veterans Affairs service connected compensation and non-service connected pension. The amount of the VA compensation and non-service connected pension should not be considered as countable income by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. (Approved)

Resolution No. 619

ENSURE VETERAN SUCCESS IN EDUCATION

WHEREAS, our nation has consistently supported the future success of our warfighters through robust veterans' education benefits, historically molding generations of proven leaders; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States helped secure robust education benefits for today's veterans through the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, offering a free in-state public education to veterans who qualify; and

WHEREAS, VA enrolled more than one million veterans across all G.I. Bill programs in academic year 2013-2014, and

WHEREAS, despite recent improvements to consumer resources for student veterans, VA still lacks the capacity to deliver counseling services to veterans on their educational options prior to enrollment; and

WHEREAS, many GI Bill-eligible students cannot qualify for in-state tuition at public colleges and universities because of their prior military service commitments; and

WHEREAS, poor information and financial hardships are driving perceptions in Washington that student-veterans are not succeeding in higher education; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States urge Congress to ensure proper oversight of VA's educational benefit programs by developing quality metrics with which to demonstrate student veteran success in higher education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress ensure veterans receive equitable access to benefits like in-state tuition and quality pre-enrollment educational information to ensure veterans are academically and financially prepared to succeed in higher education. (Approved)

Resolution No. 620

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

WHEREAS, the period of eligibility for VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) benefits is 12 years from the date of separation from the military or the date the veteran was first notified by VA of a service-connected disability rating; and

WHEREAS, many veterans do not understand their eligibility to VR&E services and the benefits of the program until later in life when they become so disabled that their disabilities create an employment barrier; and

WHEREAS, VR&E lacks quality performance measures that measure rehabilitation based on the long-term effects of disability and the likelihood that a disability may require further rehabilitation; and

WHEREAS, VR&E can take more than 90 days from enrollment to the start of services; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to change the eligibility delimiting date for VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program by eliminating the 12-year-delimiting date for eligibility to Chapter 31 benefits and allow all veterans with employment impediments or problems with independent living to qualify for VR&E services for life; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VA must restructure performance measures to emphasize long-term rehabilitation versus the current short-term indicators of success. Furthermore, VR&E should continually follow up with veterans considered to be rehabilitated to ensure that the rehabilitation and employment placement plans have been successful; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA streamlines eligibility and entitlement to VR&E programs to provide more timely intervention and assistance to all disabled veterans. (Approved)

Resolution No. 621

SUPPORT VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars recognizes that it is in the best interest of veterans to have a strong and viable veterans employment and training system dedicated to the interest of our nation's veterans; and

WHEREAS, Congress has recognized that veterans of all eras, especially recently separated service members, are finding it difficult to obtain meaningful employment and careers; and

WHEREAS, while there are certain employment and educational programs in place for veterans there is a great need for improvement in the quality, purpose, and accountability of these programs; and

WHEREAS, veteran employment programs need to have a proactive, long-term career focus versus an immediate and often low wage, job focus; and

WHEREAS, programs designed to encourage federal employment of veterans, assist veterans in finding employment in their communities, and encourage federal contractors to hire veterans demand reasonable funding and responsible oversight to ensure success; and

WHEREAS, state agencies who receive federal funding are not held to the same veteran hiring standards as the federal government; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support viable and effective veterans employment and

training systems, such as Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPS), Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERS), and other Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) programs, which require sufficient funding and capability to assist veterans in seeking and maintaining meaningful employment and re-employment opportunities in their communities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to improve and enforce federal veteran-hiring mandates for contractors who do business with the federal government as outlined in Title 38 USC 4212; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that federal veteran hiring initiatives and programs must be held accountable for the effectiveness of the services provided and funding should be adjusted to reflect abilities in creating long-term meaningful careers for veterans, and state agencies that receive federal funding must be held to the same standards and report to Congress on the success of veteran hiring initiatives. (Approved)

Resolution No. 622

VETERAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

WHEREAS, government reports consistently indicate that many federal agencies fail to reach their three-percent contracting goal for disabled veterans; and

WHEREAS, many veterans and disabled veterans lack access to the necessary capital to invest in small business opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the federal government has failed to deliver adequate tools to veterans, offering the opportunity to fulfill the three-percent federal contracting mandate; and

WHEREAS, the Small Business Administration remains underfunded and understaffed to fulfill its mission of establishing and maintaining robust veterans' programs; and

WHEREAS, the verification process through which the Department of Veterans Affairs verifies veteran-owned businesses to do business with VA and other federal agencies has failed to adequately verify veteran business owners; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars that Congress expand entrepreneurial education and networking programs for veterans via veterans small business centers and other entrepreneurship programs funded through the Small Business Administration in order to help achieve the federal government's three-percent veterans contracting goal; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Congress expand veteran's and disabled veteran's access to capital by expanding direct loan programs

through the Small Business Administration in order to help achieve the federal government's three-percent veterans contracting goal; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Congress hold VA accountable for its duty to properly verify veteran entrepreneurs to help achieve the federal government's three-percent veterans contracting goal. (Approved)

Resolution No. 623

MEDICAL CANNABIS

WHEREAS, medical cannabis is an effective treatment for injuries both mental and physical suffered by veterans especially chronic pain resulting from loss of limb or traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); and

WHEREAS, the efficacy and safety of medical cannabis has been thoroughly vetted by no less than eighteen states that allow its use; and

WHEREAS, the countries of Israel and Canada have already vetted medical cannabis and provided it to their veterans for a number of conditions and;

WHEREAS, the Federal government currently provides medical cannabis on a monthly basis to survivors of the Compassionate Care Program and;

WHEREAS, the Veterans Administration has an existing official policy on medical cannabis that recognizes veteran medical cannabis use now; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Federal Government revise its policy on medical cannabis to allow veterans to be able to access medical cannabis thru the Department of Veterans Affairs. This can be done by providing vouchers to veterans who live in states where medical cannabis is legal or by providing it from the Federal Governments cannabis farm in Mississippi to veterans who do not live in states where medical cannabis is legal as is done currently with the Compassionate Care Program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Federal Government act swiftly to provide this safe and effective medicine for the care of veterans. (Rejected)

Resolution No. 624

SERVICE CONNECTION FOR AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE IN THE KOREAN DMZ

WHEREAS, it is recorded that a class of chemical defoliants better known as "Agent Orange" was used in the Koran DMZ area to control

vegetation and to deny hostile forces the cover that this vegetation would have provided; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense along with the Department of Veterans Affairs have identified particular units that were assigned to those areas within the Republic of Korea where the defoliants were used and have conceded that the personnel assigned to the identified units may have been exposed to the effects of these chemical; and

WHEREAS, there is no provision under current law to recognize those personnel that, while assigned to the Republic of Korea and assigned to units outside of the affected areas, whose duties may have required them to travel to and thru the areas that were treated with chemical defoliant; and

WHEREAS, many of the excluded veterans are now suffering from diseases and illnesses that have been directly linked to exposure to the chemical defoliant better known as Agent Orange and are being denied service connected disability by the Department of Veterans Affairs based solely upon the location of their assigned unit within the Republic of Korea; and

WHEREAS, these veterans are being denied their just compensation from illnesses that are attributable to their service in the Republic of Korea and exposure to the chemical defoliant known as Agent Orange; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Department of Veterans Affairs recognize those veterans whose service within the Republic of Korea caused them to perform duties within the areas that were sprayed by Agent Orange or other defoliants though their assigned unit location was outside of the areas affected and are now suffering from illnesses associated with such exposure to Agent Orange or other defoliants provided that the veteran can show proof via orders, buddy statements and or other documents recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs, that they were in the areas affected. (Approved)

Resolution No. 625

AUTHORIZE RESERVE COMPONENTS OF THE ARMED FORCES, INCLUDING THE NATIONAL GUARD, TO BE BURIED IN A STATE CEMETERY

WHEREAS, since 1980 the reserve components of the Armed Forces, including the National Guard, have played a key role in sustaining the readiness capabilities of the Armed Forces in conflicts throughout the world, and

WHEREAS, some states already allow reserve components of the Armed Forces, including the National Guard, who served on inactive duty

to be buried in a cemetery of the State for which the State received a grant under the Department of Veterans Affairs cemetery grants program, and

WHEREAS, members who served in a reserve component of the Armed Forces, including the National Guard, should have the right to be buried in a state cemetery receiving the same benefits as a veteran as long as that person performed their duty and served honorably, and

WHEREAS, members who served in a reserve component of the Armed Forces, including the National Guard, have signed and taken the same oath to defend their country as members who meet the requirements, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that title 38, United States Code, be amended to authorize a State to allow the burial in a cemetery of the State for which the State received a grant under the Department of Veterans Affairs cemetery grants program of remains of individuals who served in the reserve components of the Armed Forces, including the National Guard. (Approved)

Resolution No. 626

DEPENDENCY INDEMNITY COMPENSATION FOR WIDOWS

WHEREAS, veterans who had service connected disabilities evaluated as totally disabling from the date of discharge from active duty for a period of not less than five (5) years from the date of discharge in order for the dependents to be eligible for death benefits; and

WHEREAS, a veteran who was in receipt of or entitled to receive VA compensation at the time of death for a service-connected disability rated totally disabling any time after discharge from active duty is required to have been continuously rated totally disabled for a period of ten (10) or more years immediately preceding death in order for the dependents to be eligible for death benefits; and

WHEREAS, for the purposes of DIC eligibility, there should not be a length of time requirement for any veteran who was in receipt or entitled to receive VA compensation at the time of death for a service-connected disability rated totally disabling; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that the law should be amended so that the survivors of veterans who were in receipt of or entitled to receive VA compensation at the time of death for a service connected disability rated totally disabling are eligible for DIC; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, those claims previously denied because of failing to meet the time limits be reviewed and death benefits granted where eligible. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 627

**NATIONAL CEMETERY IN MICHIGAN'S
UPPER PENINSULA**

WHEREAS, the veterans population in Michigan's Upper Peninsula is approximately 27,000 veterans over the age of 65 years; and

WHEREAS, the nearest available National Cemetery is between 450 and 700 miles from the veteran population in the Upper Peninsula; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs has implemented a **Rural Cemetery Initiative** which provides burial within a 75 mile catchment area; and

WHEREAS, Marquette County is centrically located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to initiate a feasibility and environmental impact study to incorporate VA's **Rural Cemetery Initiative** in Michigan's Upper Peninsula; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that it be centrically located in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 628

HEADSTONE AND MARKER MEDALLION

WHEREAS, Public Law 110-157, signed into law on December 26, 2007 gives the VA authority to "furnish, upon request, a medallion or other device of a design determined by the Secretary to signify the deceased's status as a veteran, to be attached to a headstone or marker that was furnished at private expense," and

WHEREAS, veterans who died prior to November 1, 1990, are not eligible to have the medallion or other device provided; and

WHEREAS, many of our honored deceased veterans now lie in their final resting place without lasting testimony by our government of their service to our country; and

WHEREAS, we believe this injustice to our Nation's veterans must be corrected; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support amending 38 U.S.C. 2306 (d) (4) to allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to furnish a medallion or other device for veterans who died prior to November 1, 1990. (Approved)

Resolution No. 629

EXTEND THE PRESUMPTION OF EXPOSURE TO
HERBICIDES TO VETERANS STATIONED AT ROYAL
THAI MILITARY BASES DURING THE VIETNAM WAR

WHEREAS, it is well-documented that herbicides were used for vegetation control and to clear base perimeters at Royal Thai installations between 28 February 1961 and 7 May 1975; and

WHEREAS, it is also documented that tactical herbicides obtained from Vietnam, as well as commercial grade herbicides, were used in Thailand; and

WHEREAS, many U.S. military service members stationed at Royal Thai Military installations throughout Thailand are suffering from diseases which include many types of cancer, as well as diabetes and other chronic diseases; and

WHEREAS, these diseases are recognized to be presumptive to herbicide exposure; and

WHEREAS, base personnel received military training such as small arms qualification training near the base perimeter; and

WHEREAS, current policy by VA restricting the presumption of exposure to herbicides to only those personnel who were military police and those with specific duties on the perimeter of installations does not recognize that many personnel working at these bases were given adjunct assignments (guard duty) on the perimeter which was poorly documented; and

WHEREAS, military service members with boots on the ground, at any time and point in Vietnam are automatically considered to have been exposed to herbicides; and

WHEREAS, the restrictive policies of VA unfairly exclude personnel who were assigned adjunct duties on the perimeter but cannot prove it; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to enact legislation granting the presumption of exposure to any veteran who was assigned to a Royal Thai military installation from 28 February 1961 and 7 May 1975. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 630

EXPAND DEFINITION OF "PERIODS OF WAR"

WHEREAS, since the end of World War II, American military forces have accomplished dozens of missions around the world, both big

and small, in defense of the United States or in support of the United Nations or other countries. These missions put service members at great risk of injury or death.

WHEREAS, many of these missions did not take place during an official “period of war” as defined by 38 USC 101(11); and,

WHEREAS, these veterans and their survivors are not eligible for benefits based on service during a period of war, such as Pension or Death Pension; and

WHEREAS, 271 American servicemen were killed in action as members of the Multi-National Peace Keeping Force Beirut, Lebanon from 1982-1984; and

WHEREAS, 241 American Servicemen were killed by a truck bomb on October 23, 1983 in Beirut, Lebanon; and

WHEREAS, U.S. military rescued over 1,000 Americans from factional fighting on the Island of Grenada in October of 1983 in Operation Urgent Fury and 18 American Servicemen were killed in this operation; and

WHEREAS, US military forces were sent to overthrow the Noriega dictatorship in Panama in Operation Just Cause from December 20, 1989 to January 31, 1990 and 23 American Servicemen were killed in this operation; and

WHEREAS, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal has been authorized to service members for participation in operations which result in contact, or threatened contact, with foreign armed opposition; and

WHEREAS, these operations for which the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal was authorized are almost all outside periods already defined as a “period of war” under Section 101(11); therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States urges Congress to amend 38 USC 101(11) to define a “period of war” to include any veteran who received an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 631

SUICIDE AWARENESS TRAINING AND PREVENTION

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 22 veterans commit suicide every day for a total of more than 8000 veterans lost per year; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America does not offer a national program on the prevention of suicide; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Veterans Service of the Veterans of Foreign Wars shall include a training session on Suicide Awareness during its national service officer training and encourage Departments to include similar training for the Post Service Officer; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America may leverage materials available through the Department of Veterans Affairs to include the Veterans Crisis Line. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution No. 632

CONGRESS MUST PASS THE ACCESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

WHEREAS, America's veterans enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system are being denied access to timely, quality health care due to the lack of necessary resources and the use of a secret waiting list within the VA health care system; and

WHEREAS, in June 2014, both the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate passed different versions of the VA Access and Accountability Act to eliminate unacceptable appointment wait times. A House and Senate Conference Committee was formed to compromise the two bills into one to eliminate the access issue, as well as other reforms to fix what's broken, hold employees accountable, and help restore the faith veterans must have in their VA; and

WHEREAS, progress on the compromise bill, however, has stalled because of the debate over the cost to fund the increased access to care. Meanwhile, veterans continue to wait, the system remains broken, and very few employees who are responsible for this nationwide crisis in care and confidence have been held accountable; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we call on Congress to immediately pass a compromise bill that will provide the necessary resources to provide timely access and reduce veteran appointment wait times; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that if Congress does go on summer recess without passing this legislation, the VFW and all veterans will work to hold all members of Congress accountable for their lack of action to this veterans' health care crisis. (Approved)

**COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL BY-LAWS,
MANUAL OF PROCEDURE AND RITUAL**

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Arizona	Timothy Borland	9972
Arizona	Jeffrey Eiler	1433
Arizona	Allen "Gunner" Kent	9972
California	Steven Jacobs	9415
California	Mike Maynor	52
Colorado	Ronald Lattin	5061
Colorado	Kirk Rosa	12009
Connecticut	Ronald Rusakiewicz	9460
Delaware	Paul Phillips	2863
Europe	Peter Mascetti	27
Florida	W. Benny Bachand	4287
Florida	John Hamilton	7909
Florida	Eugene Perrino	10087
Florida	Chester Pyatt	2550
Florida	Michael White	3559
Georgia	Denisa Adams	6077
Illinois	Rick Frank	1461
Illinois	Joseph Stachon	5220
Indiana	David Capshaw	1152
Indiana	Arthur Fellwock	1114
Indiana	David Havely	5864
Indiana	Eugene Kijanowski	717
Indiana	Robert Muhlhauser	5864
Iowa	Danny White	11517
Kansas	Robert Greene	7397
Kansas	John Muckelbauer	3712
Kansas	Lynn Rolf	56
Kentucky	Karle Johnson	7890
Kentucky	Claud Wyatt	5704
Louisiana	Larry Minton	1736
Maine	David Olson	6859
Maryland	Douglas Purnell	10159
Massachusetts	Theodore Eaton	2104
Michigan	Jerry Newberry	2492
Michigan	David Prohaska	4434
Michigan	James Van Hauter	4553
Michigan	Robert Weiss	2406
Minnesota	Stephen O'Connor	4114
Minnesota	Frank Presfield	4847
Missouri	Jimmy Cook	30
Missouri	Lawrence Maher	7356

Department	Name	Post No.
Missouri	Zach Schwenk	5606
Montana	Charles Carroll	6774
Nebraska	Harold Schlender	5289
Nevada	Vita Lopez	1753
New Jersey	Robert Pinto	1817
New Mexico	Warren Booker	7686
New York	Harold Burke	1895
New York	Michael Pascal	9486
North Carolina	Andrew Zinkievich	7383
North Dakota	James Markey	4655
Ohio	Robert Giannone	3383
Ohio	Frederick Lavery	1060
Ohio	Gerald Ward	5713
Oklahoma	Donald Fenter	5263
Oklahoma	Coral Porch	5263
Oregon	Wayne Sharp	1442
Pacific Areas	Robert Zaher	2485
Pennsylvania	John Getz	3376
South Carolina	Rodney Burne	3447
South Dakota	Gary Knudson	2038
Tennessee	Lloyd Hansen	5154
Texas	Lavern Terbl	7873
Utah	Brent Nielsen	10900
Virginia	Harold Roesch	3219
Washington	Linda Fairbank	2289
West Virginia	James Talerico	573
Wisconsin	Charlene Cobb	10173
Wisconsin	Matthias Mayer	6498
Wyoming	Patricia Peoples	1881

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California	Mary Bandini	10049
Colorado	Robert Kidd	3917
Connecticut	David Greene	10004
Europe	Gladwin Spohr	10692
Florida	Robert Young	10137
Hawaii	Harry Kaneakua	3855
Hawaii	Dick Skarnes	12122
Idaho	John Crotinger	3520

<u>Department</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Post No.</u>
Illinois	Jeffrey Hastings	805
Illinois	Terry Vance	9789
Indiana	Eric Campbell	2021
Indiana	Carl Pearson	1431
Indiana	Kenneth Stalcup	7117
Iowa	Jerry Black	839
Kansas	Dallas Eubanks	56
Kansas	Robert Greene	7397
Kansas	John Muckelbauer	3712
Kansas	John Stang	3147
Louisiana	Fred Wesley	12065
Maine	Raymond Lupo	4633
Maryland	Denise Perry	6054
Massachusetts	George Murray	1018
Massachusetts	Clifford Olson	8699
Massachusetts	Eric Segundo	3236
Michigan	Donald Nettler	9507
Michigan	Jerry Newberry	2492
Minnesota	Lawrence Grindland	295
Minnesota	Larry Ziebarth	428
Mississippi	Johnnie Richard	2539
Mississippi	Danny Williams	3685
Missouri	Earl Boyer	1831
Missouri	Larry Phillips	5789
Nebraska	Larry Gerlt	2704
Nevada	Rickie Isom	2313
New Jersey	Patrick Botbyl	1593
New Jersey	Michael Goff	133
New York	Brian DeMeritt	524
New York	Andres Veiga	9486
Ohio	James Dickens	5532
Ohio	Gary Perkins	7496
Ohio	Kari Pfeifer	2920
Oregon	Rick Higgins	4039
Pennsylvania	Lloyd Greenwood	8951
Pennsylvania	Henry Mannella	1810
Pennsylvania	Michael McLane	7069
Pennsylvania	Larry Wade	7377
South Carolina	John Sullivan	8738
South Dakota	Darold Couch	3442
South Dakota	Rollin Sieveke	5969
Tennessee	Darryl McPheron	9754
Texas	Ingleborg Conley	12075
Texas	Richard Shawver	3893
Vermont	Ann Marie Bolton	790
Washington	Jerry Herker	3386
Washington	Martin Spani	1040
West Virginia	Robert Caruthers	9926
Wisconsin	Andrew Hushek	10394

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Vice Chairman: Richard L. Eubank, Past Commander-in-Chief, Oregon

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Alabama	George Jones	6073
Alaska	David Lemelin	10029
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Arizona	Allen "Gunner" Kent	9972
Arizona	Kenneth Marshall	8053
California	Deborah Johnson	1468
California	Stephen Milano	4647
Colorado	Peter Buchanan	1771
Colorado	Bruce Dolan	7945
Colorado	Shaun Shenk	4171
Connecticut	Robert Crandall	189
Delaware	Marc Garduno	3238
Delaware	John Morrow	475
Dist. of Col.	Christopher Adams	7358
Europe	George Gilgore	10614
Europe	Norberto Millet	9342
Florida	Daniel Duffy	1966
Florida	Anthony Gardner	10140
Florida	Robert Poucher	8083
Georgia	James Gray	4706
Georgia	Ronald Keller	8385
Hawaii	Stanley Fernandez	10276
Idaho	Robert Jones	3012
Illinois	Robert Crider	2801
Illinois	Michael De Ross	8821
Illinois	Joseph Wein	2202
Indiana	Terry Bruning	2839
Indiana	Vincent Misuraca	1114
Indiana	Richard Shirley	1563
Iowa	Dennis Abel	1797
Iowa	Howard Ransford	775
Kansas	David Cuba	6654
Kansas	Robert Greene	7397
Kansas	John Muckelbauer	3712
Kansas	Douglas Simms	10552
Kentucky	Danny Morrison	5710
Louisiana	Charles Lobrano	3375
Maine	David Williams	1641
Maryland	Tonsel Lide	8950

<u>Department</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Post No.</u>
Maryland	Douglas MacArthur	8126
Massachusetts	Keith Jackson	6538
Massachusetts	Aaron Richardson	697
Michigan	Wayne Ball	12082
Michigan	Ronald Devereaux	4406
Michigan	Ernest Meyers	2406
Michigan	Jerry Newberry	2492
Michigan	Pamala Young	2269
Minnesota	Scott Bill	3915
Minnesota	Donald Nix	5518
Minnesota	Francis Sutherland	246
Mississippi	Douglas Lee	4272
Missouri	Kenneth Davis	5789
Missouri	Charles Dickinson	3135
Missouri	Robert Wonnell	1894
Montana	Gary Race	4725
Nebraska	Sammy DeJohn	8334
Nebraska	John Iossi	3704
Nebraska	Joseph Smith	2280
Nevada	Carlton Fogg	36
Nevada	Joe Rigsby	2350
Nevada	Robert Snider	3396
New Hampshire	John Rubery	1631
New Jersey	Thomas Farrell	3020
New Jersey	George Lisicki	2314
New Jersey	William Young	370
New Mexico	Vincent Lawrence	7686
New York	Michael Burke	170
New York	Alexander Meholczo	524
New York	Walter Zuncio	9593
North Carolina	Gene Kent	7034
North Dakota	James Hapala	7564
Ohio	Charles Adams	892
Ohio	Merton Compton	7424
Ohio	Michael Rebeta	7609
Ohio	John Wasyluk	2529
Oklahoma	Robert Clark	4876
Oregon	Judith Burger	4108
Pacific Areas	Ashley Combs	12109
Pacific Areas	Patrick Higgins	10216
Pennsylvania	Charles Beattie	7155
Pennsylvania	Ruth Fairchild	315
Pennsylvania	Dwight Fuhrman	8896
Pennsylvania	Eugene Myers	8951
Rhode Island	Joseph Cerrito	8018
Rhode Island	Michael Corriveau	5392
South Carolina	Janet Chisolm-Richard	3433
South Carolina	Frank Fogner	10804
South Dakota	Marvin Czerwonka	1273
South Dakota	Kenneth Payne	6554

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Texas	Robert Dickerson	9186
Texas	Henry Lester	10351
Texas	Jose Rodriguez	8936
Utah	Dennis Howland	8307
Vermont	John Boardman	6689
Vermont	Allston Gilmond	782
Virginia	Kim DeShano	2216
Virginia	Donald Westerlund	9954
Virginia	Mark Winn	392
Washington	James Daly	224
Washington	Steve Reynolds	11401
West Virginia	Melvin Goddard	4484
Wisconsin	John Kleinmaus	1393
Wisconsin	David Matuszak	721
Wyoming	Charles Sutter	4797

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California	Vaughn Gates	1537
California	David Norris	1051
California	Daniel Schmaltz	4048
Delaware	Benjamin Chudzik	3420
Dist. of Col.	Tammi Lambert	9755
Dist. of Col.	Herman Salley	2979
Florida	William Gault	8154
Florida	Karen Nigara	1689
Hawaii	George Barlett	10154
Hawaii	Joseph Davis	3391
Illinois	George Foy	5917
Illinois	Marshal Hawk	454

Department	Name	Post No.
Illinois	Jules Spindler	4549
Illinois	Barbara Wilson	3455
Indiana	William Davis	1431
Iowa	Donald Fisher	6172
Iowa	Richard Goebel	9663
Maine	Andre Dumas	9389
Massachusetts	Francis Gagnon	9566
Michigan	James Huver	12082
Michigan	Jack Pray	3243
Minnesota	David Adams	1782
Minnesota	Edward Eibon	246
Minnesota	John Staum	9625
Mississippi	Samuel Ladner	4808
Missouri	Debra Anderson	7356
Missouri	Paul Frampton	11290
Missouri	Donald Harris	5789
Nebraska	Steven Calkin	1077
Nebraska	Richard Morrison	8334
Nevada	Gilbert Hernandez	2350
Nevada	Ronald Wilson	2313
New Hampshire	Paul Chevalier	168
New Jersey	Francis Nelson	7164
New Jersey	Gary Stoop	5479
New York	Sidney Lynn	400
New York	Donald Mackey	5088
New York	James Mc Nally	53
North Carolina	Ernest Allis	9488
North Carolina	Jason Schoolcraft	8073
Ohio	Benny Morris	8054
Ohio	Bradley Price	1516
Pennsylvania	Thomas Dougherty	3474
Pennsylvania	Peter Hook	6393
Pennsylvania	Allen Jones	21
South Carolina	M Gunter	8738
South Dakota	Russel Dramstad	1776
South Dakota	Linda Fox	791
South Dakota	Dick Pickering	4726
South Dakota	Todd Struwe	2118
Texas	Tashawnya McCullough	4676
Texas	Lazaro Velasquez	2397
Washington	Ronald Ness	683
West Virginia	William Lambert	9097
Wisconsin	Daniel Foley	2267
Wisconsin	Jason Johns	10272
Wyoming	James Pedersen	2673

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National Veterans Service Brendon Gehrke, Legislative
Associate, National Legislative Service

(Room 126, America's Convention Center)

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Vice Chairman: Christian Kulikoski, Massachusetts
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Teresa Morris, Manager, Action Corps, National Legislative
Service

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Alaska	Gerry Glover	9785
Arizona	Dennis Dole	769
Arizona	James Katzenberger	10695
Arkansas	Terry Callahan	2256
Arkansas	Antoine Gordon	4548
California	Mark Barrett	5477
California	Buford Maples	5985
California	Everett Martin	1732
California	Gary Mitchell	6213
Colorado	Anthony Archer	101
Colorado	David Stone	3917
Connecticut	Edmund Burke	10004
Connecticut	Aleksandr Morosky	7788

Department	Name	Post No.
Dist. of Col.	William Bradshaw	284
Dist. of Col.	Sidney Locks	2460
Europe	John Leffler	10810
Europe	Dale Nagan	10708
Florida	Patrick Love	8203
Florida	Jason Smith	10140
Georgia	Pledge Cannon	9998
Georgia	Joel Willis	5290
Hawaii	Maria Va`a-Igafo	3391
Idaho	William Heyob	63
Idaho	Dale Smith	3646
Illinois	Kelly Chapman	2876
Illinois	Matthew McCarthy	3999
Illinois	Robert Migalich	4763
Illinois	Barry Walter	5220
Illinois	Matthew Willis	6871
Indiana	Kenneth Fisher	1152
Indiana	Stephen Hicks	7850
Indiana	Steve Milbourn	5864
Indiana	Thomas Pappas	2511
Iowa	Darrell Blasberg	2208
Iowa	Quinten Christensen	941
Iowa	Stuart Juarez	738
Kansas	David Crow	971
Kansas	William Shippey	56
Kentucky	Gerald Kayrouz	1170
Kentucky	Ruben Ochoa	11404
Louisiana	Federico Arends	5951
Maine	Louis Peterson	6859
Maryland	William Dozier	9619
Maryland	Raymond Kelley	160
Maryland	Anthony Navickas	521
Massachusetts	Christian Kulikoski	144
Massachusetts	Donald Lafond	7239
Michigan	Richard Lehner	3733
Michigan	Paul Pirlot	4230
Michigan	Larry Thayer	9455
Minnesota	Thomas Hanson	1639
Minnesota	Donald Heuer	9433
Minnesota	Gordon Kirk	724
Mississippi	Raybon Windham	9122
Missouri	Gerald Boyer	1831
Missouri	James Rippy	4398
Montana	Timothy Sowa	10010
Montana	Michael Tolomeo-Atwood	276
Nebraska	James Pierce	5547
Nebraska	Eric Williams	7102
Nevada	Denise Estes	10053
Nevada	Leslie Fiester	12119
Nevada	Herman Hagen	10468

Department	Name	Post No.
Nevada	Paul MacBeth	2313
New Hampshire	John Barrett	8214
New Hampshire	James Golden	1772
New Jersey	Warren George	6590
New Jersey	Bernard McElwee	10184
New Mexico	Allan Kuchinsky	7686
New Mexico	Fred Ortiz	5890
New Mexico	Mike Sing	8703
New York	John Mauro	9486
New York	Bruce Terwilliger	686
New York	Thomas Todaro	53
North Carolina	James Goins	9811
North Dakota	Emery Fisher	756
North Dakota	Joy Mikyska	7564
Ohio	Francis Clendenen	9473
Ohio	Wayne Hutchison	7670
Ohio	Charles Smith	4510
Ohio	Clayton Uzell	7536
Oklahoma	Harlan Bjorgo	7322
Oklahoma	Robert Mason	4446
Oklahoma	David Webb	3916
Oregon	Cheryl Campos	10626
Oregon	George Carroll	3973
Pacific Areas	Gerald Kraus	1509
Pacific Areas	Barry Moshinsky	10217
Pennsylvania	Joseph Buckley	20
Pennsylvania	Russell Canevari	5544
Pennsylvania	James Frisbie	7251
Pennsylvania	John Rybcinski	3474
Rhode Island	James Boardman	5392
Rhode Island	Gary Maddocks	2929
Rhode Island	Allen Wagonblott	5392
South Carolina	Daniel Thompson	4262
South Dakota	George Arends	628
South Dakota	Thomas Hafner	3298
South Dakota	Rick Williamson	3164
Tennessee	David Jungquist	9851
Tennessee	Raymond Rich	4641
Tennessee	John Scott	4848
Texas	Joe Garcia	8936
Texas	Julio Harros	12075
Utah	H. M. Jensen	1481
Utah	Douglas Larson	8307
Vermont	Joseph LaPerle	9449
Virginia	Ryan Gallucci	3150
Virginia	Gerald Manar	609
Virginia	John Smart	1503
Washington	Carlos Almeda	1263
Washington	Bobby Clements	91
Washington	Teddy Wright	51

Department	Name	Post No.
West Virginia	Charles Haney	7048
West Virginia	Thomas Lyons	9796
Wisconsin	Leroy Jansky	1038
Wisconsin	Gundel Metz	1318
Wisconsin	James Smith	1393
Wyoming	Michael Stark	4343

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Missouri	Zach Schwenk	5606