

PROCEEDINGS  
of the  
120<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE  
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS  
OF THE UNITED STATES  
(SUMMARY OF MINUTES)



Orlando, Florida ::: July 20 – 24, 2019

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 120TH NATIONAL CON-  
VENTION OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS  
OF THE UNITED STATES

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COMMUNICATION

FROM

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL, THE VETERANS  
OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

TRANSMITTING

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 120TH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF  
THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES,  
HELD IN ORLANDO, FLORIDA: JULY 20-24, 2019, PURSUANT TO  
44 U.S.C. 1332; (PUBLIC LAW 90-620 (AS AMENDED BY PUBLIC  
LAW 105-225, SEC. 3); (112 STAT. 1498)



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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  
September, 2020

Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
The Speaker U. S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Madam Speaker:

In conformance with the provisions of Public Law No. 620, 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, approved October 22, 1968, I am transmitting to you herewith the proceedings of the 120<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Orlando, Florida, July 20-24, 2019, which is submitted for printing as a House document.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kevin" being more prominent than the last name "Jones".

Kevin Jones  
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.
1912-1913F	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	Lyll 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.
2011-2012	Richard L. DeNoyer .....	Elected at San Antonio, Texas.
2012-2013	John E. Hamilton .....	Elected at Reno, Nevada.
2013-2014	William A. Thien .....	Elected at Louisville, Kentucky.
2014-2015	John W. Stroud.....	Elected at St. Louis, Missouri.
2015-2016	John A. Biedrzycki, Jr.* .....	Elected at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
2016-2017	Bernard J. Duffy .....	Elected at Charlotte, North Carolina.
2017-2018	Keith E. Harman .....	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
2018-2019	Vincent “BJ” Lawrence .....	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri.
2019-2020	William “Doc” Schmitz .....	Elected at Orlando, Florida.

**VFW NATIONAL OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS, 2018-2019**

Commander-in-Chief.....	Vincent “BJ” Lawrence
Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.....	William “Doc” Schmitz
Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief .....	Hal J. Roesch, II
Adjutant General.....	Kevin Jones
Quartermaster General.....	Debra L. Anderson
Judge Advocate General .....	Daniel J. Nail
Surgeon General .....	Ruth A. “Ruthie” Fairchild
National Chaplain.....	Charlene K. Cobb
National Chief of Staff.....	Jerry W. Herker
Inspector General .....	Charles L. “Charley” Shoemaker
Adjutant General & Executive Director, Washington Office .....	Robert E. Wallace
Assistant Adjutant General .....	Kim DeShano
General Counsel.....	John R. Muckelbauer
Director, Administration & Operations, Washington Office .....	Robert H. Jackson
Director, Administrative Operations.....	David E. Prohaska
Deputy Director, Administrative Operations .....	Johnathan Duncan
Associate Director, Administrative Operations .....	Zach Schwenk
Director, Communications, Public Affairs & Publication .....	Joseph E. Davis
Director, Human Resources .....	Steven A. Chambers
Director, Membership.....	Rick Butler
Deputy Director, Membership .....	Richard McKenna
Director, National Legislative Service .....	Carlos U. Fuentes
Associate Director, National Legislative Service .....	Patrick D. Murray
Associate Director, National Legislative Service .....	Katherine A. Keleher
Associate Director, National Legislative Service .....	Kristina J. Keenan
Director, National Security & Foreign Affairs.....	Johnathon Towles
Director, National Veterans Service.....	Ryan M. Gallucci
Deputy Director, National Veterans Service .....	Dawn M. Jirak



Deputy Director, National Veterans Service ..... Michael Figlioli  
 Director, Operations ..... Barney Hill  
 Director, Programs ..... Lynn W. Rolf, III  
 Manager, National Veterans & Military Support ..... Linda L. Ferguson  
 Director, Properties ..... Brian Opalewski  
 Editor-in-Chief, VFW magazine ..... Tim Dyhouse

**REGIONAL NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATION MEMBERS, 2018-2019**

Department of Alabama	George Jones
Department of Alaska	Walter Watts, Jr.
Department of Arizona	Michael Ferguson
Department of Arkansas	Ashley Little
Department of California	Earl Fulk
Department of Colorado	Bruce Dolan
Department of Connecticut	Richard DiFederico, Jr.
Department of Delaware	William Russell Hall
Department of Europe	Norberto Millet, Jr.
Department of Florida	W. Benny Bachand
Department of Georgia	Alfred Lipphardt
Department of Hawaii	Stanley Fernandez
Department of Idaho	Rick Johnson
Department of Illinois	John Davin
Department of Indiana	Gregory Baker
Department of Iowa	Darrell Blasberg
Department of Kansas	Bobby Cox
Department of Kentucky	Robert Hendrickson
Department of Louisiana	Gerald Dugas
Department of Maine	David Williams
Department of Maryland	R. Brian Sturgis
Department of Massachusetts	Robert Graser
Department of Michigan	Harry Croyle
Department of Minnesota	Gary Anderson
Department of Mississippi	Steven Organ
Department of Missouri	Phillip Pippins
Department of Montana	Arthur Widhalm
Department of Nebraska	John Iossi
Department of Nevada	Gilbert Hernandez
Department of New Hampshire	Paul Lloyd
Department of New Jersey	William Thomson
Department of New Mexico	Kathie Schiebel
Department of New York	Robert Barnhart
Department of North Carolina	Gregory Stafford
Department of North Dakota	James Hapala

Department of Ohio	Chuck Keller
Department of Oklahoma	Robert Clark
Department of Oregon	Bert Key
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Department of Pennsylvania	Robert Eiler
Department of Rhode Island	Guyde Lombardi
Department of South Carolina	Augustus Singleton
Department of South Dakota	Darold Couch
Department of Tennessee	Henry Hooper, II
Department of Texas	Daniel West
Department of Utah	Dennis Parizek
Department of Vermont	Allston Gilmond
Department of Virginia	Thomas Gimble
Department of Washington	Frederick Green
Department of West Virginia	Todd Kingsbury
Department of Wisconsin	John Giese
Department of Wyoming	Rodney Birkle
Immediate Past Commander-in-Chief	Keith E. Harman

### **NATIONAL CONVENTION COMMITTEE**

**July 21-25, 2018, Kansas City, Missouri**

Convention Committee Chairman	Jim Mueller
Convention Committee Operations Officer	Paul Connors
Medical - Health Fair Chairman	Kathy Lee
Meeting Halls, Signs & Flags Co-Chairman	John Hoffman
Meeting Halls, Signs & Flags Co-Chairman	Tim Sloan
Assistant Adjutant General, Administration/Programs	Kevin Jones
Manager, Meetings & Events	Vanessa Kane, CMP, CMM
Memorial Service Chairman	Larry Lefebvre
Patriotic Rally Chairman	Nancy Cowan
Registration Chairman	Jim Nail
Transportation Chairman	Richard Dukovich

### **NATIONAL HONOR GUARD**

	<b>POST</b>
Ronald Servary, Captain	521 MD
Albert Brown	3792 DE
Jay Cabacar	5471 DC
Kathleen Carlson	160 MD

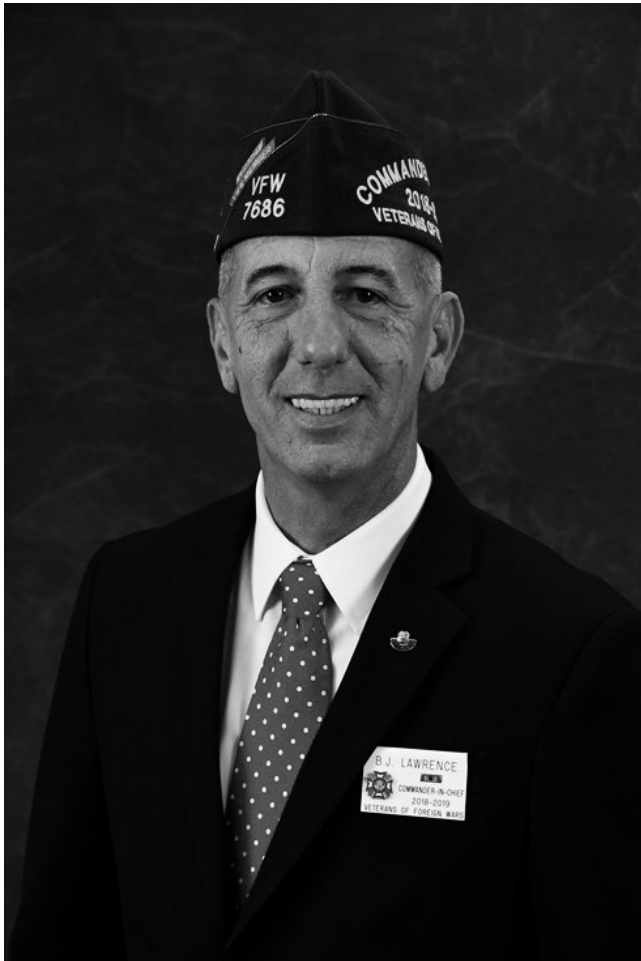
Marco De La Rosa	7356 MO
Mark Herron	5789 MO
Alfred Simmons	8509 MD
Clinton Slack	475 DE
Edward Smith	2863 DE

**NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS**

	POST
Bryan P. O'Brien	2550 FL

**NATIONAL ASSISTANT SERGEANTS-AT-ARMS**

Joy Ausman .....	10043 ID
Sherrod N Conyers .....	2122 CA
James Galen .....	6802 TX
Garold Gamble .....	345 MI
Lora Land .....	9191 TX
George Lott .....	10152 NJ
Keith Mac Donald.....	2275 CA
Brian Willette .....	3104 MA



Vincent "BJ" Lawrence  
Commander-in-Chief  
2018-2019



William "Doc" Schmitz  
Commander-in-Chief  
2019-2020

**VFW NATIONAL OFFICERS 2019-2020**

Commander-in-Chief..... William “Doc” Schmitz  
Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.....Harold “Hal” Roesch, II  
Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief ..... Matthew “Fritz” Mihelcic  
Judge Advocate General .....J. Douglas “Doug” Whitaker  
Surgeon General ..... Curtis “Doc” Bohlman  
National Chaplain..... James “Jim” Jenkins  
National Chief of Staff..... Paul R. Phillips  
Inspector General ..... Duane T. Sarmiento

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Assistant Adjutant General, Administration & Programs ..... Kim DeShano  
Quartermaster General..... Debra Anderson  
General Counsel.....John Muckelbauer  
Director, Administration Operations ..... Johnathan Duncan  
Associate Director, Administrative Operations .....Zach Schwenk  
Associate Director, Administrative Operations .....Quentin Carroll  
Director, Member Service Center .....David Prohaska  
Director, Membership..... Rick Butler  
Deputy Director, Membership..... Richard McKenna  
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Director, Programs.....Lynn Rolf, III  
Director, Properties ..... Brian Opalewski  
Chief Information Officer .....Jason Hailey  
Controller, Purchasing & Member Insurance .....Jim Lierz  
Editor-in-Chief, VFW Magazine..... Tim Dyhouse  
Manager, Communications & Public Affairs ..... Randi Law  
Manager, Development ..... Kelly Jones  
Manager, General Services ..... Alisa Neilon  
Manager, Human Resources.....Danielle Heinisch  
Manager, Meetings & Events/Exhibits..... Vanessa Kane, CMP, CMM  
Manager, National Veterans & Military Support..... Linda Ferguson  
Manager, VFW Store.....Sonja Cutright

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VFW MEMORIAL BUILDING, WASHINGTON, DC**

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Director, Administration & Operations..... Anthony Lowe  
Director, Communications, Public Affairs & Publication .....Joseph Davis

Associate Director, Communications & Public Affairs .....Neil Forte  
 Director, National Legislative Service .....Carlos Fuentes  
 Deputy Director, National Legislative Service..... Patrick Murray  
 Associate Director, National Legislative Service .....Kyle Kalman  
 Director, National Security & Foreign Affairs.....John Towles  
 Director, National Veterans Service..... Ryan Gallucci  
 Deputy Director, National Veterans Service ..... Michael Figlioli  
 Deputy Director, National Veterans Service ..... Dawn Jirak  
 Associate Director, NVS, Field Operations ..... Wayne Hutchison  
 Associate Director, Training & Quality Assurance .....Christopher Macinkowicz  
 Manager, Administration & Support Operations..... Theresa Aldana  
 Manager, Training & Quality Assurance ..... Lauren Barefoot

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Department of Alaska	Walter Watts, Jr.
Department of Arizona	Michael Ferguson
Department of Arkansas	Ashley Little
Department of California	Earl Fulk
Department of Colorado	Bruce Dolan
Department of Connecticut	Richard DiFederico, Jr.
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Department of Wisconsin	Gundel Metz
Department of Wyoming	Rodney Birkle
Immediate Past Commander-in-Chief	Vincent Lawrence

## **NATIONAL CONVENTION COMMITTEE**

**July 20-24, 2019 Orlando, Florida**

Convention Committee Chairman	John Hamilton
Convention Committee Operations Officer	Joe Gault
Medical - Health Fair Chairman	William Wentling
Meeting Halls, Signs & Flags Co-Chairman	Bill Hertline
Meeting Halls, Signs & Flags Co-Chairman	Thomas Gosselin
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Memorial Service Chairman	Harry Seiler
Patriotic Rally Chairman	Gary Godard
Registration Chairman	Michael White
Transportation Chairman	Terry Guthrie



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JOINT OPENING SESSION  
SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE 120th NATIONAL CONVENTION  
OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA, JULY 21-24, 2019

ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE  
SUNDAY JULY 21, 2019

(The Memorial Service of the 120th Annual Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the Orlando Convention Center, Orlando, Florida, was called to order at 8:30 a.m., with Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence presiding.)

CALL TO ORDER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All rise. Sergeant-at-Arms, will you please escort the Gold Star Families and Past National Chaplains to their seats of honor.

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

Escort in the Gold Star Families and the Past National Chaplains of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America.  
Ladies and gentlemen, please, no applause.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GOLD STAR TRIBUTE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Please be seated.  
Sergeant-at-Arms.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: There are times when mere words seem far from being adequate. This is such an occasion because we are gathered to recall those who have made the supreme sacrifice and to honor their families. Thus, our deeds speak better than words.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is founded upon the true comradeship of people bound by experiences, interests, and everlasting patriotism. It is the sort of comradeship that lives through succeeding generations and far back into memory because we know that neither time nor events can separate those who have joined in the common defense of our flag and our country.

That is the way we feel about the men and women who are absent. While they are physically gone, we remember them. In reality, they are very close to us. They are definitely a part of our thinking and actions. We feel that they have molded the future of our great Nation. They give us strong incentive to carry on our crusade for lasting peace and better purposes in life.

The highest tribute this organization can render them and the most profound respect all of us can demonstrate is to apply to our own lives the strong faith and undaunted courage which were theirs.

To the family of those comrades, we pledge the sincere friendship of this organization. Thank you again for being here with us today.

#### VFW AUXILIARY DRAPING OF THE ALTAR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I now call upon VFW Auxiliary National President, Sandi Kriebel, to prepare the Auxiliary Altar.

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: The VFW Auxiliary National Conductress and Color Bearers shall prepare the Auxiliary Altar with placement of the VFW Auxiliary Memorial Altar Cloth and Bible.

#### ADVANCEMENT OF THE COLORS

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

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

Ladies and gentlemen, please rise for the advancement of the flag of the United States of America. Comrade Captain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Color Guard, advance, post, and salute the flag of the United States of America.

NATIONAL HONOR GUARD: On your command, sir.

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

#### INVOCATION - VFW AUXILIARY NATIONAL CHAPLAIN LEONA McDERMOTT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We will now have our Invocation by VFW Auxiliary Chaplain Leona McDermott. Parade rest.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: National Sergeants, parade rest.

AUXILIARY NATIONAL CHAPLAIN McDERMOTT: Almighty God, we thank You for the solemn time to remember those who have gone before us. We thank You for the grace and health to be here so that we may pay tribute to those who have helped secure the liberties and blessings that we enjoy.

We ask that Your spirit abide with us during this ceremony. May it bring healing to our hearts and peace to our organizations. Let the words, music, and prayers offered this morning be pleasing, true, and honorable.

Remembering is the best way to honor, and today we honor our comrades, brothers, and sisters. All this we ask in humility and love. Amen. (Amen)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: National Sergeants, attention.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, NATIONAL ANTHEM, POSTING OF THE COLORS

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrades, Auxiliary members, and friends, please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States followed by our National Anthem, and then the posting of the colors. Present arms.

(Whereupon, the Assembly gave the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the National Anthem sung by Willa Watts, National Assistant Soloist, VFW Auxiliary.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the opening for this Memorial Service has been completed, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms.

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

National Sergeants, right face. Forward march.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Please be seated.

Comrades, members of the VFW Auxiliary, and friends, we meet at this time to commemorate our comrades of the United States Armed Forces who have answered the last call, and their families whose service and sacrifice too often goes without the recognition it deserves.

The VFW Ritual provides that the audience shall refrain from applauding. The Sergeant-at-Arms will see that there is no disturbance during the ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Sir, your orders will be obeyed.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I request that the VFW National Chaplain preside.

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

POW/MIA TRIBUTE

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: We will now have the lighting of the POW/MIA Candle and the Armed Forces Vigil Candle by the Commander-in-Chief and the VFW Auxiliary National President.

(Whereupon, the POW/MIA Candle and the Armed Forces Vigil Candle were lit.)

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: O God Almighty, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, some of our comrades and companions are prisoners of war and missing in action. Comfort them, we pray, in their isolation. As they are separated from their homes and loved ones, give them grace to endure their

hardship.

Supply their needs and protect them from 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 our members of the Armed Forces of the United States of America. On the day of battle may they be courageous and strong, resourceful and capable, resolute and victorious.

For those serving in more peaceful situations, may they serve with dignity and honor as effective emissaries of goodwill for this Nation. May their devotion and loyalty to You and to their homeland inspire them in moments of challenge and comfort them in tribulation and long separations from loved ones.

And finally, we ask that they may return safely to serve You and our country in the days and the years to come. Amen.

(Amen)

#### MEMORIAL ROLL CALL

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: This year our Memorial Roll Call recognizes recently departed Past Commander-in-Chief John S. Staum, who passed away on September 23rd, 2018; Past Commander-in-Chief John M. "Jack" Carney, who passed away on January 1st, 2019; and Past National President Rosemary Mazer, who passed away on June 5th, 2019.

John was National Commander-in-Chief from 1985 to 1986. Jack was National Commander-in-Chief from 1992 to 1993. Rosemary was National President from 1986 to 1987.

The family of John Staum was unable to attend. Therefore, he is being represented by Chad Solheid, Commander, Department of Minnesota. The family of Jack Carney is being represented by his son, Tim, and his wife, Theresa, and friends Benny and Teresa Bachand. The family of Rosemary Mazer is being represented by her daughter, Pam Johnston, and her husband Bob, and friends Gail and Bob Yusiewitz.

#### MEMORIAL ROLL CALL TRIBUTE

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: We will now prepare for our Memorial Roll Call Tribute.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, what message of comfort can you bring as we remember those who have answered the final call?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We can keep their memories bright and strong. We can remember their service to this country and their service to their fellow comrades and family members.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: VFW Auxiliary National President, how

can we maintain hope in the midst of our sadness and loss?

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: Every life has a beginning and an end. No matter the time in between, we can be thankful that we've had those years together and were able to share our hearts and lives with them.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Comrade Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, what message of condolence do you have for those bereaved?

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Mourning is a natural part of this life, and it means we have celebrated a life well lived. The pain we feel is a reflection of the deep love and friendship we shared.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: VFW Auxiliary National Senior Vice President, what can we do to make sure these lives are never forgotten?

NATIONAL SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT HAAKE: We can continue to meet together as we are now, and to speak of them with fondness and love. We must remember and honor the memory of those we lost.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Comrade Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, what can we do in our lives today to continue the legacy of service of those gone before us?

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ROESCH: We can continue to serve our fellow veterans, their families, and our communities. We must always honor the dead by helping the living.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: VFW Auxiliary National Junior Vice President, what hope can you offer to those gathered here as we realize how short life can be?

NATIONAL JUNIOR VICE PRESIDENT ONSTWEDDER: Every day holds the opportunity to serve those around us. Our faith, friends, and family can be our strength and hope as we travel life's road.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: VFW Auxiliary National Chaplain, what can we take away from this Memorial Service so that our lives hold meaning once we depart?

AUXILIARY NATIONAL CHAPLAIN McDERMOTT: Each of us must extend a hand of friendship to those around us. We must unite in our common goal of serving veterans, their families, and the military community. Remembering what brings us together will keep us united. In this way, we can best honor those comrades, sisters, and brothers we have lost.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: We are thankful for these inspiring words from each of you. Let us learn the lesson of the hour, which is that one day we too will answer the final call and someone will be remembering us.

Let us live our lives so that when our time comes to depart this life, we can do it with a good conscience in the comfort of our faith or beliefs and in perfect charity toward everyone we meet.

National Officers, you may take your seats.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we praise Your name and give humble thanks for all Your mercies. We know that in You we live and move and have our being. We call upon You in this and every occasion of our need. Be with us both at the

beginning of each new day and at the close of each day's labor and weariness.

We ask Your blessings upon the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Auxiliary as it endeavors to serve the needs of Your people. We think of our comrades afflicted with disease and physical and mental disabilities. We remember those we have lost and their families. We call upon You for Your blessings upon all of those.

We seek Your guidance in our concerns for our Nation and its well-being. Bless us on this and every occasion when we gather and call upon Your presence and Your protection. Make us always to be aware of our dependence upon You for everything we do or undertake. And to You we give the honor and glory forever and ever, O Lord. In Your name we pray. Amen.

VFW Auxiliary National Assistant Soloist, Willa Watts, will now perform "Wind Beneath My Wings."

(VFW Auxiliary National Assistant Soloist, Willa Watts, performs "Wind Beneath My Wings.")

#### SYMBOLIC TRIBUTE

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Comrades, in commemorating the virtues of our departed heroes who have served their country in 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 HARMAN: These white flowers I place as a token of purity and affection we have for our departed comrades.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, have you a tribute to offer upon the Sacred Shrine?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: 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 departed comrades.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Members of the VFW Auxiliary, will you offer a tribute to the memory of our departed comrades?

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: I place upon our Sacred Shrine this wreath as a symbol of eternity. Its color bespeaks life everlasting. Thus, we do 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 COBB: While America's military service personnel are overseas defending liberty around the world, they leave behind those who love them most.

The family members of the military keep the home fires burning, their prayers, their care packages, their phone calls, and their emails give support and encouragement for those at war. They stand by their side in a show of love and

commitment. We honor their sacrifices today.

I ask the VFW Auxiliary; what tribute do we offer to those family members gone before us?

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: These white flowers we bring as a token of love that we have for our departed brothers and sisters, and Past National President Rosemary Mazer.

(National Assistant Soloist Willa Watts performs "I'll Never Love Again.")



## MEMORIAL ADDRESS

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Commander-in-Chief, please approach the dais for the purpose of introducing our guest speaker.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce our speaker, Derek Blumke.

Derek served a combined 12 years in the United States Air Force and Michigan Air National Guard. During this time, he deployed three times with the AC-130H Spectre Gunships in support of the war on terror.

In 2007, Derek founded the Student Veterans Association at the University of Michigan, and less than a year later cofounded Student Veterans of America.

During his time with SVA, he led the organization's lobbying efforts, where he worked alongside the Executive Director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to pass the Post 9/11 GI Bill through Congress, and helped to build the infrastructure for the organization to scale. SVA is now the largest organization of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in the country, hosting chapters on over 1,500 campuses in all 50 states, and in 4 countries around the world.

Derek went on to found a New York City-based technology company; served as an executive at two other New York City-based tech start-ups; was the founding director of the Department of Veterans Affairs national mental health program, The VITAL Initiative. He was a founding committee member of the National Action Alliance on Suicide Prevention and is a member of the American Legion's National Centennial Committee.

For his work, Derek has received the Presidential Volunteer Service Award and was recognized at the White House by President Barack Obama for his leadership in supporting returning military veterans.

Derek is a 2010 graduate of the University of Michigan, and has returned to Michigan to address the impacts of computerization on the workforce, and is working with the VFW and American Legion to end the veterans suicide epidemic. He is a Life Member of the Graf O'Hara VFW Post No. 423 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Derek, please come to the dais.

COMRADE BLUMKE: In the early morning on the 30th of May, 2005, Memorial Day, 80 miles northeast of Baghdad, a shooting star was crashing its way towards earth.

It was only there for a flash and it was thousands of miles away. I never saw it. I never heard it. I never could have dreamed it. But the only sound I heard to even know it happened were the words of a friend the next day: "Did you hear about Casey?"

Two months earlier, my friend Casey Crate and I had been together in Afghanistan. As I jumped down from the ramp of one of our Spectre Gunships, a fleet of Toyota Tacoma's and SUVs came to an abrupt halt in our staging area. From the bed of one of the trucks, my friend dismounted. Like his colleagues, he was armed to the teeth and wore a parachute on his back. But what

separated him from his bearded friends, was that he wore his typical unbreakable smile, coursing from ear to ear.

For me, this was just another deployment, but for Casey this was different. This was his first time out as a Combat Comptroller.

After nearly two years of grueling training in the Combat Control Pipeline, where he and his colleagues were sharpened to the tip of the Air Force's spear, Casey had been brought up to the pros.

He was having the time of his life. He looked less like the highly-trained war fighter -- lethal war fighter that he was and more like a kid who'd been brought up from the sidelines who'd just been asked by the adults to join them on the field.

The giddiness on his face was almost infectious. Nearly laughing myself, I ironically asked, "Hey, Casey, what are you up to?"

Without a second of hesitation, he proudly piped out, "We're going to jump out of airplanes and catch bad guys."

I saw him again a few weeks later as we were coming out of the chow tent. We made plans for when we returned to the United States. And I almost asked to get a picture together, but figured we'd have plenty of time when we got back.

"Did you hear about Casey?" I assumed he was back and had already started into his antics.

Almost laughing, I said, "No. What's up?" My friend Jason now realized it would be his job to tell me.

His face became ashen, almost stone-like, "He's gone, Brother. He's gone."

That day in 2005 would be what I now see as my first Memorial Day. A few weeks later, from a helicopter hangar on Hurlburt Field, the reality set in.

He was gone. I felt the 21-gun salute in a way that I'd never felt before. As the crisp snap of the rounds were fired, a shock ripped through me. Each proceeding round of volleys felt like bolts of lightning, seizing me from the top of my head, shaking down through my bones before tearing through my chest and exiting at the bottom of my boots.

Until Casey's death, I had not understood why the old veterans marched in their parades, why they wore their caps, or why many of them always seemed so serious and stoic.

Casey's death -- as I suspect for many of you here who have lost family members and friends "over there" -- made me question everything. It made me question why God would take a person who seemed to have been placed on this earth for the sole benefit and welfare of others.

It made me question why he volunteered to go forward from Afghanistan to Iraq when he was supposed to have beat me home. And it made me question why we were fighting in places I hadn't previously been able to place on a map. The more I sought to understand and the more I learned, the less I blindly trusted those in leadership positions and the system as a whole.

Through this reflection, I learned that everyone, from the combat

commanders selected to lead our friends in combat to our elected officials and even our Commander-in-Chief, all are human, all are flesh, all are fallible.

I suspect it was Casey's death that always led me to ask the right questions; to always seek understanding; and when a problem faced me in the future and something wasn't right, to confront it.

When I arrived to campus at the University of Michigan in 2007, the transition was not easy. Just as we'd been surprised by a war in Afghanistan, it seemed the country was just surprised with our return.

I asked the university why they did not have programs for veterans. And when I did not get the right answers, it fueled me to action. When I dug deeper, I realized the problems were much bigger than just the University of Michigan.

And it's led me to start Student Veterans of America and ensure that other veterans didn't have to struggle as my colleagues and I did. It also led me to work alongside Bob Wallace in the Veterans of Foreign Wars to help compelling Congress towards the passage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill of Rights.

Casey's loss was a crushing one. Crushing for his family. Crushing for his friends. Crushing for the whole world to bear. But all of you know of a similar loss. Whether it came from machine gunfire in Korea or Europe; booby traps in rat holes in Vietnam; IEDs in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Syria; an unexplained cancer; or an internal pain that led to a self-inflicted casualty, these losses must be for something.

Aeschylus wrote, "Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us through the awful grace of God."

In the fall of 2008, less than a year after we founded Student Veterans of America, I received a message from one of my SVA chapter presidents. He wrote to inform me that one of his members, thereby one of my members, had killed himself.

This young man's death, a person I'd never met, haunted me. I felt as though I were a commander and I'd just lost one of my troops. Even worse, I was the commander responsible for the welfare of an organization and those in it, but I was left helpless in preventing this tragedy from happening again.

Throughout my tenure as President of SVA, I fought and struggled to create programs for veterans who might be in crisis. I believe it was this struggle that led me to the Department of Veterans Affairs, where I'd build a national mental health program, all with the hope that I could make an impact and save lives.

Unfortunately, it seems much of this work was in vain. I was fighting to save lives, along with thousands of others, but we were doing so without truly understanding the cause -- even worse, as I now know, the VA would not be taking a leadership role in ending this epidemic, instead unintentionally contributing to it.

A decade after the message from our chapter president at UC-Berkeley, I found myself as a tech executive in New York City, and in short order

a failed tech start-up founder.

In the year following my company's failure, I found myself on a different path. No longer did I have the career that seemed to be in a meteoric rise. Instead, I was in a death spiral that only seemed to find deeper bottoms.

If I had fallen from a cliff and hit the rocks below, I could only be found with a hand drill and bloodied hands as I clawed to go deeper. In my despair, I was treated for depression, but my "treatment" made me worse. Within a year of being placed on antidepressants, I was unemployable and barely able to maintain stable housing. At my lowest point, I came to accept the best I would ever do again would be mowing my parents' lawn.

Fortunately, suicide was not an option for me as I'd considered the thought years earlier, but I could not bear knowing the wreckage that would be left for my family and friends. The positive, I'd survive. The negative, I was resigned to an endless stream of shocks, as failure followed failure, and isolation met profound sadness.

A little over a year ago, I had an epiphany. Using my fingers to do the math, I counted up the list of medications the VA had me on. By the time I hit the sixth finger, I realized that my turmoil was created by the same medications that were supposed to be treating me. In that moment, I also recognized that the VA had no plan of taking me off this cocktail; I, alone, would have to climb out of this electrified cage.

When I tried to recount the last time I met with a VA psychologist or counselor, I couldn't. In three years of "treatment," nearly a dozen drugs in all, six at a time, thousands of pills, I never met -- once met with a VA psychologist or counselor.

I was as much in shock as many of you are likely in hearing this. But what is more terrifying -- and what everyone here knows -- that I was not an isolated case. While this lesson in overprescribing practices at the VA is important and

requires us to investigate, the true wisdom came as my withdrawal began.

As I decreased the dosage of Zoloft, an antidepressant, I became rage-filled, nearly violent. I believed I was being watched, that my phone calls were being listened to, and my life was in danger.

Beyond the paranoia, panic attacks, anxiety and depression, I had physical pain to the point where I could barely walk. At its worst, I couldn't stand. My ears rang as though they would explode, and electrical shocks -- or brain zaps as they're called -- streamed from one side of my head to the other.

After nearly a month of severe pain, anxiety and panic, an article ran in the New York Times: "Many taking antidepressants discover they cannot quit." Through the stories of others, I found my own. I realized that no longer would this be a short and inspiring recovery story. Instead it became a yearlong protracted war to expel a poison that had altered my body's biology.

As I began to recover, I realized that my thoughts had not been normal. More importantly, I recognized what happened to me was not right and that I

was not alone.

The more I researched, the darker the story became. I found that contrary to what the VA is publicly reporting, the suicide rates for veterans who use the VA for their health care are 32 percent higher than for veterans who do not use the VA for their health care; though I had to go to the VA's own source data to put this statistic together, which the VFW and American Legion have since fact-checked for accuracy.

As shocking as that statistic might be, it fit into a theory: Veterans who use the VA for their care could be at an increased risk for suicide, as they have greater access to psychiatric care and, therefore, have a greater likelihood of being prescribed antidepressant medications – the same class of drugs that, for a time, made me a danger to myself and others -- and it was this that could be causing the higher suicide rates for veterans at the VA.

A study by researchers from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the University of Michigan showed that the first 180-day suicide rates for veterans treated with antidepressants. Five of these drugs were found to have suicide rates greater than 1 in 200 for the first 90 days you take it. For one drug studied, the suicide rate was over 1 in 100.

In the last meeting I had with my psychiatrist, he said that in his 25 years of practice, he'd never had a patient with as many challenges with these drugs as me. I posed a question to him: "Maybe I was the one that came back."

It seems I might have been. A little over three years ago, a young Marine veteran named Geoffrey Bowen checked into inpatient psychiatric care at the Ann Arbor VA Medical Center. After four days being pumped full of medications to treat him for his paranoia -- he believed someone was hunting him -- he was discharged.

Two weeks later, he went missing. After three soul-crushing weeks, they finally found his body in the cab of his Bronco in a rural area, not 10 miles from the Ann Arbor VA.

Three months after his death and having managed to survive the pain of her husband being missing and thought dead for three weeks, finding him, and ultimately burying him, doctors felt his wife Lauren was depressed and suggested she try Zoloft. Within two weeks she was having panic attacks, and in a month she was debilitated to the point where she could not drive.

To treat the panic, doctors prescribed Xanax. Three years later, the panic attacks have subsided. Her children, five and six now, are healthy, happy, and growing. But three years later, she is still trapped on Zoloft. Every time she tries to stop after slowly weaning, the panic attacks return and her life spins into chaos again.

I tell Lauren's story because she cannot be here, as she was at the Department of – Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Michigan's convention. I tell her story because she knew what happened to her and her husband was not right. To do something about it, she started an annual walk at Ann Arbor to raise awareness about suicide. But she has now recognized, as has my VFW and Legion Posts in Ann Arbor, Graf-O'Hara Post 423, the American

Legion Department of Michigan, and the Michigan Department of Veterans of Foreign Wars, awareness is not enough.

In every year of the past five years, we have lost more than 6,000 veterans to suicide. This does not count the caregivers and spouses who might have met a similar fate. In the five previous years, we lost over 5,000 veterans to suicide. Just one year of veteran suicide deaths accounts for all of the combat deaths in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria combined, all since the wars began.

We must remember all of the comrades we've lost in combat and at home. But just as we are here today in memory of those who are not here, we must learn. We must evolve. We must never forget. But in the end, we must act. We have the opportunity to save the lives of others, to end this epidemic.

This year more than 6,000 stars will continue crashing down. Instead of bright, beautiful lights, their descent is consumed in darkness. Their deaths are similar to the loss of my friend. While his burning star was that of an airplane on its final descent towards Earth, his loss was a causality of war, as were the 6,000 lives That we will lose this year.

Alongside the VFW and you as my comrades, friends, and family, I look forward to ensuring the brightness of these falling stars is blinding and all-consuming, that we make this year to be the end of a sad and painful chapter for our most beautiful community.

Let us never forget our brothers, sisters, mothers, daughters, fathers, sons, family members, and friends who cannot be with us. Let their light always show us the path.

God bless the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

God bless every veteran who has proudly served our Nation. God bless our Gold Star Families. And God bless the United States of America.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, Mr. Blumke.

VFW National Chaplain, please join me.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: VFW Auxiliary National Assistant Soloist, Willa Watts, will now perform "Hallelujah," the Veterans Version.

(National Assistant Soloist Willa Watts performs "Hallelujah.")

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Thank you, Willa. That was magnificent. You have a beautiful gift.

BENEDICTION - PAST VFW NATIONAL CHAPLAIN REVEREND PETER R. HOOK

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Please stand for the Benediction by Past VFW National Chaplain James W. Gray, followed by the playing of "Taps" by Michael Carlson who is 15 years old and has been playing the trumpet for four years. He is taking private lessons from a retired U.S. Army Band trumpet player.

He has played "Taps" at the Department of Colorado Joint Memorial Service and the "National Anthem" at the Council of Administration meetings of

the Department of Colorado VFW Auxiliary. And this year he was asked to be the honorary musician for the Department Auxiliary. Michael is a Boy Scout and holds the rank of Life and is currently working on his Eagle rank.

PAST NATIONAL CHAPLAIN GRAY: Let us pray.

Almighty God, as we conclude our annual memorial service, we are reminded that you, O Lord, are God, Creator, and the giver of life. You have blessed all present here today with life, and we are grateful for each day we have been given.

As we have remembered and honored those who once sat with us, we give thanks for the time we had with them and for their commitment and service to preserve liberty and freedom in our own land and in the world. The fallen, whether in the air, on the land, or on the sea, have provided for all that which we appreciate today.

May we continue to remember our comrades with grateful hearts full of thanksgiving to You for Your grace and mercy to them.

And now Lord, be gracious and merciful to us and let Your light shine upon us for You are our God and our Savior, King of kings and Lord of lords, and unto You we ascribe glory now and forevermore. Amen.

(Amen)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: National Sergeants, attention. Present arms.

(Whereupon, Michael Carlson played "Taps".)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Honor arms.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: This concludes our Memorial Service. I would like to acknowledge and thank all of you for your respectful participation in this solemn service. Please, everyone, go in peace.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: National Sergeants, fall in.

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

JOINT OPENING SESSION  
MONDAY, JULY 22, 2019

(The Joint Opening Session of the 120<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the 106<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the VFW Auxiliary, held in the Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida, was called to order on Monday, July 22, 2019, at 8:00 a.m., by Adjutant General Kevin Jones.)

INTRODUCTORY CALL TO ORDER ADJUTANT GENERAL KEVIN JONES

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Kevin Jones, Adjutant General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Welcome to Orlando, Florida, and welcome to the Joint Opening of the 120<sup>th</sup> National Convention.

As we kick things off this morning, please draw your attention to the large screens to the sides of the stage as this year's generous convention sponsors are displayed. We thank them for their support. Without it, our conventions simply wouldn't be possible.

Special appreciation goes to USAA, Phillips, Humana, Burger King, and Sport Clips. And I'd like to extend a special thanks to Sprint Cap Tel as the provider of this year's closed captioning. Please give all of our supporters a warm round of applause.  
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: With us this morning are representatives from the 2018-2019 Outstanding Community Service Posts. If you would, please stand as a group and be recognized.  
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: I have just a few announcements before we proceed this morning. The typical membership awards program, which includes the presentation of All-Americans that have historically taken place tomorrow morning has been moved to this evening as part of a very special event we have planned.

Our National Commander will speak more on this event in a couple minutes, but know that we'll kick off the event at 6:00 p.m. right here in this very room. And shuttles will run from the Rosen hotels every 15 to 20 minutes beginning at 4:30 p.m.

As a result of moving membership awards to this evening, this afternoon's business meeting is being moved to tomorrow and will now take place during the second half of tomorrow's business meeting.

We'll also hold our annual Patriotic Celebration tomorrow evening beginning with the traditional Patriotic March of the departments. Lineup is at



5:30 p.m. And this year the march will be followed by some great entertainment by the Six-String Soldiers, Sailor Jerri, and a few other special guests.

Again, shuttles will run from the Rosen hotels every 15 to 20 minutes beginning at 4:30. Folks, believe me, you won't want to miss either of these two events.

And as a reminder, those of you who plan to attend the Commander-in-Chief and National President's Reception on Wednesday, you must attend the installation and receive a ticket. Once the installation concludes, the Sergeant-at-Arms and/or members of the staff will distribute tickets. You must have a ticket in hand to attend the reception.

The department commanders from the class of 2013-2014, Bill's Brigade, will have their luncheon today at 12:30 p.m. at Marlow's Tavern in Pointe Orlando.

Finally, if you haven't yet, please download the VFW Event app. We've got a much improved app this year, and it truly offers the most effective way for you to stay apprised of all the happenings of the convention. If you don't have it yet, please download it by searching "VFW Events" at the Apple app or Google Play Stores.

#### INTRODUCTION OF JOHN HAMILTON, CHAIRMAN VFW 120TH NATIONAL CONVENTION COMMITTEE

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Now, please join me in welcoming this year's convention chairman, John Hamilton.  
(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: Good morning, VFW and Auxiliary members and special guests.

As this year's convention chairman, I'm pleased to welcome you to not only the 120th VFW National Convention, but also to my home state, the great Sunshine State of Florida.

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

#### ADVANCEMENT OF COLORS VFW HONOR GUARD

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: Now, please rise as we officially open the convention with the advancing of the colors.

National Sergeant-at-Arms, you will prepare the room to advance the colors.

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

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

#### INVOCATION BY NATIONAL CHAPLAIN CHARLENE COBB

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: For this morning's invocation, we will have the National Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, Charlene Cobb.

Please remain standing as we recite the Pledge of Allegiance led by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the national anthem is sung by Willa Watts, the Auxiliary National Soloist, and for the posting of the colors.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Most gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we gather today to kick off our National Convention: "Make It Happen." As we begin these important deliberations, we ask for Your divine guidance and wisdom in all that we do.

Lord, grant that the information from this convention might become the inspiration we need as we go forward serving the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. We ask that You would uplift and strengthen our National Commander, B.J. Lawrence, and all of the officers of this great organization. Help us to remember always those we are here to serve.

We ask that You would provide opportunities for us to share our accomplishments and also our disappointments so we are able to learn from one another for the betterment of this great organization.

Dear Lord, we ask that You would be with those who, even now, are serving our country throughout the world. Be with the family members left behind and comfort and care for them. In Your precious name, we pray. Amen. (Amen)

#### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrades, Auxiliary members, and friends, please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States, followed by the national anthem, and then the posting of the Colors.

(Whereupon, the Pledge of Allegiance was given, followed by the singing of the national anthem by VFW Auxiliary National Assistant Soloist Willa Watts, and then the posting of the Colors.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Past Commander-in-Chief, the opening for the 120<sup>th</sup> National Convention has been completed, sir.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: Very well.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: National Sergeants, left and right face. Forward march.

## VIDEO PRESENTATION

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: Please be seated.  
Now, please dim the lights for a special presentation.

(Whereupon, a video was shown at this time.)

(Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF B.J. LAWRENCE  
PRESENTATION OF OFFICIAL CONVENTION BADGE, BELL, AND GAVEL  
BY 120TH NATIONAL CONVENTION CHAIRMAN, JOHN HAMILTON

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to introduce a gentleman who has served our great country for nearly 30 combined years. He's an Army veteran and has served the VFW at the Post, District, Department, and National levels of the organization.

B.J. Lawrence was elected to the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars on 25 July, 2018, at the VFW 119th National Convention in Kansas City.

He served in the U.S. Army from 1983 to '86, earning his eligibility in Korea, and joined the VFW in 2000 at VFW Post 7686 in Alamogordo, New Mexico, where he maintains his Gold Legacy Life membership today.

At the 2010 VFW National Convention, B.J. joined the ranks of the select few when he was recognized for his distinctive membership recruiting achievements on the Post, District, and Department levels by earning the coveted designation of VFW Triple Crown winner.

Since joining the organization, he has remained dedicated to moving the organization forward, calling on all of us to "Make It Happen." And, ladies and gentlemen, I think we have.

Please welcome our Commander-in-Chief, B.J. Lawrence.  
(Standing ovation)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: We're having a little private meeting up here. It's great fun. You should be here.  
(Laughter)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: And your bell, sir.

(Whereupon, Past Commander-in-Chief Hamilton presented Commander-in-Chief Lawrence with the convention badge, bell, and gavel.)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: Please be seated.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you.  
(Applause)

REMARKS BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF B.J. LAWRENCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Well, first of all, good morning. We made it happen.  
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: What a great day to kick off our 120th VFW National Convention. I'd like to start by thanking my fellow VFW and

Auxiliary members, distinguished guests, supporters, and friends for being here. You all have brought a unique energy to the convention this year. And I have no doubt this is going to be our best convention ever.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It's hard for me to believe that it's been almost a year since I stood before you in Kansas City. Yes, it's been almost a year since I had teleprompter issues. And as you notice today, I have a book in front of me. So that's not happening again.

A year ago, I was sworn in as the National Commander of the greatest veterans' service organization in the world. The saying "Time flies when you're having fun" has held especially true for me as I've thoroughly enjoyed leading you through a remarkable year of achievement for our veterans, service members, and their families, and for our great organization.

This is not to say that I wasn't met with my share of challenges, that at times I didn't think, "What the hell have I gotten myself into?"

(Laughter)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: But all the while I knew I had the full and unwavering support of the strongest membership of any organization in the world, and that's an indescribable feeling. But most of all, I thank you all for that.

Now, I do have to take a moment and call a few people out specifically. To my daughters, Tianna and Kaidyn; my sons, Marine Corps veteran Frederick and Army veteran Christopher; and my wife and best friend, Mary, thank you for your patience and encouragement over the last year. But mostly, thanks for keeping me laughing.

Thank you to my leadership team: Senior Vice Commander, Doc Schmitz; Junior Vice Commander, Hal Roesch; and to my Auxiliary counterpart, Sandi Kriebel; and our Quartermaster General, Debra Anderson. It's been an absolute pleasure to serve alongside of each and every one of you this year.

Shout-out to the Western Conference.

(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you for your faith in me and for and your friendship.

Past National Commander Tom Pouliot, thank you for your confidence in nominating and installing me to this great office.

I also want to extend my thanks to Adjutant General Kevin Jones and his staff at the headquarters and Washington office for the support and guidance they have provided me.

Our success over the past year is a direct result of the efforts of everyone in this room. You stood at the ready, prepared not only to execute, but to effectively accomplish each and every mission that came your way no matter what it took.

I asked you during my acceptance speech to this high office last year "Make It Happen," and make it happen you have. For the first time in 27 years' membership in our organization has grown. And while this is significant for the VFW, the positive and lasting effects of this landmark year will extend far beyond the direct impact of our organization.

This ensures the doors of Congress, the White House, and the Pentagon remain open to veterans. This ensures for years to come that veterans, service members, and their families will have advocates with the experience, clout, and who possess the fire needed to win the fight for quality-of-life programs and services.

It ensures those who want to continue serving after they hang up the uniform. Those who find comfort in sharing the camaraderie known only to those who have served our Nation in war have a safe place to go.

This ensures the vitality of our organization remains strong in serving communities all over the world. This ensures our legacy lives on.

During a time when it's increasingly difficult to break through the clutter and busyness that is life, you spent the last year getting out there and telling our story. You showed those that put on our country's uniforms that we have their backs. You welcomed them into the VFW. You made it happen. (Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Now, as a token of my appreciation and to celebrate this momentous occasion, I am personally inviting each of you to my Membership 100 Percent Plus "Made It Happen" celebration tonight, as Adjutant General Kevin Jones mentioned, right here in this room beginning at 6:00 p.m.

It's then when it will be my honor to kick off this evening's event by presenting the remarkable 657 commanders with the title of All-American. (Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: That's right. It wasn't a typo. 657 All-American Commanders in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Unbelievable.

I'll also announce the Triple Crown Awards, Top Conference Departments, the winner of the first ever Conference Membership Award -- or as we lovingly call it, The Commander's Cup. And we'll also name the 2018-2019 Recruiter of the Year.

And, of course, an event of this magnitude wouldn't be complete without some snacks, beverages, and a heavy dose of entertainment. So please join us this evening as we honor some of our organization's elite and have a whole lot of fun celebrating our growth.

In fact, we have much to celebrate together, beyond membership. All of the achievements highlighted in the video we watched just moments ago were hard-fought results produced by our collective efforts. We made it happen by

communicating with our elected officials and mobilizing to send thousands of letters, emails, and phone calls to make sure important legislation to positively affect veterans was passed.

We made it happen by providing uninterrupted support to our communities. Making sure local businesses, residents, and area youth know they can count on the VFW and Auxiliary to come through. And we made it happen by confronting each and every obstacle head-on, never backing down from a good challenge.

And while we're talking about things to celebrate, as you know, our second annual Uniting to Combat Hunger campaign kicked off right here in Florida on June 11th. It's estimated that 25 percent of our service members seek aid from food pantries. 25 percent.

We have to be part of the solution. So this year we again teamed up with Humana, as well as Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida, Care Plus Health Plans, and the Society of St. Andrew setting the lofty goal of raising 100,000 meals for hungry local residents.

Well, I'm pleased to say I received an update just before I took the stage this morning, and, ladies and gentlemen, we absolutely shattered our goal raising more than 300,000 meals and 2,000 bottles of water.  
(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you to all of those who contributed to this successful effort in helping to ensure those who put on a uniform of our great Nation are able to feed their families.

Leading up to this convention and as my tenure as your National Commander nears its end, I spent quite a bit of time reflecting over the last year. And I have to say I've never been prouder to be part of something in my life. And the experience of leading you this past year will be one I'll never forget.

Your determination and resolve in forwarding the mission of the VFW has been truly inspirational. And I'm thankful for your guidance and understanding. But most of all, I'm thankful for your friendship.

I look forward to my next chapter with the VFW. And, again, it has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the Commander-in-Chief of the greatest veterans' service organization in the world, the organization where truly "No One Does More For Veterans." Now, let's have a great convention.  
(Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you VFW and Auxiliary. You know I love you-all. Thank you. Please be seated.

PRESENTATION OF VFW GOLD MEDAL OF MERIT AND CITATION TO  
SANDI KRIEBEL, NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE VFW AUXILIARY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my distinct pleasure to

introduce my esteemed counterpart, the National President of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary.

Sandi Kriebel was a Life member of Yingling-Ridgely Auxiliary Post 7472 in Ellicott City, Maryland. She began her journey in the organization when she joined on the eligibility of her father, who served in the U.S. Army during World War II and the Korean War.

Sandi has served the organization in several capacities, including as Auxiliary Post, District, and Department President, where she was named Outstanding President of the Year for her membership group.

On the national level, she has served as National District Council Member, Eastern Conference Chairman for the Americanism and Membership programs, and National Director for the Cancer Aid & Research Hospital, and the Buddy Poppy programs. She also has served as National Patriotic Instructor.

There is no doubt her leadership -- especially over the last year -- has led to another incredible year for the Auxiliary. I'd truly like to congratulate Sandi and every member of the Auxiliary for all of your accomplishments this year and for working together with us as one VFW family. Yes, this year we all learned how to believe.

I am pleased to now present the VFW Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit to a person of great devotion to those we serve. VFW Auxiliary National President, my counterpart, Sandi Kriebel.

Sandi?

(Standing ovation)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit and Citation awarded to Sandi Kriebel, National President, Veterans of Foreign Wars 2018-2019, in esteemed recognition and sincere appreciation of her loyal and compassionate concern for America's veterans as the National President of the VFW Auxiliary.

Her theme, "Believe We Can Do It," reflects her vision and support for our Nation's veterans and their families, and will forever serve as the true and honorable legacy of her presidency.

Her wealth of experience and lifetime commitment to the objectives of the VFW Auxiliary 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 seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 22nd day of July.

Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.

(Standing ovation)

REMARKS BY NATIONAL PRESIDENT SANDI KRIEBEL, VFW AUXILIARY

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: Commander-in-Chief Lawrence,



National VFW and VFW Auxiliary officers, Past Commander-in-Chief, Past National Presidents, comrades, Auxiliary members and guests, I am so honored to receive this award from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. And I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

It is humbling to accept this award. It has been an absolute privilege and honor to represent the VFW Auxiliary members this year and work with our VFW leadership. The VFW and Auxiliary truly worked as a team this year to strengthen and grow our organization.

To Commander-in-Chief Lawrence and all the members of the VFW, there is no limit to what we can achieve through teamwork and supporting the mission we believe in. I am so impressed and inspired by your 100 percent plus in membership achievement. Together, working as a VFW family under Chief Lawrence's leadership, we raised awareness of the great mission across the country and around the world.

And to the VFW Auxiliary members who I represented this year, you made me so proud. You make a difference every day. And you do hold the key to the success of our mission.

This is a new era of membership and service. It looks different than it even did two decades ago. It is important to realize that we are still more vital than ever in our mission, even if we are growing and changing, Auxiliary members coming together, veterans, and active duty service members in the traditional ways, as well as reaching out in new, innovative ways: Through social media, through training like building on the VFW Auxiliary foundation, and through making new, powerful connections through Community Outreach.

I have been a member of the Auxiliary for 54 years. And I remember a time when our Commander-in-Chief would ask all World War I vets to stand, and only a handful would stand. He would ask all World War II veterans to stand, and the majority of the room stood. He would ask the Korean War veterans to stand, and a good number would stand. He would ask the Vietnam veterans to stand, and a small handful would stand.

Now today, when our Commander-in-Chief asks the same question, there are no World War I veterans. A small group of World War II veterans stand. More than a small group of Korean War veterans stand. A majority of Vietnam veterans stand. And a small group from Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, and other conflicts stand.

Now today, female veterans stand.  
(Applause)

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: It's a sign of the times. It is our legacy of our organization, the heritage that is handed down to one generation of veterans to another, ready to carry on the torch that will keep our great organization strong, alive, and effective. I know that this generation of veterans will be ready to mentor and hand over the torch of service to the next

generation.

I know that because I know that you love this organization, and you truly believe in its purpose. I know this because you, above all, understand the true meaning of sacrifices and the needs of our veterans.

Something we members can count on: There will always be veterans and their families that we must serve through our support and passion. This reason alone will propel us into the decades ahead with purpose and passion. Our mission is ongoing. Let us continue our great work as one VFW family.

I wear this medal proudly for all the members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary, their incredible dedication and their hard work. Thank you.

To every veteran here today, thank you. Thank you for answering the call. Thank you for your sacrifices. Thank you for serving our country. Each of you has given a powerful legacy of hope. Hope for the future. Hope for the heritage of freedom and democracy.

And no words can ever express how much you are appreciated, not only for my freedom, but to have the privilege to belong to this great organization of which I am so proud to be a member of.

It is the greatness of our country, the sacrifices that you and others are not afraid to make that unites us together to continue that greatness. Thank you for all that you have done, for all that you do, and all that you will continue to do.

God bless our service members, and God bless the great United States of America.  
(Standing ovation)

INTRODUCTION OF UNITED STATES CONGRESSWOMAN  
VAL DEMINGS, 10TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my privilege to introduce United States Congresswoman Val Demings, Representative for the citizens of Florida's 10th Congressional District since 2017. Representative Demings sits on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the House Judiciary Committee, and the House Committee on Homeland Security.

Prior to being elected to Congress, Representative Demings served honorably with the Orlando Police Department for 27 years, working in virtually every department until making history in 2007 when she was appointed to serve as Orlando's first female Chief of Police.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: You know I love that background.

It was through her hard work and leadership and the dedication of her officers that the Orlando Police Department was able to reduce violent crime by more than 40 percent. She worked tirelessly to make the Orlando community a partner of the department, all while improving the quality of life in Orlando's most distressed community.

Besides serving as a subcommittee vice chair, Congresswoman Demings's leadership positions include serving as assistant and regional whip for the House Democratic Caucus, co-chair of Candidate Recruitment for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and Vice Chair of the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force.

Let's give a warm VFW and Auxiliary welcome to Florida's 10th Congressional District, Congresswoman Val Demings.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY UNITED STATES CONGRESSWOMAN VAL DEMINGS

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: Good morning, VFW and Auxiliary.  
(Good morning)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: It is my honor and it's a joy for me to be with you this morning.

To your Commander-in-Chief, B.J. Lawrence, to your Executive Director, Bob Wallace, and to your National President -- it was so nice to sit there and see her be honored this morning -- Sandi Kriebel. Right.

I'd also like to take just a moment -- I do have the microphone. You-all invited me. I want to acknowledge the Orange County mayor who was gracious enough to accompany me here this morning. We are in the convention center that is in his jurisdiction. Please join me in recognizing Orange County mayor, who just happens to be my husband, Jerry Demings.

(Applause)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: It's an honor for me to be one of 435 members who represent you in the United States House of Representatives. But let me pause for just a moment. Are there any Floridians in the house?

(Cheering)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: Yeah, I thought so. Are there any law enforcement in the house?

(Cheering)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: Thank you so very much for double service.

I'm delighted that you have chosen to hold your 120th National Convention in Orlando. And we just happened to be in Congressional District 10. I stand before you this morning as a member of Congress and as a former police chief, and I believe in giving honor to whom honor is due.

VFW, I believe in protecting those who have worked so hard to protect us, our national defenders. As this crowd knows -- oh, I know you know. I know you know -- that the United States of America is the greatest country in the world. Am I right about that?

(Cheering and applause)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: Yeah, we are. We are. And we are not just the greatest nation by chance, but because of the brave men and women, our servicemen and women who live and die to protect our Nation, to protect our freedoms, and protect our democracy.

In Congress, we know that our veterans have honored our country. And now we, as members of Congress, must honor them by ensuring that we finish the VA MISSION Act and allow veterans to get the care they need regardless of where they live.

(Applause)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: What else can we do to do our part? Well, we can be there for our veterans and their surviving family members by eliminating the 15-year use or lose it limitation and make the GI Bill truly a Forever GI Bill.

(Applause)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: And we do acknowledge the 12-month delay, but we must continue to work so that you will understand that blessings delayed are not blessings denied. We are going to get it done.

The Blue Waters Veterans -- Navy Veterans Act was signed into law on June 25th. Yeah, just a little while ago.

(Applause)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: Bringing the decades-long fight for disability benefits linked to exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War to victory. But we also realize there are many other locations where we believe our servicemen and women were exposed to Agent Orange, and we are working to extend this act to cover those service locations as well.

(Applause)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: In Florida, there are 6,295 Gold Star Families who lose out on their survivor benefit plan payments due to the dreadful widows' tax, with 168 of those families living in Congressional District 10. To sum things up, we need to end the widows tax.

(Applause)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: VFW and Auxiliary, this week, as you conduct the business of the VFW, I pray that you will have a productive yet fun time in Orange County. And if you need something and don't get it, just give me a call because I know the Orange County mayor.

(Laughter)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: So thank you. Thank you for the millions of volunteer service hours. Thank you for scholarship. Thank you for the advocacy you continue to bring to Capitol Hill and to local communities. Thank you, VFW and Auxiliary, for having our servicemen and women's backs and making a difference. We are a better Nation for it.

Enjoy yourselves, be safe, and may God continue to bless and keep you. Thank you.

(Standing ovation)

CONGRESSWOMAN DEMINGS: Thank you. Thank you. God bless you. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: This year we're celebrating an incredible milestone. 100 years ago at our National Encampment, our forefathers established the National Service Bureau, known today as National Veterans Service, to work with the government to ensure America's veterans got the benefits they earned and deserved.

The VFW was the first veterans service organization to help veterans cut through the bureaucratic red tape. Literally, the term goes back to the beginning of the National Service Bureau.

Our first service officers used to go to the Department of Treasury, into the basement where they kept Veterans War-Risk Insurance Bureau claims bound with red tape. Literally red tape. They would actually cut through the red tape and bring it upstairs to be processed.

Because the Department of Veterans Affairs hadn't been established

yet, our centralized office had to work with a few different government departments to get veterans the benefits they needed. It's because of this we can proudly say we've been helping veterans with benefits claims longer than the Department of Veterans Affairs has existed.

Today National Veterans Service, a hallmark program of the VFW, has assisted hundreds of thousands of veterans in attaining their VA benefits. In our last fiscal year, over 2,000 VA-accredited VFW representatives helped recoup over \$8.3 billion in VA disability, compensation and pension benefits, which includes \$1.4 billion in new claims.

## VIDEO PRESENTATION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: With that, I'd like to ask you to turn your attention to the video screens for a short video presentation.

(Whereupon, a video was shown at this time.)

(Applause)

### PRESENTATION OF THE VFW ACCREDITED SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE YEAR AWARD TO TERRY "MIKE" ESHENBAUGH

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Wow. If that video didn't get you excited about the work we're doing for veterans, this next award winner sure will.

We know from experience that much of success is showing up. For U.S. Army veteran and VFW member, Department of Texas Service Officer, Terry "Mike" Eshenbaugh, showing up has led to his incredible impact that is known across Texas.

As a VFW rep at the Texas Veterans Commission in the Houston regional office, Mike shows up for the veterans he serves every single day without fail.

But Mike goes above and beyond simply showing up for the veterans of Texas. He leads outreach programs, regularly speaks at VFW Department of Texas meetings, trains other Texas VFW service officers, and holds regular office hours at the Houston Vet Center every Tuesday.

To date, Mike has been in contact with over 1,500 veterans. His commitment to going above and beyond for veterans is evidenced by the thanks he receives from those he's helped.

During Hurricane Harvey, Mike didn't sit by to watch the events unfold. Instead, he got out in his community to help those stranded by the flood. In the aftermath, he continues to serve by helping screen every veteran seeking assistance from the Texas VFW Foundation in the wake of the storm, making them aware of all of the programs and services available to him.

His commitment to service sets the standard for the type of service representative, VFW leader, and member we all strive to be, and is most deserving of today's honor.

Please join me in welcoming the 2019 VFW Accredited Service Representative of the Year, Terry "Mike" Eshenbaugh.  
(Standing ovation)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: VFW Accredited Service Officer Representative of the year 2018-2019, presented to Terry Michael Eshenbaugh, Department Service Officer, VFW Department of Texas, in special recognition of his exemplary achievements and support of the veterans' service mission and programs of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, thus earning

him the distinction of the VFW-Accredited Service Representative of the Year.

His remarkable and steadfast service to our Nation's veterans, on behalf of the VFW Department of Texas, reflects great credit upon himself, his department, and our entire organization. His actions make real promises that "No One Does More For Veterans."

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 17 July, 2019.

Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.  
(Applause)

REMARKS BY TERRY "MIKE" ESHENBAUGH,  
VFW ACCREDITED SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE YEAR 2019

COMRADE ESHENBAUGH: All right, Texas, where you at?  
(Cheering)

COMRADE ESHENBAUGH: I just want to take the time to, you know, thank the NVS staff. Ryan and his staff put together some outstanding training that I take back with me. I take it to the state level, I take it down to the post level to be able to be a help to all these veterans.

I also want to take the time to thank the Texas Veterans Commission. Without their leadership and commitment, I wouldn't be able to do what I'm able to do.

I want to thank all the veterans out here. Without you-all, I wouldn't have a purpose.

I was told when I was little that if you love what you do, you won't work a day in your life. And I can honestly say I have not worked a day in the last four years.

And I just want to accept this award on behalf of my children. Tyler, Caden and Olivia, I want to thank you for continuing to inspire me each and every day to be better.

I love you guys and thank you-all.  
(Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF NATHAN NAYLOR, VICE PRESIDENT  
OF VETERAN HEALTHCARE, PHILIPS NORTH AMERICA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Our next guest represents an organization whose decades of dedication toward helping people live healthier, happier lives, has made them an ideal fit as a Patriotic sponsor for this year's National Convention.

Our next guest is the Vice President of Veterans Healthcare for Phillips North America, who for four years served as the VA Deputy Assistant Secretary



for Public Affairs. During that time, he helped to reduce veterans' homelessness, expand the GI Bill, end the benefit backlog, and improve access to care.

Prior to his work at the VA, he served the White House as the traveling press aide to former Vice President Al Gore and in the U.S. Senate. He comes from two military families and is married to a caregiver of a Vietnam-era veteran.

Please welcome our esteemed guest, Mr. Nathan Naylor.  
(Applause)

REMARKS BY NATHAN NAYLOR,  
VICE PRESIDENT OF VETERAN HEALTHCARE, PHILIPS NORTH AMERICA

COMRADE NAYLOR: Thank you, everybody.

Good morning, Veterans of Foreign Wars, VFW Auxiliary, distinguished guests, and friends.

Thank you, B.J., Doc, Hal, Kevin, Kim, and my battle buddy, Kevin Jamison, who's out there somewhere.

I'm very pleased to represent that over 20,000 U.S.-based employees of Philips North America in speaking with you today. In fact, this is a bucket list personal for me, and I'm grateful for the opportunity.

You heard some of my story from that warm introduction. But what you may not know is that I'm the grandson of a World War II and Korean War veterans, the son-in-law of the late General John Nelson Abrams, and I'm married to a military caregiver who stayed with her dad after his brain surgery at Walter Reed every night her mom didn't send her home.

I've had my heart broken when my Grandfather Captain Jesse Abner Naylor died too young, and when Captain Eugene Brakberg (ph) learned that his final battle would be a -- would be a three-front war against Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and dementia.

At this time last year, my family and I were frenetically preparing for General Abrams' long-awaited return home. A goal that was short-lived as he would pass away a few weeks later at Walter Reed, where his father, Creighton, and mother, Julie, died years previously.

These experiences have taught me that family cannot be replaced. Home is precious. And time is short. In my experience, VFW knows these truths, as do my former VA colleagues and my colleagues at Philips today.

Our goal at Philips is to improve the lives of 3 billion people by 2030. My goal is to start on that objective with the VFW and work out from there. So I'm signed up for the mission with each of you, and I'm not alone.

The full weight of Philips North America is in the fight too. If you don't know us at Philips, we were founded just a few years around the time of the VFW. So -- so we're in good company.

Philips knows that our world today would not exist if it weren't for the

American GIs it's something that Philips has never forgotten. In fact, we're honored that the American veterans and VA are our largest clients in the world.

Philips is also one of the great global engines of innovation. We're making extraordinary advances in telehealth and connected care. And we are on the precipice of helping change the way health care is delivered in your homes and in your communities where you live. Because time is short, home is precious, and each of you are irreplaceable.

So that's why I'm here today, to show you what VA Philips and the VFW have been able to create together. Because of the leadership of VFW, in helping to pass the MISSION Act, the Department of Veterans Affairs is able to make bold, sweeping changes to the way health care is delivered. It's a very exciting time.

Over the past several months, VA Philips and VFW have teamed up on Project Atlas to bring telehealth to local VFW posts in remote communities in rural America. It's in these places that I've -- that I've met probably the cutest married couple in North America, Rick and Mel Weldon at Post 6786 in Eureka, Montana; Ray Andel in Post -- VFW Post 7842 in Linesville, Pennsylvania; and Mike Hughes at Post 2487 in Los Banos, California.

Project Atlas is designed to bring -- to bring convenient, secure, and private environments where you can talk with your doctor from the convenience and comfort of your community and from your VFW hall.

But rather than tell you about Atlas, I'd like to play a short video to show you what your members have helped create.

(Whereupon, a video was shown at this time.)

(Applause)

COMRADE NAYLOR: You've been great hosts in Montana, Pennsylvania, and California. And I look very much forward to working with many of you at other sites around the country, but we still need your help here at the convention.

I'm pleased to say that the first in the world example of the Project Atlas prototype is right over yonder through that air wall on the Philips booth in your expo hall.

I'd love to meet you, my colleagues and I, talk with you and hear what you have to say about the project, and how we were -- and how we can work together to improve telehealth in your VFW posts. Please let us know your thoughts. I look forward to working with you.

It's an honor to serve you, to give back in a small way to our world's largest customer, the American veteran. When I think of our work together these past many months, it's true that "No One Does More For Veterans" than the VFW. Thank you and God bless America.

(Standing ovation)

INTRODUCTION OF DAVID McINTYRE, CEO, TRIWEST

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: As TriWest Healthcare Alliance's cofounder, president, and chief executive officer, our next guest has spent his career working to ensure that America's veterans have access to high quality health care no matter where they reside.

With more than 30 years of experience, success, and accomplishments in national health care policy development, David McIntyre's knowledge and passion have helped to establish TriWest's network of more than 1 million providers for veterans across the Nation.

Based in Phoenix, Arizona, TriWest is one of the two third-party administrators actively overseeing the implementation of the new Veterans Community Care Program, part of the MISSION Act.

After expanding services in 2018, TriWest now serves veterans in all 50 states, as well as American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to TriWest Healthcare Alliance President and CEO, David McIntyre.  
(Applause)

REMARKS BY DAVID McINTYRE, COFOUNDER,  
PRESIDENT, AND CEO OF TRIWEST HEALTHCARE ALLIANCE

MR. McINTYRE: Commander Lawrence, thanks for that warm introduction.

Adjutant General Jones, Quartermaster General Anderson, Auxiliary President Kriebel, Executive Director and my good friend Bob Wallace, ladies and gentlemen, thanks for allowing me back –

I was in Kansas City at your convention last year, and I heard Jerry Moran talk about what drives and motivates him as a U.S. Senator to lean forward for those who serve.

I then found myself, about two or three months later, sitting across the table with Senator Moran as he and this organization were trying to figure out how they were going to take the MISSION Act over the finish line. And together you did it.

And it's our awesome privilege to update you on where we are since that period. And it's an honor for me to be here to honor one of my good friends today.

As Commander Lawrence said, we serve the whole Nation. When I was here last year in Kansas City -- when I was at your convention in Kansas City, we did not serve the entire Nation at that point in time.

Our colleague contractor was relieved of their responsibilities, and we were asked to stretch ourselves to finish the job, and make sure that while we're bringing on telehealth and doing other things that doctors all over America had the opportunity and the privilege to lean forward and do what they want to do, and that's support VA in delivering services for our Nation's

heroes.

We started the work together with VA on September 11th, and evaluated over the course of two days what it would take to accomplish that climb. We chose together December 7th to start the rollout. The first state was in Montana. We finished that work on January 31st of this year. December 7th to January 31st.

There's now 1.1 million providers in America leaning forward at the side of the VA to make sure that veterans get what they need, what they deserve, and what they've earned when it's needed in support of VA.  
(Applause)

MR. McINTYRE: And we made a commitment to them. We said, "We'll process and pay your bills on behalf of VA in ten days. And that's exactly what we're doing. And 12 banking institutions in this country have come along our side and said, "How much access to capital do you need? Because we want to be part of what you're currently doing." So we have the capital and we're paying our bills.

The second thing that we're in the process of working on right now is finishing the development of an urgent care network that's available in communities across the country. One of the objectives of the MISSION Act was to make it possible on a Friday night to go to an urgent care center if you have a sinus infection.

Or if you cut your hand, as I did as a kid, you could go in and get three stitches rather than going to the emergency room and waiting for several hours because you're not there with your arm cut off so they're having to triage you.

Today, as I stand here, 86 percent of this Nation's veterans eligible for urgent care have to drive no more than 30 minutes from their house.  
(Applause)

MR. McINTYRE: I committed to government personally that I would make sure myself that that job got done. I flew in last night to honor my friend this morning. I will leave in a couple of hours. I will go back to leading my team and getting that job done.

In three weeks, we will have finished our work. In three weeks, 92 percent of this Nation's veterans will have access to urgent care within 30 minutes of where they live. And that is all over this country, that's in Puerto Rico, that's in Guam, that's in the Virgin Islands, that's in Samoa, that's in Hawaii. That is what was intended. If it doesn't exist, we can't contract with it.

But at the end of the day, Medicare requires 70 percent. We said we need to make sure that there's footprint everywhere where a footprint exists. So that we can make sure that together we -- Congress, the White House, and the VA -- leaned forward and made it possible for the arc of access to change in that critical space.

We've had over 10,000 encounters now occur in that system. The

complaints are less than .01 percent. And we're using the opportunity to figure out what they are, to find the gaps, fix the gaps, and make sure that it's going to be strong.

So it's our incredible privilege at TriWest to lean forward for a while. We're looking forward to the day when we don't have to worry about every zip code and almost every time zone in the world, because that's what we cover right now.

We're looking forward to the day when we have a colleague that will be at our side that will be doing the rest of the country. And, indeed, they start their work late this week in two parts of this country as they climb up to the table and we step back, with a 30-day overlap designed to make sure that there is no gap for veterans. And that there are, to the best of our ability, no gap for providers. Because that's the commitment that we made once we settled this down.

No one, no organization has leaned forward more smartly on this topic and more focused and more aggressive than the VFW. And at the end of the day --

(Applause)

MR. McINTYRE: Yes, you should give yourselves a hand.

(Applause)

MR. McINTYRE: I said last year, "We're not here to privatize the VA." And we're not. We're simply privileged to do the work we do every day in support of the country at the side of VA. Most of us are either veterans or veteran family members, and we consider this work to be an awesome honor and a privilege.

I'd like to thank the VFW for the amazing work that you've done, for the way in which you represent those who've served this country, and the way in which you push those of us that need to continue to stay focused.

And I want to thank you for entrusting us with the opportunity to work at the side of the great providers in VA to be able to deliver services.

I'd now like to show you a video that's going to be part of a thank you campaign that will end on Veterans Day. It is about allowing veterans to have voice in thanking providers for caring for them, both providers in the VA and providers in the community.

Because when we leave the whole country, we want to make sure that we've enabled the opportunity to say thank you, and to help everybody understand it's about a care team. It's not about one or the other. And the rhetoric needs to change because all are needed in order to be able to serve the great people that have served this country.

So if you could roll the video.

(Whereupon, a video was shown at this time.)

(Applause)

MR. McINTYRE: I'd like to ask my friend, Bob Wallace, your Executive Director, if he'd come up and join me on the stage.

And while he walks up, I want to tell you that Chuck Byers, who started that video, had prostate cancer. Chuck Byers is alive today because of the health care delivery system that's VA. Chuck Byers is alive today because along with 3,300 veterans who had prostate cancer in Phoenix, Arizona, with no urologist in the Phoenix VA at the time of the crisis was on a list.

Chuck Byers was taken care of by one of the 67 urologists in Phoenix, Arizona, that leaned forward in six weeks and took care of all 3,300 of their heroes. That's what this is about.

(Applause)

MR. McINTYRE: As I said, I had the privilege of coming in last night. I apologize for not staying long. But I wanted to take the opportunity to come here to say thanks to my good friend, Bob. Bob's a person who I hold as a hero in my own life for his own service. He's also a person who I hold as a hero for standing tall when standing tall is not easy. Although for Bob it's probably pretty easy because he is tall. Right?

But the bottom line is there's no one that I've encountered in my 35 years of this privileged work, first a decade as a staffer on Capitol Hill, and then almost 25 years now serving in the role I'm privileged to serve in, both taking care of those in the military family and now in the veteran community, where I like to say, "You're not a veteran unless you were birthed in boot camp."

There's no one that stood taller, kept everybody more focused, been more honest, and put the thumb down on those of us that needed focus. Whether you're in a role I'm in, whether you're a member of Congress, whether you're the President of the United States, or whether you're a Secretary of VA, your organization has been incredibly well-served by the likes of Bob Wallace. (Standing ovation)

MR. McINTYRE: And, Bob, I think you'd probably agree that once in a while those words have to be very sharp and focused. And they have been. But they've been the starting point for a very mature conversation that's always led to the right thing for veterans. And I personally want to thank you for that.

As I think about the fabric of the VSO community and I think about this great organization, I think about the loss of someone like Bob Wallace to the fabric of what goes on. But I know Bob well enough to know that he would say, "There are people that are right behind me that are ready to climb into my shoes."

Now, his are big shoes so they're going to be really hard to climb into. But I think he would say and you would all agree that there's amazing people that will follow, that will fill that role the best they're able when they get to that place.

So, Bob, in honor of your service, in honor of all that you've done to keep all of us honest, in your effective leadership, I would like to let you know

that on behalf of the VFW we are going to be making a \$50,000 contribution to the VFW SVA Fellowship program so that the next generation might be effectively trained. Thank you.

(Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF VICE MINISTER LU CHIA-KAI,  
VETERANS AFFAIRS COUNCIL, REPUBLIC OF CHINA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my privilege to introduce Lu Chia-Kai, the Vice Minister of the Veterans Affairs Council for the Republic of China on Taiwan.

Mr. Lu served in the executive branch of his country's government for 18 years before moving over to the Veterans Affairs Council in 2003, first as a legal counselor, then secretary general, and now as its vice minister, where he is in charge of veterans hospitals, veterans homes, and overall administrative operations.

The VAC is similar to our Department of Veterans Affairs, and they were a gracious host when I visited Taiwan in April, a visit that also included meeting President Tsai Ing-wen.

The VFW has a special relationship with the Veterans Affairs Council that goes back many years. Plus, we have a longstanding VFW National Resolution that supports the Republic of China on Taiwan.

I am very pleased that he could join us again. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Vice Minister Lu.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY VICE MINISTER LU CHIA-KAI, VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION,  
REPUBLIC OF CHINA

VICE MINISTER LU: Good morning.

(Good morning)

VICE MINISTER LU: Commander-in-Chief Lawrence, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, and all the American heroes, it is my great honor and a privilege to attend the 120th VFW Convention.

On behalf of the Veterans Affairs Council, the Republic of China, I would like to express my sincere regards and the blessing to all of the American heroes and heroes' family here in this venue today.

Veterans Affairs Council of the Republic of China and the VFW have bonded in a brotherhood relationship since 1980. Since then VAC keeps a close exchange with the headquarters in the Department of Pacific Areas. The main reason is that we share the same value and the beliefs in freedom, democracy, human right, peace, and international justice.

I say so because only veterans can appreciate the value of freedom, democracy, peace, and the human right. Only veterans' family can tell how

much their loved ones have sacrificed. Now, let's give a big round of applause to heroes and their family.

(Applause)

VICE MINISTER LU: VAC deeply believes that taking care of veterans is our responsibility. Based upon this concept, the VAC offers our veterans with free vocational training courses, job matching services to restart their second careers and to honor her contributions to the country for their sacrifices and the sweat.

Furthermore, VAC also provides educational subsidies, free medical treatments, and even carry (unintelligible) to the veterans, including their families.

VAC established veterans homes to take care of the veterans, especially when they are older and have no one taking care of them.

I want to emphasize that taking care of veterans is not only a part of our social welfare but an appreciation for their sacrifice and contribution to the country.

As the Chinese philosopher Confucius once taught us that makes the age have the appropriate final years, those in their prime have the appropriate employment, and the widows, orphans, the old and the child who is -- as well as the sick and the physically challenged are all well taken care of.

I want to express my sincerest appreciation to VFW for your unwavering support by submitting the resolution to your Congress and the State Department backing Taiwan in terms of defense and arm procurement, foreign and the political affairs, and economics and the trade issues. We will always cherish this comradeship.

Thank you very much for your attention. Blessing you in good health and spirits.

(Applause)

VICE MINISTER LU: And now I would like to present Commander-in-Chief Lawrence a Medal of Honor with Cravat of Veterans Affairs Council First Class in recognizing his dedication to promote the welfares of the veterans and uphold international justice.

Colonel Huang, please announce the citation. Thank you.

COLONEL HUANG: Certificate of award to accompany the presentation of the Medal of Honor of Veterans Affairs Council to Mr. Vincent "B.J." Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America, in recognition of his dedication in upholding international justice and in safeguarding international status of the Republic of China and improving welfare of the veterans.

A Medal of Honor of Veterans Affairs Council First Class is hereby awarded on the date of the 22nd day of July in the year of 2019, General Chiu Kuo-Cheng, Minister, Veterans Affairs Council, Republic of China.

(Applause)



## INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTINE TROLL, FIRST PLACE VOICE OF DEMOCRACY WINNER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Since 1947 the VFW's Voice of Democracy program has been inspiring America's youth. What is reflected in this program is an extension of America's values and its ideas. This premier scholarship program helps ensure our Nation's heritage will never be lost, and allows students the opportunity to give voice to how they perceive our Nation and the many liberties afforded to them.

Ms. Christine Troll's outstanding entry based on the theme: "Why my vote matters," earned her the esteemed title of 2018-2019 National Voice of Democracy winner and a \$30,000 college scholarship.

Christine represents the many thousands of young people who participate in the scholarship program annually. And she and her peers are truly the future of our country. What they are today America will be tomorrow.

Please join me in welcoming and celebrating Christine Troll's achievement as the 2018-2019 Voice of Democracy winner.

Christine?  
(Standing ovation)

## REMARKS BY CHRISTINE TROLL, FIRST PLACE VOICE OF DEMOCRACY WINNER

MS. TROLL: Thank you. I would like to express how deeply grateful and humbled I am to have been asked to speak and be present here today. To fully convey my gratitude to the VFW and all that they do would take more than 1,000 words.

At some point in every person's life, something happens to him or her, and after that their life is never the same again. For me, that occasion has been my involvement with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Voice of Democracy programs. These programs have distilled in me an appreciation and love for the freedoms of this great Nation and the sacrifice that they were built on.

Not only does the Voice of Democracy contest give students like me a chance to make our patriotic voices heard, but also a chance to make your sacrifice seen. Any essay topic relating to America can be traced back to the soldiers and veterans without whom the history of America could have never been written.

In the years I have been involved with the VFW programs, I have met and come to know personally many veterans, every one of whom stands as a shining example of everything that our Nation has been and still strives to be.

Old Glory has never been given. It was earned by the brave men and women that I'm looking at right now in this crowd and they -- all, like you, that have come and fallen before us. Man has no greater love than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends.

To every soldier and veteran here and everywhere in our great Nation,

you are my American heroes. Thank you for your service.  
(Standing ovation)

MS. TROLL: It started out as a mundane Monday morning with the shriek of my alarm clock waking me up and dragging me off to school and work. I went through the motions lackadaisically, until later that day I looked up during my food service job to see a man missing his right arm from the elbow down.

Just as he walked out the door, a lump lodged in my throat and my stomach crawled into my chest as I caught the proud golden words on his black cap, "United States Marine Corps Veteran."

I spent the rest of the day with that veteran on my mind. He, along with every veteran, including my grandfather and uncle, sacrificed everything they had and everything they were to protect the basic human rights of every American, such as the right to religious freedom, the right to free speech, and the right to vote.

However, I'm an American teenager. I'm worried about turning old enough to drive, not vote. Midterms and inauguration day will take place with or without my one, teeny, unmeaningful vote. Yet a few days later, I found myself lost in the chapters of my AP history book on our founding fathers.

Suddenly, I was in Philadelphia on September 17th, 1778, at the Constitutional Convention. I found myself surrounded by the giants of history who, from a fragile moment in our Nation's birth, orchestrated in the second article of our Constitution a voting system of checks and balances, guaranteeing every American citizen – not just the politically elite -- the right to help decide who represents us, what issues they address, and how they spend our money.

Every American citizen deserves the efficacious right and fundamental responsibility to make his or her voice and opinion heard. And that's exactly what voting grants us.

To quote President Lyndon Johnson's maxim, "This right to vote is the basic right without which all others are meaningless." My vote matters because my rights matter.

Fast-forwarding 133 years and 200 pages, I found myself in Washington, DC, in 1920 on August 18th. After a Civil War, several Constitutional amendments, and risky suffrage at activism, people of every race and gender gathered to celebrate the quintessential right to vote that all citizens have finally been granted.

Voting identifies us as full American citizens whose opinions can influence the Nation's future. Many voters feel a sense of powerlessness since the chance that their one vote will solely determine the fate of the president is very slim.

Nonetheless, when has America ever been about the individual? We are a Nation as a whole, united, indivisible house under God, and each vote

makes up a brick of that house. Whether black, white, man, or woman, our voices matter. My vote matters because I matter.

After 13 years and seven more chapters, I landed in the company of hundreds of German citizens in the streets of Berlin on January 30th, 1933. Some were cheering exuberantly declaring, "Heil Hitler," while others seemed frozen in fear, their expressions blank and chalky. I swallowed with difficulty knowing the millions of lives about to be lost to the horrors of war.

Hitler stands as an optimal example of why pure democracies as well as total dictatorships lead to utter collapse. Pure democracies allow for a candidate who is willing to exploit the fears and angers of the people to gain power, just as Hitler did. Nevertheless, when he took complete control without the consent of the people, disaster struck.

A nation where the citizens are not allowed a fair say in their leadership always results in disintegration. With this conundrum in mind, our founding fathers created a democratic republic of the people, by the people, and for the people. My vote matters because the consequences matter.

85 years later, back in 2019, I wake up again to the shriek of my alarm.

I have not seen that veteran with the black cap again. But I have encountered others, every one of whom I thank for their service and sacrifice.

Each of them, as well as many of my own friends who have recently enlisted in the military, have given Americans the meaningful extraordinary privilege to influence the future by voting for what they feel will create a more perfect union. My vote matters because their sacrifice matters.

Next year, thanks to those who have fought and fallen for my freedom, my vote will be counted in the polls. And it won't just count. It will matter. Thank you.

(Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: She's like phew, "Okay. I'm done."  
(Laughter)

INTRODUCTION OF MAJOR GENERAL WORTHE S. HOLT, JR.,  
VICE PRESIDENT AND DEPUTY CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER, HUMANA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Ensuring that veterans have access to the highest quality health care has been a VFW priority for nearly 120 years. To this day we continue to fight on Capitol Hill to defend and expand the benefits that our Nation's veterans have earned and justly deserve.

With decades of care, delivery, and administrative experience and an impressive 36-year military career with the United States Air Force, it should come as no surprise that our next guest and the organization he works for have become important allies to the VFW and our mission.

As Humana's Vice President, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Worthe Holt is a driving force behind Humana's continued effort to ensure America's veterans receive the timely, high-quality health care they've earned.

Responsible for Humana's corporate clinical strategy, as well as the oversight and implementation of its Bold Goal community-based health care initiatives, Dr. Holt's military experience provides both valuable insight and a unique perspective when working with clients and hospitals across the Nation to improve the clinical care and health programs our Nation's heroes have access to.

Now, it gives me great pleasure to welcome to the stage retired Major General Dr. Worthe Holt.  
(Applause)

#### REMARKS BY MAJOR GENERAL DR. WORTHE HOLT, JR.

MAJOR GENERAL HOLT: Well, good morning.  
(Good morning)

MAJOR GENERAL HOLT: I guess most importantly I'm a proud retired service member, and I'm so pleased to join you today. I'd like to thank all of our veterans and military families for your service and to the VFW for inviting me to speak. It's great to be back here again this year, particularly after the wonderful reception I received in Kansas City last year.

So in a nutshell, for most of my career, I served as a line officer fighter pilot flying F-4s and F-16s. Later, supported the development and maintenance of the pilot-physician program, and eventually led a medical group with the Indiana Air National Guard.

I had the opportunity also to serve as Assistant Adjutant General for the Minnesota National Guard where we flew C-130s, F-16s, and also served as home to the 34th Infantry Division. I completed my career as Special Assistant to the Commander, and subsequently Chief of Staff for the United States Africa Command, where I had the opportunity to work with all branches of the service and agencies, including the Coast Guard.

And I have to tell you when I went to Africa, I never had any idea that the Coast Guard played such a presence with our operations on that continent.

Now, from a health and wellness perspective, in general I've always found that service members/veterans are extraordinarily resilient. Despite hardships, they handle injury and illness remarkably well.

That being said, I see great need and opportunity and, in fact, quite a bit of dismay with many of the issues that all of us face, particularly posttraumatic stress disorder, suicide, as well as the social determinants of health, including food insecurity and homelessness, all of which I will touch on later.

Now that being said, good health care is not one size fits all, especially for veterans and active military. As a fellow veteran, I know firsthand the importance of having an ally that you can count on to achieve your best health.

Humana is a health and well-being company that has a longstanding relationship with the military. And we are committed to providing high-quality

health care for veterans and are constantly finding more ways to care for our members. That's why 50,000 VFW members -- and many of you here today -- chose Humana for your health care needs. That number continues to grow every day. And we take our responsibility for serving you very seriously.

It's important to know that everyone at Humana demonstrates our commitment to veterans in a variety of ways. Our continued partnership with the VFW in sponsoring the National Convention is certainly a cornerstone to that end.

Another way we support veterans is through our community locations across the Nation. We have a special initiative for our Vietnam veterans too. In local communities and special events like this one, we present Vietnam veterans with a commemoration pin and a ceremony to honor, thank, and officially welcome our Vietnam veterans home.

It's our privilege to have honored more than 1,100 Vietnam veterans since 2018 with these commemorative pins as Humana strives to show how much we care and appreciate your service to our Nation. Thank you.

But our commitment doesn't stop there. As part of Humana's ongoing efforts to provide resources, information, and guidance for veterans to achieve their best health, Humana and the VFW veterans service officers have forged a bond to collaborate on veterans' issues.

For example, local VFW posts across the country have partnered with Humana and Care Plus to educate veterans about the health care options specific to their unique needs. And Humana agents participate in educational classes on VA health care and veteran benefits as well.

These trainings allow Humana agents to be knowledgeable about guiding veterans to make the best health care choices, and ensure that their family members are also receiving the benefits they're entitled to.

We care about your livelihood too. Part of that is providing employment opportunities through our Veterans Hiring Initiative. While Humana's goal was to hire 1,000 veterans and military spouses by the end of 2014, I'm proud to share that we quickly surpassed that and currently have more than 4,500 veterans and military spouses working at Humana offices across the country.

(Applause)

**MAJOR GENERAL HOLT:** This commitment to hire, develop, and retain veterans, military spouses, and wounded warriors has allowed Humana to be recognized as a Top 10 Gold Level Military Friendly Employer by Victory Media seven times.

Humana is also one of the original corporate sponsors of the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp For Veterans with Disabilities, an outstanding program administered through the Syracuse University Whitman School of Business. This program has had more than 1,500 veterans graduate, with 72 percent of them starting his or her own businesses. And of those individuals, 92 percent are still in business and generate 288 million in

revenue yearly.

In addition, Humana is a longtime partner to the Department of Defense's TRICARE program, and currently administers health benefits for more than 6 million active duty military and retirees, as well as their families, across 32 states. We're grateful for the opportunities to help those who have served our Nation and their families as we know veterans have given so much of themselves for our country.

That's why we support prioritizing several veteran causes here at home. As a veteran myself, I'll never forget the time that I spent in service. I have to tell you 36 years seem like 36 days to me. I'm proud of my service, and I wouldn't trade my experiences for anything.

Now, admittedly, I joined up to fly jets. That's what I wanted to do. And it wasn't until sometime later that I developed a genuinely profound sense of patriotism. I learned a great deal about commitment and hard work from my father, Seymour Holt, who was a successful businessman and pharmacist, and he served at Walter Reed, and then later from my father-in-law, a career fighter pilot and Vietnam veteran himself, Colonel John Corbisiero (ph). At the age of 92, John still receives outstanding health care in San Antonio at the Audie Murphy VA Hospital. I'm very, very pleased with the care that he gets there.

Through these individuals, as well as my own professional development, I grew to know and respect a discrete set of values. I also learned the importance of accountability and keeping promises. As a Nation, it's imperative that we keep our promises to you.

I want to discuss values for just a moment. I was well aware of the Air Force values: Integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. And through my work, particularly at Afri-Com, I learned the other service values as well, including duty, honor, loyalty, personal courage, respect, selfless service, devotion, and commitment to build a foundation of trust and leadership upon which our strength is based and victory is achieved.

Now, those values have given me strength and they've guided me throughout my career, both civilian and military. I'll tell you I used to get asked a lot, "How can you be a doctor and a fighter pilot at the same time?"

And I gave that a lot of thought early on in my career, and I would say that both contribute to supporting and maintaining quality of life, our way of life, and what we deem most important. It's all about serving others in the context of values and behaviors that distinguish the United States of America from the rest of the world.

My memories and experience have been magical. From flying jets to caring for service members to special operations in diplomacy across the African continent. And it's that strong set of enduring values that's helped to guide me through challenging times. And as I said, both the good and the bad, it was a spectacular experience that I wouldn't trade for anything.

But as I alluded to earlier, I know that not everyone is so fortunate. We know that some memories are harder for veterans to forget, and as a result

they unfortunately take their own lives. In fact, nearly 8,000 veterans die each year due to suicide. This has to stop, and we're committed to doing our part to address it.

Humana and the VFW team up on the Stop 22 Initiative, which as you know aims to increase awareness that 22 veterans commit suicide every single day. Alongside the VFW, Humana hosts its Stop 22 walk-a-thons, which allowed us to donate and spearhead fundraising efforts for PTSD, suicide prevention and awareness.

And as part of our ongoing effort to assist veterans in their communities, Humana also participated in stand down events to help more than 2,100 homeless and at-risk military veterans and their families sustain independent living in communities across the country.

A key part of independent living is making sure you can put food on the table. As you heard earlier from our National Commander, that can be a tremendous challenge. In fact, research shows that 25 percent of our Nation's total active duty and reserve personnel seek aid from food pantries. No one should be food insecure, especially not our veterans and military families.

With one in every four servicemen or women struggling with food insecurity -- that's identified as a lack of access to enough nutritionally-adequate foods to live an active, healthy life -- Humana set out to improve this serious societal problem. The issue impacts Orlando residents too, as nearly 14 percent of Orlando residents face food insecurity.

To address food insecurity, which can also contribute to poor health, lower productivity, and higher medical costs, Humana and the VFW teamed up with the national nonprofit Feeding America and the Uniting to Combat Hunger campaign to combat food insecurity. Leveraging Feeding America's network of more than 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs, we have staged numerous events to raise food donations since the campaign launched in early 2018.

This year alone efforts of the VFW districts of the Department of Florida contributed a total of 66,550 meals to the overall national campaign, supporting six Feeding America food banks in Florida. And you heard we actually far exceeded that earlier today.  
(Applause)

**MAJOR GENERAL HOLT:** Food drives also are encouraged at our company-sponsored rock and roll marathons across the country to help food banks in every market. With upcoming runs in Virginia Beach, Savannah, and New Orleans, we are confident we will be able to make a positive impact in those communities as well.

We also encouraged food donations at the Rolling Thunder Run in Washington, DC, over Memorial Day Weekend. Now, some of our service members are deployed, and unfortunately they never get to return home. That's why we sponsor the Rolling Thunder Run, bring awareness and accountability for the 60,000 POWs and MIAs still unaccounted for.

And we also supported Rolling Thunder, the largest gathering alongside more than 1.2 million riders setting a new record of support. Now, I've got to ask you: Did anybody really think that Rolling Thunder wasn't going to happen?

I'll be there riding myself next year.

In Washington, we encouraged all participants and area residents to drop off nonperishable foods at the Humana tent or one of the 15 drop-off locations in the Washington, DC, and Virginia area.

There we go. Those events, as well as the others that I mentioned, have aligned perfectly with Humana commitments to veterans in addressing food insecurity, which is a key component of our Bold Goal initiative. Bold Goal aims to make the communities we serve 20 percent healthier by 2020. We're confident that by working together we can help our neighbors and fellow veterans as no one should be food insecure.

Now, I invite you to learn more about these efforts as well as Humana's commitment to helping veterans achieve lifelong health and well-being by visiting our booths at the health fair in the main exhibit hall throughout the convention.

Again, it is an extraordinary privilege for me to join you here today. I'm grateful for not only your support but certainly for your service to our country. And I hope you enjoy the rest of your time here at the VFW convention. Thank you and safe travels wherever you go.

(Standing ovation)

MAJOR GENERAL HOLT: You're very kind. Thank you.

#### INTRODUCTION OF THE VFW NATIONAL HOME FOR CHILDREN REPRESENTATIVES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Since 1925 the VFW National Home for Children in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, has remained a prominent representation of the very best that the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary has to offer. There is no better example of how our organizations work together to support America's military families than by the services offered by the VFW National Home.

Joining us this morning are three exceptional individuals: National Home Board President Mike McGrath; Executive Director, Patrice Greene; and, most importantly, our 2019 Buddy Poppy Child, Brooklyn Hekman, who resides in the Illinois house.

(Cheers)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Where you at Illinois? Make some noise. Come on.

(Applause)



COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Brooklyn's favorite subject in school is music, and she loves to read. She recently completed fourth grade and enjoys painting and going to the gym. She also enjoys making Christmas cards for the troops with her mom and sister. Most of all, she loves the piano and playing outside. Brooklyn is quite an extraordinary young lady.

In keeping with our great time-honored VFW tradition, our Buddy Poppy Child will now mingle among the generous VFW and Auxiliary members here today and pass the hat on behalf of the National Home. So please give what you are able to to this ever-impactful organization. Your donation to such a worthy cause will further illuminate Brooklyn's day.  
(Applause)

REMARKS BY VFW'S NATIONAL HOME FOR CHILDREN BOARD PRESIDENT, MIKE  
McGRATH

MR. McGRATH: Chief and comrades, good morning. I'd like to thank our Commander-in-Chief for inviting us today. And as Board President for the National Home, I've been honored to serve with our 12 elected and our 5 ex officio trustees that include Adjutant General Kevin Jones, Quartermaster General Debra Anderson, and Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence.

Thanks to each of you for your leadership and your service to veterans and their families.

Kevin, thank you for your support and assistance on our board and for the work you do each and every day for our organization.

Debra, thank you for your expertise and guidance to the board as chairman of our Finance Committee, and this year as a valued member of our Executive Director Search Committee.

Commander B.J., thank you for your outstanding leadership of our great VFW organization and for your love and support of the VFW National Home for Children.

On behalf of all our trustees, thank you to all our VFW members, Auxiliary. Your hard work and support makes all the good work we do at the National Home -- makes it possible.

I was recently at the home at our 15<sup>th</sup> Annual National Home Orientation for department junior vice commanders and presidents. We had a great crowd of outstanding leaders from all across the country. Everybody worked hard learning in depth about the National Home.

But we -- we also had a lot of fun doing it, seeing the beautifully-maintained campus and hearing in person from the veteran children and families and the alumni we've helped over the years is heartwarming. And I'm proud of the way we have really changed people's lives for the better.

So thank you all for what you do to "Make It Happen." And be sure to come and visit the home whenever you can. It will warm your heart.

Now, as some of you know, the National Home's Executive Director for

many years, Patrice Green, announced her plan to retire last year. And so the Board of Trustee's Executive Search Committee led a nationwide search. And I'd like to announce the appointment of the new Executive Director, Fred Puffenberger.

Now, a little about Fred, he's -- he's had experience as a volunteer and in board leadership capacities for organizations like Hospice, Child and Families Charities and a member of the Foster Care Review Boards in the states of Michigan and Tennessee.

His professional career spans 30-plus years in leadership roles. And Fred was born in Michigan and graduated from Central Michigan University. He's familiar with the National Home campus and has spent many childhood hours playing there with friends who resided at the home. So, therefore, Fred has a special commitment to honor the National Home's legacy by helping veterans and their families.

Sadly, due to a sudden and serious family emergency, Fred had to depart for home yesterday. But he asked that I share the following with you today. "Friends, it's with a heavy heart that I am unable to be with you today.

As I write this, I realize that this, our audience here, is also a family with a dedication to sacrifice and service like no other. And I thank you for that service.

"I want you-all to know that the staff at the National Home and I are dedicated to continuing our legacy of service to our veteran families. We do it proudly and with integrity. It is my pledge that with your help, we will serve many, many more in the years to come.

"May God bless you all. Sincerely, Fred Puffenberger."

And, Fred, to you we offer our prayers and our best wishes to your family. Thank you.

And now it is my pleasure to introduce the outgoing VFW National Home Executive Director, Patrice Green. Please come up.  
(Standing ovation)

MR. McGRATH: Patrice, we thank you for your years of service to our National Home and we wish you all best in your retirement. Thank you.  
(Applause)

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mike. And thank you, Kevin, Debra, and B.J., for your leadership and friendship throughout the years, and for all you have done and all you will continue to do for the VFW, for our Nation's veterans, and for the VFW National Home for Children.

Commander-in-Chief B.J., you have energized all of us. You have led by example with hard work and dedication to the mission and a positive can-do attitude. And under your leadership and working together, we really did "Make It Happen." And I commend you all for that. Thank you so much.  
(Applause)

MS. GREEN: And on a personal note, B.J., I truly appreciated and enjoyed your participation in the National Home's orientation program during your Junior Vice year. Even with the call at 6:00 o'clock in the morning, "Can we get out there and get everybody in front of the nearest Burger King," which we made it happen -- and I tell you what, when he wants something to happen, it happens, and I think it's great.

And, B.J., I wish you the best in your upcoming leadership role to come. And we pledge our support, all of us at the National Home.

As National Home Executive Director for the past 15 years, it's been an honor and a privilege to get to know you and so many other wonderful and generous people from all across the country. So it is a very difficult thing for me to say goodbye, but it won't be always.

You know, I am a member of the ladies Auxiliary as well. And we will see you -- we will see all of you.  
(Inaudible)

MS. GREEN: Ooh, I joined as a member of the Ladies Auxiliary. VFW Auxiliary.  
(Laughter)

MS. GREEN: On behalf of all our trustees and the wonderful National Home staff and the children and families we have helped at the National Home for over 94 years because of your help, I thank you all. Your hard work, your support, and your dedication makes the good work that we do for veterans and their families at the VFW National Home possible.

I do want to repeat what Board President McGrath said. Come to the National Home whenever you're able. Your hearts will be touched. And you will be amazed at the work that you have done there, and you'll never be the same.

Back in 2008 -- speaking of people that you have helped over the years, sometimes it helps to have a real example.

Back in 2008, many of you remember we were right here in Orlando for National Convention, and we had a nice little Buddy Poppy at the time. So that's been over ten years ago. We thought it would be real fun to watch the video of the little Buddy Poppy that was in Orlando 10 or 11 years ago. So could we have that video now, please?

(Whereupon, a video was shown at this time.)

(Applause)

MS. GREEN: But we also thought it might be really fun or awesome to hear what that Buddy Poppy is doing today, 11 years later. So it's my pleasure right now to introduce to you the 2008-2009 VFW National Buddy Poppy, Marie Strefling.

(Standing ovation)

REMARKS BY 2008-2009 VFW NATIONAL BUDDY POPPY CHILD, MARIE  
STREFLING

MS. STREFLING: Good morning. It is so great to be back in Orlando. Thank you for having me back. I am now 22 years old, but I still love a lot of the things that I loved as a child, like playing board games, card games, Rollerblading, riding my bike, hanging out with my family. I also love to read and play with my dog.

Recently, I bought a house in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In my spare time, I like to work on small things to improve it. After getting a house, I adopted a dog. He is wonderful and helped me renew my love for animals. He often reminds me of my pigs that I raised in 4-H.

(Laughter)

MS. STREFLING: I still think math and computers are awesome. I was able to combine those two favorite subjects as a kid into a career today. I studied accounting at Western Michigan University and graduated summa cum laude.

(Cheers and applause)

MS. STREFLING: I then went on to get my master's as well.

(Applause)

MS. STREFLING: And over the past year, I sat for and passed all four parts of the Certified Public Accountant Exam.

(Applause)

MS. STREFLING: Thank you.

I start my full-time job at Plante Moran in Kalamazoo as a tax staff in just a few short weeks. I could not have done this without your generosity and support. I am so thankful to have grown up with the National Home. Some of my fondest memories are going to Cedar Point and participating in 4-H each year.

I appreciate the opportunity to have worked on work crew in the summers and volunteering at the VA every Tuesday. Those are memories I will always cherish. You have provided me a childhood I otherwise could not have had, and I will forever be thankful.

(Applause)

MS. STREFLING: It is my honor to introduce you to the newest Buddy Poppy Child, Brooklyn.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY 2019 VFW NATIONAL BUDDY POPPY CHILD, BROOKLYN HEKMAN

MISS HEKMAN: Hi. My name is Brooklyn. I live at the VFW National Home in the Illinois 1 house --  
(Cheering and applause)

MISS HEKMAN: -- with my mom, my stepdad, and my two sisters: London, who is one, and Taylor, who is 17. I just finished fourth grade and I'm going to be in middle school next year. At school, I like music and reading.

At the National Home, some of my hobbies are painting and gym. But best of all, I love piano lessons with Ms. Lorinda (ph) and playing outside. I love playing the piano because some of my favorite songs that I sing I can now play on the piano, and I think that's really neat. My big sister knows how to play, and now I can play some songs with her.

I like painting because I can use my creativity and it gives me a chance to unleash my inner artist.

I like going to open gym because I can play basketball with my sister and I can run around all over the place.

I like playing outside because we have a lot of people at the National Home, and sometimes it is good just to meet new people at the parks or even in my backyard. And all the people I have met have been kind to me.

I was in 4-H this year, and I chose a rabbit to work with. His name is Lucky. Lucky and I got first place at the fair.  
(Cheering and applause)

MISS HEKMAN: My family is able to live at the Home because my great-grandpa was in the Army and served in the Vietnam War.

Another thing I enjoy doing at the National Home is showing my appreciation to our soldiers. My mom, my sister, and I make Christmas cards for the troops and that felt like a really great thing to do.

That is the reason I'm very glad to be Buddy Poppy. It gives me even more chances to show my appreciation for our veterans and for the National Home. I am so happy my family is able to live at the National Home, and I just want to thank everyone for this opportunity.  
(Standing ovation)

MS. GREEN: Good job, Lady. Tell him, "We have a present for you."

MISS HEKMAN: And we have a present for B.J.

MS. GREEN: This is a photo of all the good times that he had at the National Home. Tell him that.

MISS HEKMAN: This is a photo of all the good times he has had at the National Home.  
(Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF UNMET NEEDS RECIPIENT – CHRIS BLEVINS (& FAMILY)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Since our humble beginnings back in 1899, the VFW has made an immeasurable impact on the quality of life for countless service members, veterans, and military families. While we may not see their faces, while you may not know their stories, believe me when I say what we do makes a positive difference in the lives of real people every single day. Our next guest is living proof.

If you'll play the video, please.

(Whereupon, a video was shown at this time.)

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in giving a warm welcome to Chris Blevins.

(Standing ovation)

## REMARKS BY CHRIS BLEVINS

COMRADE BLEVINS: Good morning.  
(Good morning)

COMRADE BLEVINS: I'm going to try and get through this without too much issue here.

First and foremost, I want to thank everybody at the VFW that has made everything happen for me and done all that they can for me.

More importantly, I want to thank everybody in this room for all the sacrifices that you-all made because you guys paved the way for me to be able to stand up and make my ...

Lastly and most importantly, I want to thank my wife and my kids for always being there to support me and take care of me.

(Applause)

COMRADE BLEVINS: The Unmet Needs program is a program that -- it's kind of the best kept secret in not a good way. I didn't know anything about this program, and I had no idea how to even go about asking for any kind of assistance from this type of program.

When they reached out to me, it was -- it couldn't have come at a better time. As I said -- I'm sorry.

(Applause)

COMRADE BLEVINS: The amount of work that the VFW and the Unmet Needs program do for our service members is an amazing thing. And the moment that I had, I was in the darkest moments of my life. I didn't think anybody really cared even though I -- I had my family. I thought I was alone. I couldn't provide for them, and I didn't know what to do.

The VFW stepped in and pulled my head above water and let me see that I needed to get back in the fight and I needed to push forward. And for that, I am -- I'm eternally grateful and there's no -- no way that I could possibly pay that back.

We lose a lot of service members to suicide, and it's something that is very personal to me because I was almost one of those numbers. And I hope that through me being able to work with the VFW that I can reach at least one person out there and let them know that you're not alone, and when you think you have nobody else, I care. I'm there. And you can call on me.

(Applause)

COMRADE BLEVINS: You can call on me because we don't need to lose anybody else. And that is my -- my biggest hope that I can at least reach that one person that needs it most and let them know that it's not weak to ask for help. And

if you think you have nobody else, know that I care and that you can always call

me. I'll be there for you. Thank you again everybody. I appreciate the opportunity.  
(Standing ovation)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Let's give Chris another round of applause for sharing such a personal story with us today, and also extend our appreciation to Comcast NBC Universal who flew Chris and his family in to be here with us, and are treating them to a nice vacation in Orlando.  
(Cheering and applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Somebody was short at this mic. It's okay.  
(Laughter)

#### INTRODUCTION OF PRASAD REDDY, CEO, TWISTED X BOOTS

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Over three decades ago as our next guest completed his American naturalization ceremony he pledged to return the kindness, support, and encouragement he received from the Veterans of Foreign Wars members who welcomed him to America with smiles and copies of the U.S. Constitution.

Now as president and CEO of Twisted X Boots, Prasad Reddy has gone above and beyond to satisfy that pledge. Twisted X continues to support the VFW, our country's brave service members, veterans, and their families.

In fact, in a recent huge play of support -- this is good -- I'm happy to announce Prasad and his Twisted X Boots have signed on as the title supporter of the Voice of Democracy program.  
(Standing ovation)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Now, without further ado, please give a warm VFW welcome to Mr. Prasad Reddy, founder and president and CEO of Twisted X Boots.

Love you, Brother.

#### REMARKS BY PRASAD REDDY, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF TWISTED X BOOTS

MR. REDDY: Thank you. Thank you very much. Every year I prepare a speech, and I come here and I lose it.  
(Laughter)

MR. REDDY: Just -- just seeing all the heroes here, what you do, what you have done, what you have provided to each and every one of us, each and everyone -- every citizen here, is unmeasurable and there's no way to repay. And someone said, you know, you give a blank check. You dedicate everything. And we -- we have a philosophy in our company, like, all businesses



must support military and first responders and help any way we can.  
(Applause)

MR. REDDY: A little point on the Voice of Democracy, but six years ago when I went to Kansas City to meet with the VFW organization, and they talked about each of the year Voice of Democracy, and I said, "We want to be part of it." But at that time, it was not available to participate in.

And -- but three weeks ago, I think, Commander Lawrence, B.J. Lawrence, came and visited us and he mentioned to me Voice of Democracy, "I want you to think about it."

I said, "I thought about it. We are doing it." It was, like, half a second.  
(Applause)

MR. REDDY: It's a great program. What better way of teaching and training our children to become -- to instill the values, the democracy and everything. And it's a great thing. As I heard Christine Troll, it's -- it gives me shivers.

But anyway, as a part of the -- I said, "You give a blank check." But we -- in our own small way, we want to present not a blank check but a little check to VFW.  
(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: I don't want to handle this money. You know how that goes.  
(Laughter)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Let's open this sucker up, would you please.

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL ANDERSON: Twisted X boots is presenting \$100,000 to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.  
(Standing ovation)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: We're going to do a photo op. Prasad; we want a picture.

MR. REDDY: Okay.  
(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: That's an American.  
Yep.  
(Cheering and applause)

INTRODUCTION OF JOE TORRES, SENIOR AFFINITY ACCOUNT MANAGER, USAA

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: On with the show

here. As one of our biggest supporters, the VFW has been fortunate to have a longstanding and strong relationship with a truly outstanding company.

It might sound familiar to you: The United Service Automobile Association or better known as USAA.

(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Together our alliance has provided VFW members with top-rated banking and financial advice and property and casualty insurance. And its support has extended to numerous members of VFW.

As over 18 years of military service, USAA Senior Affairs Account Manager Joe Torres has been deployed to Afghanistan twice while working at USAA. He still serves in the United States Army Reserves.

(Cheering)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Yeah, give him one.

(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: And is a Bronze Star recipient.

(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Joey joined a USAA team April of 2002. And his military service makes him a valuable advisor and ally as the account manager of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Joe works today, day in and day out, to advance those in current service and those who have honorably served in the past.

I am pleased to introduce the esteemed guest from USAA senior account -- affiliate account manager for the VFW Life Members Post 12031 in Arizona, Joe Torres. Joe?

(Applause)

REMARKS BY JOE TORRES, SENIOR AFFINITY ACCOUNT MANAGER, USAA

COMRADE TORRES: Good morning, VFW.

(Good morning)

COMRADE TORRES: Quick shout-out to the Department of Arizona.

Hooah!

(Cheering)

COMRADE TORRES: Where are my Army brothers and sisters at?

Hooah!

(Cheering)

COMRADE TORRES: I want to say what a privilege it is for me to be here on behalf of USAA to talk with you.

As a soldier and veteran, like many of you, transitioning from active duty service to civilian life was mind-blowing. As all of you know, when you're in active service, your community and everything you need is right -- right there.

Well, I quickly found out that that wasn't the same out of active service. Your community, your friends, your resources, even folks that your family can engage with is not there. I still serve in the Army Reserves, and this was most pronounced when I had to deploy as a reservist.

In my time in active duty, I heard about the VFW, but I didn't know about the VFW until about a couple years ago. The post that I now belong to, the Department of Arizona, the many friends that I've made throughout the Nation, from New Jersey to California, and even the National folks here that I work with helped me get that feeling of community again that I had lost when leaving active duty. I have -- I have my team again. And I can see how passionate this organization is to take care of veterans.

At USAA we are just as passionate to take care of our military service members and their families. We were founded by service members to take care of each other, and we -- and we continue to look at how we can be a provider of choice for the military community.

We want to be there for you when you have life-changing events and -- and things that affect you financially and be your trusted adviser. At USAA, we do know what it means to serve, and our partnership with the VFW ensures that nobody does more for veterans.

I want to congratulate the VFW on a great year with getting new members. I know this outreach isn't easy without letting them see your heart for community and sharing how we can take care of them and sharing what membership means to you.

USAA is honored to be associated with you, and we truly value your partnership. God bless you. Thank you.  
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I'm not letting Joe get off that easy since I was in the back in the meeting; I wasn't out here for his intro. So just to announce USAA, through Joe's efforts, has agreed to sponsor tonight's membership celebration.  
(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a couple of announcements we'd like to catch up on.

Patrice Green, if you're still in the room, please come up and see Kevin.

Also, speaking of tonight's membership celebration, just a reminder all State Commanders receiving All-American Awards, please have on your gray Commander's polo shirt. All Post and District All-American Commanders, please have on

your special All-American shirts that were given to you in your All-American packet.

PRESENTATION OF THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL AND CITATION  
TO VFW NATIONAL HOME FOR CHILDREN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PATRICE  
GREEN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: So, Patrice, first of all, I want to apologize because I had to leave the stage abruptly for a meeting in the back. But I didn't get a chance to thank you for what you do. So let's do this again. Patrice, before we let you go today, I'd like to honor you with a special award.

With Patrice Green's retirement and a new chapter of life on the horizon, it gives me great pleasure to present the VFW Distinguished Service Medal to VFW National Home for Children Executive Director, Patrice Green -- (Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: -- for her more than 30 years of dedication and service to the VFW National Home.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: When asked to reflect on her accomplishments during her 15 years as Executive Director, Patrice stated that what has been most personally gratifying is that the Home's trustees and VFW and Auxiliary leaders and members have become united, educated, and revitalized with strengthened love and support for the National Home.

It is through this type of leadership that the important mission of the National Home -- to help our veterans and their children and their families when they need us -- is achieved.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in honoring Patrice Green with the Distinguished Service Medal and Citation.  
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Distinguished Service Medal and Citation awarded to Patrice Green in sincere appreciation and spirited recognition of her more than 30 years of dedicated and unwavering service to the VFW National Home for Children.

Her passion for serving others and progressive thinking has earned her the respect of her peers and served her well in serving veterans, service members, and their families. Her unwavering commitment to upholding the values and mission of the VFW National Home has left an indelible mark on the organization and earned her the deepest respect and admiration 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, 2019.

Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones,  
Adjutant General.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: When somebody's standing next to you and hugging you and you can feel their whole body shaking, you know she was quite surprised and excited to receive this award. It might take her a minute to compose herself.

(We love you, Patrice!)

REMARKS BY VFW NATIONAL HOME FOR CHILDREN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
PATRICE GREEN

MS. GREEN: Oh, I can't -- I can't tell you how shocked I am. The people that I have watched, over the years that I've attended National Convention, receive this award to me are so much more deserving. But I accept this gratefully, but I thank each and every one of you from sea to shining sea.

I have met so many wonderful people. This organization just shines, and it will always be in my heart. You have helped so many people. And I'm so glad that I had a chance to just show you one in person today. Because we get the chance to see hundreds and hundreds of people that were helped.

So you need to -- I accept this award, but I attribute it to all of you. Because without you, the National Home wouldn't be able to do what it does and help so many people throughout the years. It's been a pleasure to know all of you, a pleasure to work with you, and I am extremely honored by this presentation. Thank you so much.

(Applause)

PRESENTATION OF THE VFW JAMES E. VAN ZANDT CITIZENSHIP AWARD  
TO KENNETH FISHER, CHAIRMAN AND CEO OF FISHER HOUSE FOUNDATION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my honor and a privilege to present the 2019 VFW Citizenship Award to Mr. Ken Fisher, Chairman and CEO of the Fisher House Foundation.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: This award is presented annually to an individual or organization for outstanding service contributing to American citizenship. It recognizes significant contributions to the spirit of service and dedication to the Nation that inspires us all to display better citizenship.

This award is presented in recognition for what Mr. Fisher and the Fisher House Foundation continue to provide to the families of wounded, ill, and injured servicemen and women.

In carrying on the legacy of his great uncle, Zachary Fisher, the foundation has grown into the preeminent public/private partnership serving

military families. Working with both the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, his network of 84 Fisher Houses throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany provide millions of nights of free lodging to military families. And that free lodging is now closing in on a half billion dollars saved for military and veteran families.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Mr. Fisher also served as chairman of the Invictus Games, and the foundation he leads awards scholarships, established Hero Miles and Hotels for Heroes, and even paid delayed government death gratuities to grieving families during a previous government shutdown. He has and continues to make a difference daily in the lives of many, which is what this award is all about.

It is with great pride and honor that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States presents its 2019 Citizenship Award to the Chairman and CEO of the Fisher House Foundation, Mr. Ken Fisher.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: The James E. Van Zandt Citizenship Award and Citation awarded to Ken Fisher, Chairman and CEO, Fisher House Foundation, in special recognition and sincere appreciation of his outstanding leadership in ensuring that the families of wounded, ill, and injured servicemen and women are able to stay for free at his network of 84 Fisher Houses co-located on VA Medical Centers and military installations across the country, United Kingdom, and Germany.

In caring for -- in carrying on the legacy of his great uncle, Zachary Fisher, the foundation he leads has provided millions of nights of free lodging to some 370,000 military and veteran families since program inception. From free lodging to scholarships and frequent flier and traveler donation programs, he continues to make a positive impact on the lives of many every day, which 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 22nd day of July, 2019.

Approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.

(Applause)

#### REMARKS BY KENNETH FISHER, CHAIRMAN AND CEO OF FISHER HOUSE FOUNDATION

MR. FISHER: Wow. First, let me tell you what an absolute privilege it is to be here with you this morning because I stand in a place full of men and women who know firsthand what it means to serve, veterans of all generations

who've served in uniform and who continue to serve today.

For over 100 years, this organization has done work critical and far-reaching. But I think most importantly, you ensure that none of your fellow veterans will ever be left behind, and that those who have given their lives in that service will never be forgotten. And I sincerely applaud your efforts.  
(Applause)

MR. FISHER: As for me being recognized in this way by the VFW, it's not so much a validation of the work that I have done over the last 20-plus years, but rather a validation of the mission of the Fisher House Foundation itself. My wife, Tammy, Dave Coker, and a group of dedicated coworkers as passionate as I am about supporting veterans, our active duty servicemen and women and their families of all generations, specifically those who have been wounded or just require hospitalization.

For too long the plight of the military family has been unknown. The sacrifices, the burdens, the stress of uncertainty, especially during long deployments is hard enough. But when their loved one is wounded, injured, or ill, or a veteran just requires medical care, the stress and the burdens on those families just increase.

And that was the reason that my Uncle Zachary Fisher founded the Fisher House program almost 30 years ago. My uncle appreciated one simple truth: That a family's love can be the best medicine of all. And it was with that in mind that the first Fisher Houses began construction, and it remains so today. These comfort homes are available to all military and veterans' families free of charge until their hospital stay ends and they can either return to duty or they can come home.

Today we've seen the network of Fisher Houses grow year by year. By year's end we'll almost be at 90. 2019 alone we'll see 34,000 families benefit from the program. And tonight close to 1,200 families will sleep safely in a Fisher House somewhere around the world.  
(Applause)

MR. FISHER: We have expanded our services to include our Hero Miles program and our hotels program and our scholarships, which I encourage you to go online to Fisher House.org and check out. These have become so important in addition to the other services that we provide.

And over the last 10 years our sponsorship of adaptive sporting events, such as the Warrior Games and Prince Harry's Invictus Games, has allowed families to share in and celebrate the end of that long road to recovery. Witnessing their loved ones evolve from wounded warriors to athletes as they compete in paralympic-style events and watching families smile with pride has been particularly gratifying -- gratifying to us.

But I think the most important feature that happens inside these walls is the support system that forms among the families and each house literally

becomes its own community. Families will help one another. They'll provide comfort when it's needed, guidance when they aren't sure, or just a shoulder to lean on when times get tough.

In so many ways, these houses provide a place where the families can heal emotionally and just by knowing that they are not alone. Because they become better caregivers because so much of the burdens have been removed. Since our founding, almost 370,000 guest families have called Fisher House home. And we've saved them almost \$450 million in lodging and travel expenses.

And I'm proud to say that just behind just about every Fisher House, behind that house is the VFW providing badly-needed community support by volunteering and raising money to help supplement the Houses' operation. It's a partnership that we value enormously, and it's a major reason why being recognized today is so important to Tammy and me.

The work that we do is important because we don't believe that helping military and veteran families in their time of need to be charity in any way, but rather our responsibility as Americans who benefit from your sacrifices.

Few in this country will ever know the true meaning and depth of service. Even fewer will know what goes on behind the person who wears the uniform, that the entire family serves. Few will ever know the struggles resulting from wounds, both seen and unseen, that too many veterans and their families still deal with today, brought back from places too far away and under conditions those who never served will ever comprehend.

The mission that Tammy and I, along those we work with will continue, whether it's just providing scholarships, travel, or a safe haven for families in their time of need. And we will continue to speak out on behalf of your families as well. Because no matter how many times you are thanked for your service, we at Fisher House know that that will never be enough. And this country must never forget the sacrifices made on behalf of them in the name of freedom. And we'll continue to work with the VFW to make sure that that happens.

Thank you so much for this award. May God bless you. May God bless your families. And may God bless this -- the greatest Nation on earth. Thank you.

(Standing ovation)

PRESENTATION OF THE VFW ARMED FORCES AWARD TO  
ADMIRAL MICHELLE J. HOWARD, UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my honor and a privilege to present the 2019 VFW Armed Forces Award to Admiral Michelle J. Howard, United States Navy, retired.

(Cheering)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: There you go. Navy in the house.  
(Cheering and applause)



COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Admiral Howard was the first African-American woman to command a U.S. Navy ship, the U.S.S. Rushmore, and the first to achieve both two- and three-star ranks.  
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: You'll be doing a lot of applauding before I get through this bio, I guarantee you.  
(Laughter)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: In 2006, she was elected for the rank of Rear admiral (lower half), making her not only the first female graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy selected for flag rank, but the first admiral selected from her entire graduating class of 1982.  
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: On July 1st, 2014, she became the first woman to become a four-star admiral.  
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: As Vice Chief of Naval Operations, which she began that same day, she became the first woman, as well as first African-American, to hold that post. Howard also became the first female four-star admiral to command operational forces when she assumed command of U.S. Naval Forces Europe and U.S. Naval Forces Africa.  
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Starting to figure out real quick she is the real deal.  
(Laughter)

(Go Navy!)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: You got it. The VFW Armed Forces Award has been presented annually since 1964 to operational units, as well as active or retired members of the Armed Forces for outstanding contributions to national security. The award recognizes extraordinary achievements that reflect the highest traditions of service.

Admiral Howard's near 36-year career has been a record of many firsts. But what's most important to the VFW is she led from the front while taking care of her sailors and their families.  
(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Now, it is with great pride and honor that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States presents its 2019

Armed Forces Award to a veteran of Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Joint Endeavor, of humanitarian relief efforts in Indonesia and maritime security operations in the North Persian Gulf, and the rescue of merchant mariner Captain Phillips from pirates off the coast of Somalia.  
(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Now, we're talking. Please welcome Admiral Michelle Howard.  
(Standing ovation)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Armed Forces Award and Citation awarded to Admiral Michelle J. Howard, United States Navy, retired, in special recognition and sincere appreciation of her faithful and dedicated service to America, her Navy, her sailors, and joint service teammates and their families at home and abroad.

Admiral Howard's near 36-year career has been a record of many firsts from achieving flag rank and commanding ships to becoming the Vice Chief of Naval Operations and Combatant Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe and U.S. Naval Forces Africa. Her selfless service to 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 22nd day of July, 2019.

Approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: One more time. Raise the roof.  
(Cheering and applause)

REMARKS BY ADMIRAL MICHELLE J. HOWARD, UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

ADMIRAL HOWARD: All right. Good morning, Shipmates!  
(Good morning)

ADMIRAL HOWARD: Well, let me start by thanking the Veterans of Foreign Wars for this recognition. It's a privilege to address members of an organization that has devoted its existence to honoring military service and promoting patriotism.

I suspect that one of my factors in my selection for this award is that my career has often been described as breaking through the glass ceiling.

But perhaps -- perhaps since we're all veterans, we know senior officers are referring to "the brass." And I would describe my and other women's advancements in the Armed Forces as breaking through the brass ceiling.

(Applause)

ADMIRAL HOWARD: Breaking through the brass ceiling is one perspective. Another is that our military organizations create environments for their members to succeed. In all of our services, we have opened up our aperture beyond equal opportunity and have come to recognize the importance of diversity to mission success.

And I understand that diversity means many things to many people. But particularly for women and minority members how we see ourselves defines our ideas, and how we see ourselves is a result of our upbringing and our experiences.

But I'd like to share with you just one sea story on this topic. When I had command of U.S.S. Rushmore, I was asked to speak to elementary children in a neighborhood school. And after talking a little bit about myself in command of the ship, the youngsters asked me questions. And they were easy with me at first. And I was able to answer with confidence questions such as, "Why are Navy ships gray?" "Do you see dolphins at sea?"  
(Laughter)

ADMIRAL HOWARD: And then -- then this young boy stood up. And he started with, "How can you be in command of a ship? You're -- you're --" and he paused searching for words. And in that two-second pause, so much went through my mind. "Was he going to comment on me being a woman?" And then I found myself praying, "Please, Lord, do not let this child ask me about my heritage."  
(Laughter)

ADMIRAL HOWARD: And then he continued, "How can you be in command of a ship? You're short."  
(Laughter)

ADMIRAL HOWARD: Bring out the box.  
(Laughter)

ADMIRAL HOWARD: Diversity is not about height. Diversity is the opportunity to aspire to the heights. And I've been very fortunate and joined a service that allowed me to get to the heights. And I've had many assignments throughout my 35 years.

And years ago when I was in a session with a fellow admiral that I had recently met, early in the conversation he stated that he read my biography. He recounted that I was in the first Gulf War; that I was in the Pentagon on 9/11; that early in my second 2004 deployment, I was involved in Indonesia tsunami relief operations; and within 48 hours of taking command of the counter-piracy task force, an American was kidnapped at sea.

And so then this admiral blurted out, "Boy, are you lucky."  
(Laughter)

ADMIRAL HOWARD: And he's right. I am lucky and blessed. In my case, I've had command several times, and I've always been trained and ready to take on the challenges that came to me and my team.

In addition, I am lucky and blessed that I grew up in a service and a Nation where, over the years, opportunities have expanded for women and minorities. And I have been lucky and blessed to serve with Sailors, Marines, Soldiers, Airmen, Guard, and Reserves who volunteered to protect the Constitution, our people, and our American ideals.

And I have been lucky and blessed that I've had over three decades of service with shipmates who live a life of purpose on and off duty. They know service is about the people of this country. Service is based on a constant belief in these ideals of opportunity and freedom, ideals based on our Constitution, our rights and responsibilities as citizens. And it's these ideals that remain the impetus and motivation behind my commitment to our Armed Forces and to our veterans.

We veterans represent the fabric and strength of our Nation. Our military draws its talent from that strength, and ensures that we services represent all of America. So whether we are Army; Navy; Marine Corps; Air Force; Reserve; Guard; and my favorite sibling sister service, the Coast Guard, that we, in defending our Nation, must mirror the faces of the citizens we defend.

And it's important that we reflect America because sometimes societal attitudes shift because the brass ceiling is broken. Living role models can be very powerful, and they can influence and change the beliefs of those who encounter them. So any individual who breaks through the brass ceiling is significant for our Nation. And we need to continue shaping future leaders who not only break that ceiling but shatter it to pieces.

And so for my fellow veterans, each of you, you are role models in your communities. You inspire in your hometowns, your neighbors, friends, and families. And it's this inspiration that generates willingness for others to serve.

So sometimes citizenship can be bounded by color or by gender, but it's your inspiration that unites us as patriots. And it's your inspiration that will ensure one day there will be a future patriot and it will no longer be rare for women to achieve command or a senior leadership position in our Armed Forces. So I thank you.

In order to get through brass ceilings, we all must have the same firm footing when we start the journey. And it's once we've gone through the ceiling, we're obligated to reach out and pull up. And in thanking all of you in the VFW, if I had to describe how I see you, it's this notion of reaching out and pulling up.

Thank you for continuing your focus on military service. You provide veteran support for the return to civilian life in our communities. You pave the way for veterans to be as successful as full-time citizens as we have been in our military careers.

So, B.J., thank you again for this award. I accept it on behalf of all of the servicemen and women that I've served with and for those who still serve. May God bless our Armed Forces and our veterans.  
(Standing ovation)

INTRODUCTION OF HONORABLE MICHAEL R. POMPEO U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my honor and a privilege to introduce our keynote speaker, the 70th U.S. Secretary of State, the honorable Mike Pompeo.  
(Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: The Secretary hails from California. And in 1986 would graduate first among his class of more than 1,000 cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He would then serve until 1991 as an armor officer with the 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry, 4th Infantry Division.

Upon earning a law degree from Howard University, he went to work for a DC-based law firm, and then in the late 1990s moved to Wichita, Kansas, where he and three fellow West Point classmates bought into an aircraft parts manufacturing business.

In 2010 voters in the Kansas, 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, elected him to the first of four terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served until President Trump nominated him to be the CIA Director in January, 2017, and now as the Secretary of State since April, 2018.

The Secretary now serves as America's Chief Diplomat, which to the VFW is important because of the relationships America has with our allies in the Far East, Middle East, and Europe, because of America's efforts to recover and return our fallen to their families and to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and material.

The Secretary was copied on a letter the VFW sent President Trump last year to urge that the return of Korean War remains be a discussion point with the North Korean leader in Singapore. The fact that it was included in the Summit agreement and a little over a month later North Korea released 55 transfer cases of American remains is very important to America's largest and oldest major combat veterans organization.

The VFW wants more American remains returned home to their families. We need to keep this humanitarian mission above politics. We need to keep this one door open. And the VFW wants to aid in our government's efforts just as we continue to do in Vietnam.

Comrades, Auxiliary members, and guests, I present to you an Army veteran, a West Point graduate whose class motto was "Courage Never Quits," a lawyer, a businessman, and Director of the CIA, please welcome Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

(Standing ovation)  
(Go Army!)

REMARKS BY HONORABLE MICHAEL R. POMPEO, U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: Carry on, yes.

I -- it's an honor to be here. Good morning to everyone. It was about 30 years ago I was a little younger and a little skinnier, a little less gray, and I was a young lieutenant. My tank was Bravo 21. My gunner was a young man named Specialist Forsyette (ph). He was the best in the platoon.

We were training. We were preparing for -- to fight the East Germans and the Russians during the Cold War. And we'd just finished a training run, a (unintelligible). We had fired 205-millimeter sabot rounds from our M1A1 main battle tank.

And for those who of you who are tankers -- how many tankers we got out here?

(Cheers)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: Yeah. So the smell of cordite filled the turret. It was awesome. And the jet engine -- the turbine engine of that tank was roaring as we traveled down the range. And we had just -- we just hit two moving targets at a distance of a little more than a mile.

And my gunner in an M1 tank, he sits right down on the front, right beneath where the tank commander was, and he turned around with this big old smile and said, "Lieutenant, America is awesome."

(Laughter)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: When I -- when I walked in here this morning and could see all of you and could get a feel for the room, I must say that it reminded me of that moment. It reminded me of the joy, Specialist Forsyette's joy and mine. So thank you all. Thank you all for what you do for America each and every day.

I want to thank, too, some very special people. Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence for inviting me to speak. It truly is a privilege to be here with you today. It's been more than five decades since a sitting Secretary of State addressed your convention. And I think it's about damn time.

(Cheering and applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: I also want to recognize VFW Auxiliary National President, Sandi Kriebel, and congratulate VFW National Commander, Doc Schmitz, and Auxiliary National President, Peggy Haake.

It's truly an honor to stand here and speak in front of so many patriots, and to speak to your organization in particular. I know this organization.

I represented south-central Kansas. I've been in a lot of VFW halls. Since 1899, you-all have served our veterans and each other. And nobody

orders you to devote your time to this. You-all do this because it's honorable. You do it because you have true servant's hearts. And I thank you for that.

It's great, too, I just came up after a Naval Academy grad. I wasn't going to do the Army jokes, but now I feel compelled to do one.

(Laughter)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: More seriously, your service and the service of generations before you have helped make America the great and glorious place that it is. Americans have always looked out for one another. It's what we do.

Our first veterans knew the stakes of the battle for independence for them, for their children, for us. They -- they knew. Folks like General and then President George Washington, they knew service mattered. He carried himself not as an imperious king, but as a humble servant.

A few decades later, a Frenchman, a fellow named Tocqueville, he marveled -- he watched. He watched as he saw America perform voluntary service to each other. He said, quote, "to found seminaries, to build inns, to raise churches, to distribute books, to send missionaries, and to create hospitals, prisons, and schools." You-all know this stuff.

President Lincoln too. When he was writing about service said that, quote, "I freely acknowledge myself the servant of the people, according to the bond of service -- the United States Constitution; and that, as such, I am responsible for them." He was talking about the people he has a duty to serve.

Today we still love to volunteer for greater causes. Your organization is proof of this. I've seen it. So are Rotary Clubs with its "Service Above Self" motto. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Habitat for Humanity, so are the countless churches and synagogues and mosques that do good works in our communities. Thousands of other groups too. And you-all know this. Danger does not deter our men and women from serving in uniform.

(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: I was reminded of that on the very first day that I was sworn in as a member of Congress. I was sworn in. It was the -- not the first time in my life. It was after my time and service in the Army. I was sworn in 24 hours earlier to defend the Constitution. And I got a note that said that there had been a young man killed in action whose family was in Wichita, Kansas.

I made a call that day. It was one of my first acts as a member of Congress. I spoke with the father of Staff Sergeant Eric Nettleton -- he's a hero of mine. I spoke to his father who was that day a hurting man. And I was a brand-new member of Congress. He knew that his son's death meant something. It meant something to his fellow Americans.

And so while I was thanking him and his family for their commitment to America -- it's a wonderful family -- and their son's service, Staff Sergeant

Nettleton's father said something to me, he said something that sticks with me to this very day. He said, "Mike, just don't let the bad guys win."

Eric Nettleton gave all. He gave the ultimate service for his fellow Americans. As Secretary of State, my mission every day is to make sure we never let the bad guys win.

(Cheering and applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: So I was once a soldier. Now I lead a diplomatic team. We protect the great fruits of other's service. And I want to talk to you today about how President Trump and our administration is doing just that. But a little history I think is in order to talk about.

Look, I know this, I know that diplomacy is our first and best tool for protecting American interest. It's how - when diplomacy is done well, it saves lives. It really matters. I tell my team that every day.

It's how we build alliances with our friends and allies around the world. It's how we get American companies in the door so that they can grow their businesses in other countries so that we can create jobs for your kids and for mine. It's how we keep our enemy's finger off the trigger, keeping troops out of harm's way.

But when we do it wrong, when it's practiced poorly, diplomacy creates problems for our country. Serious problems. We live in dangerous times. No one knows that better than the men and women in this room. Some of that's because our leaders made foreign policy decisions that didn't serve Americans well or put Americans first.

We struck deals that enriched rivals like the Islamic Republic of Iran. And when competitors, like China, broke some fundamentally basic, mutual agreed-upon trade rules, we simply played nice. And when Russia violated important treaties, we sent them letters and just begged them to stop. And when rogue nations, like North Korea, had launched missiles and had tested nuclear weapon systems, we did too little.

We abandoned our friends too, not just in North Asia and the Middle East, but friends in Europe, in the Arctic, in Southeast Asia, and indeed where I just came from, South America. And perhaps -- perhaps saddest of all, we let the doctrines of global elites dictate our engagement instead -- instead of using the American creed, the one that you-all fought for in places like Kasserine Pass and in Kumsong and in Khe Sanh and in Kirkuk and in Kandahar, those are the values that America must rest upon.

When we get this diplomacy wrong, it's selfish. It preferences the will of others over that of Americans, and it affords politicians easy accolades without doing the hard work to secure real achievements. And we've learned the hard way that short-sided diplomacy, bad decisions, have long-term consequences. And when we make those bad decisions, it doesn't do honor to your service because, in fact, it helps the bad guys win.

But as those of you in uniform can appreciate, this isn't about politics; and that staring at these problems or complaining about them, well, it doesn't



solve them. It's on our administration -- it's on our administration every day to do something about these challenges if we don't, we're derelict in our own service to you and to America.

When I -- when I meet with President Trump -- I spoke to him just a couple hours back -- he said to send his regards to you, tell you that he loves you and values you and regrets that he couldn't be here today himself. When I meet with President Trump, the outcomes he wants are always very clear. I never have any doubt about Commander's intent.  
(Laughter)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: And not only that, he expects me to deliver. He expects the State Department team to deliver for him.

I start by trying to be true to men like Washington and men like Hamilton and all of our brilliant founders. I strive to stay true to their principles as a -- as the first idea and central defining idea: A right to life, to liberty, to the pursuit of happiness that are contained in the Declaration of Independence, our central guidepost.

These are our constitutional rights. And President Trump is fearless in protecting our freedoms and in asserting our sovereignty. He, every day, wants to make sure that the bad guys don't win.

Too, President Trump is unafraid. He's unafraid to try new diplomatic tactics where the old ones were simply not getting the outcomes that America needs and deserves. You've seen this. You've seen this on North Korea, where we came into office and found that appeasement wasn't working, and neither did neglect.

So we're maintaining pressure on the North Korean regime, while keeping an outstretched hand for diplomacy. I've now had the chance to meet with Chairman Kim on multiple occasions. Indeed, I think I've spent more time with Chairman Kim than any other American now surpassing Dennis Rodman.  
(Laughter and applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: This is an important step towards -- this is an important step towards achieving America's ultimate objective: The denuclearization of North Korea and the safety of countries in the region and all around the world.

And on the Islamic Republic of Iran, the nuclear deal, it only -- it only made the regime more aggressive. So we've reengaged with allies to exert pressure on that regime. All we ask of them is all America ever asked: We just want them to behave like a normal nation.

And today, as part of that maximum pressure campaign, I'm announcing that the United States is imposing sanctions on the Chinese entity Zhuhai Zhenrong and its Chief Executive, Youmin Li. They violated U.S. law by accepting crude oil. And we've said all along that any sanction will indeed be enforced.

We can't tolerate more money going to the ayatollah, putting American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines -- putting their life at risk. It's too important.  
(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: On Venezuela -- on Venezuela, our patience only emboldened Maduro and his Cuban masters. We have led a 55-nation coalition to support the Venezuelan people and their quest for democracy, for freedom, and for prosperity.

And on the subject of Cuba, we've reversed President Obama's appeasement of the brutal Castro regime.  
(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: Now, it's important to note this is sometimes misconstrued by some of the media. "America first" does not mean America alone. Indeed, other nations are rolling up their sleeves to work alongside of us.

We're restoring friendships that were neglected for a long, long time, from Eastern Europe to our partners in the Gulf to the Pacific islands. And, of course, our relationship with Israel is unequalled. It's a democracy. It stands for the same things that we do here in America. That relationship is stronger than it's ever been. And we're very proud of that.  
(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: You know, another way that we seek every day in this administration to honor your service is to put America first economically. President Trump understands this in his gut. Economic security drives national security. We can't support a military or a robust global diplomatic presence without prosperity. It's how we pay for deterrents. That's how we achieve peace.

Now, those are just a few reasons why we insist on free and fair trade with rule-breakers like China. There are many others. That's also why we tackled tough trade disputes with friendly partners like India. And it's why we explain to nations like Hungary that companies that are tied to the Chinese Communist Party should not build out their 5G networks.

We explain why America's economic model is the best. It's the best to secure prosperity, not just for us but for every citizen across the entire globe.

And speaking of explaining, I'm honoring your service today too, by telling the world one simple truth: The U.S. military is a force for good everywhere and always.  
(Cheering and applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: You take this for granted, but not everyone accepts that proposition. So I say it - I say it everywhere I travel

whether they like it or not.

You've fought for things that deserve to be defended. You fought for your children. You fought for your homes. You fought for your neighbors and your friends and your family. You fought for our inalienable rights. You fought to keep our people and other people free. You fought so that this truly exceptional place that we call America might endure. And we will never apologize for that.

Not ever.

(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: Last but certainly not least, we take care of our own, both the living and the fallen. President Trump's Singapore Summit with Chairman Kim produced the single largest return of remains from North Korean in history. 55 boxes filled with honor and with sacrifice.

(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: I remember sitting in the room negotiating with my counterpart. He's a former senior North Korean general. And I remember talking to him, and I think he was perplexed that we put this as the first among the items we wanted to talk about.

Every one of you understands why we put that first, and why we'll continue to work on this. And we will not stop working on this until every one of our fallen heroes and their remains have been returned to the United States of America.

(Cheering and applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: I'm immensely proud too that we've gotten dozens of Americans who were held hostage overseas back, back to their families, back to America. And we did so without paying a single penny in ransom.

(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: In just about two and a half years, that's more than any other administration in modern history. I've had a chance -- I've had a chance to be part of that too. As CIA Director, I vividly recall coordinating the rescue of an American woman and her family who were being held by terrorists in Pakistan.

And then too I had the glory of flying back from North Korea, flying back and bringing home three Americans who had been held there wrongfully. It was quite an amazing thing.

It was 2:30 in the morning. We arrived in Washington, DC. President Trump and Melania and all of the senior leaders were there from America, and the TVs. Although it was 2:30 in the morning, every eye was riveted. It's how much we care, as Americans, about getting our compatriots home. It's how much President Trump and the administration cares about bringing these same people home.

(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: I have many tasks, but every day I work to bring back Americans that are wrongly held in places like Iran and in Syria and in Mali and in Venezuela and all over the globe.

I want to mention too there's a threat that some of you know about: There are rogue courts, international courts, that have threatened to bring American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines to dock to bring them to justice. This is wrong. This administration has moved heaven and earth to prevent them from wrongfully prosecuting anyone in this room or anyone other who has served in the United States Armed Forces.

(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: You know, it wasn't too terribly long ago and I had an incredible opportunity to land in darkness. It was a desert. I was flown in on a helicopter. We were miles from the nearest light. I was then serving as America's Chief Spy, the Director of the CIA, and I needed to get out to see this elite team.

It was a small team of about a half a dozen folks. I wanted to thank them for the work that they were doing, work that is truly remarkable. And this half dozen, or so, team members, they were nearly all veterans of the United States Armed Forces. And this mission -- this mission required exactly the kind of excellence and experience that service in the military provides.

So I climbed down out of the helicopter and I was met by an electrical engineer, a physicist, and four guys who told me, "Sir, we just get stuff done." (Laughter)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: And while I cannot tell you precisely their mission, I can tell you what I was thinking when I got back on that helicopter. I was thinking exactly what Specialist Forsyette had told me 30 years earlier. I was thinking that America is awesome. (Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: No other country in the world could pull off that mission. And no other country would accept such risks for such a noble purpose. And no other country has men and women willing to do what those men and women were doing that night.

And as I wrap up here today I hope you-all get the sense that I take the mission as America's most senior diplomat very seriously. Because of that, I can use your help too. My wife Susan and I talk a lot about how America has changed in these last few decades.

One way is one that you know, that we have fewer and fewer families -- fewer and fewer families who have veterans that are part of their family. That's not a good thing. We need veterans in the life of every American. We need them both to serve others and to be an example of service itself.

There was a fellow named Edmond Burke, and he stated that we all have our own little platoon -- our families, our neighbors, our coworkers and so on. He said -- he said to love that little platoon we belong to in society is the first link. It's the first link by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind.

So I know you-all love America. Continue to serve. Continue to serve your little platoon. Do it in the way you see fit. Continue your act of work here with the VFW. Mentor a young person who really needs someone to look up to.

Tell them your stories.

Run some errands for an elderly neighbor and spend a little time visiting with them too. They'd love to hear about your service. Help your family members who may be struggling with demons or from addiction.

As many of you do, continue to care for our brothers and sisters who are struggling with PTSD. As veterans, you know this, and as active members of the VFW you have taken it to heart. Your fidelity to the call of service was proven long ago. If you keep serving, each of you will be a force multiplier for freedom inside of our country and outside of it.

And as you perform that service, know that you aren't alone. My team and I will be doing our part right alongside you. We will not let the bad guys win.

(Applause)

SECRETARY OF STATE POMPEO: I want to thank each of you, VFW members, family members of those who have served. May God bless each of you. May God bless each and every veteran. And may God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

(Standing ovation)

#### HOWARD E. VANDER CLUTE MEMORIAL RIDE CHECK PRESENTATION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Nearly two decades ago, members of the VFW and its Auxiliary who shared a passion for riding motorcycles and for the VFW mission came together to honor Howard E. Vander Clute, Junior, the VFW Commander-in-Chief from 1979 to 1980 and Adjutant General from 1981 to 1995.

Since 2002, these dedicated members have shown their commitment to veterans and our mission by organizing the annual Howard E. Vander Clute, Junior, Memorial Ride, a cross-country ride to the VFW National Convention to present the money raised through entry fees and sponsorships to support the VFW's Veterans & Military Support programs.

Please help me give a warm welcome and a heartfelt thank you to Lynn Rolf, VFW Programs Director, along with Florida Riders Chairman, Scott Henry, and Virginia Riders Chairman, William Shepherd, who are representing this year's Howard E. Vander Clute, Junior, Memorial Riders.

Lynn?

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Unfortunately, Scott Henry actually has a day job and he couldn't attend. So I asked a great friend of mine, Don Harris, to join us from the great state of Missouri.

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Don was in an accident not too long ago, and he's made a remarkable recovery.

And I –

COMRADE HARRIS: Three years ago this week.

COMRADE ROLF: Three years ago this week. And it was a great opportunity to bring him up here and share in the glory of the great things that the Riders across the organization do, their true caring hearts. But before that, where's all the Missouri peeps -- or all the Virginia people?

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Commander-in-Chief, I would like the Missouri Riders, led by Shep -- sorry about that. I keep looking at Don. He's a big guy. The Virginia Riders and their people, please stand while Shep presents a monster check of \$19,000 to support our Veterans & Military Support programs.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: I hope you enjoyed that video that you saw of Comrade Blevins and his family, and the true power of the Veterans & Military Support programs. Our great Riders that traveled across the country this week raised an incredible amount of money, totaling over \$33,000. And I would like both ride chairmen to present the check to our Commander-in-Chief.

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Thank you to all the Riders.

(Applause)

PRESENTATION OF SMART/MAHER VFW NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION  
TEACHER AWARDS  
INTRODUCTION OF BOBBIE SCHAMENS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AWARD  
RECIPIENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Next, I'm very pleased to introduce the National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, representing Grades K through 5, Bobbie Schamens of Sparta, Wisconsin.

(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Bobbie brings her personal

experience as a military spouse and infuses it into her curriculum as a fourth grade teacher at Meadowview Intermediate School. In addition to teaching civic responsibility, patriotism, and proper flag etiquette, her class makes cards to be included in military care packages. And she regularly recognizes local military and veteran families with the military tribute case near her classroom.

It is through these activities that Bobbie is able to infuse the ideas we hold dear to her young students. It is teachers like Bobbie who are paving the way for the leaders of tomorrow, and to her we're grateful.

Please join me in welcoming Bobbie Schamens, sponsored by VFW Post 2112 and its Auxiliary in Sparta, Wisconsin.  
(Cheering and applause)

#### REMARKS BY BOBBIE SCHAMENS

MS. SCHAMENS: I had to check the time. I can still say good morning.  
(Laughter)

MS. SCHAMENS: Good morning. And thank you for this honor and opportunity to come and share with you today.

I would also like to say thank you to all the VFW men and women for your dedication and sacrifices that you have made for this country. Thank you to the VFW Post No. 2112 in District 11 for your support and opportunities that you have given to me and many teachers over the years.

My heart truly runs over with gratitude and pride for all VFW men and women. My sense of patriotism and pride comes from my parents and many military family members who are currently serving and who have served. As a military wife of a retired military veteran, I know firsthand the sacrifices that you have made for this country and for your families. And that I'm truly thankful for.

I believe opportunities come to us for a reason. It was a little over a month ago that I had to go to the bakery to pick up some frosting to do a couple graduation cakes. School was still in session, and I had about a million things running through my mind.

My son and I were rushing around the corner at the bakery, and I happened to see an elderly man sitting there through the window. His hat had caught my eye. It had read "World War II Veteran." I looked at my son and I said, "I know that we're in a hurry, but I need to stop and take a moment to speak to this gentleman."

I approached the man and his family, and I said, "Excuse me, sir. I need to thank you for your service that you have made for this country."

He looked into my eyes and he said, "Thank you." And he began to share his story and his experiences that he had with the military. His family was extremely grateful that I had taken time out of my day to stop and thank him.

They told me that it was just in the last few years that he was able to open up and talk about the experiences that he had had.

As we parted ways, we walked out of the bakery, and my youngest son asked me why we had stopped to talk to this man when we didn't even know him. I said to him that we should always take time to thank a veteran or anyone who has helped us to maintain and keep our freedoms.

Who knew that this little trip to the bakery would lead to an opportunity to share about history, patriotism, and being a good citizen. Most importantly, allowing a veteran to tell his story.

This is what I want to take to share with you today is about experiences that we have in our everyday life that truly make a difference in what you do and what we do. My experience as a military wife and teacher have helped me relate to my students and their families and the community that I serve.

These experiences impact my teaching and they generate meaningful conversations inside and outside the classroom. Every day we are presented with opportunities to teach this younger generation. I like to capitalize on these opportunities when they come up.

At the beginning of the year, I take the opportunity to talk about patriotism. Every day at Meadowview Intermediate in Sparta, Wisconsin, we start our day by saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

(Applause)

MS. SCHAMENS: I take time to talk about the importance of our flag and why we say the Pledge of Allegiance. I want students to understand that this should not just be part of a routine or something that we do every day. But I want them to understand that there is a history there and it has a much deeper meaning.

Throughout the year we have many opportunities to discuss American history. In November, my class is responsible for a display case that's outside my window. I have mentioned that these opportunities, when they present themselves, we need to capitalize on them, and we do.

So our class sends out a school-wide note asking for military memorabilia to go into the display case. This not only gives students the opportunity to learn about their family history, but it sparks amazing discussions about our American history. It never ceases to amaze me how many students will say that they did not have a family member that served in the military. But they come back with pride in their eyes and they say, "Ms. Schamens, you were right. I did have somebody who served in the military."

Students also get many opportunities to demonstrate citizenship inside and outside of the classroom. They need to understand that this is their community and their country, and they are a part of it. One way that we get involved is we hold various drives for military members and send care packages overseas.

We also take many opportunities in our classroom to participate in penny wars for the Sparta Area Cancer Society. One year we held a penny war to collect money for a student in need. As a school, we raised enough money



for her to receive her prosthetic ear.

It was not just one student, one classroom, but a whole school that came together for this great cause. This is what good citizenship is about. It's amazing to see how these small acts of kindness can impact others in big ways.

My classroom is also involved in an intergenerational program. Once a month my class and two other classrooms visit local nursing homes. We are paired then with an adopted grandparent. We share about our life experiences and memories as we make new ones. And in the process, we find out that many of our grandparents are retired military veterans.

It's so amazing to see these little light bulbs come on and the students making these connections. I cannot say enough about the school and staff that I work with. We work hard to bring our school and community together.

I leave you with this today: When opportunities present themselves, use them. It's our stories, our life experiences, our history that are the most powerful teaching tools that we have. Never let an opportunity slip by. Take time to listen to each other. Share your stories because we are truly inspirations to each other.

Thank you again for this honor. I truly appreciate every single one of you, and I will never take for granted the opportunities that your service to this country has provided for myself and others. Thank you and God bless.  
(Standing ovation)

#### INTRODUCTION OF ANNE MARTIN MIDDLE SCHOOL AWARD RECIPIENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Next, I'm very pleased to introduce the National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, representing Grades 6 through 8, Anne Martin of Tracy, California.  
(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: No one understands sacrifice like our Gold Star Families. And for Anne, it's her family's sacrifice that encourages her to teach her students on the importance of making sure our veterans, service members, and their families are never forgotten, especially those in her Tracy, California, community.

Through school-wide campaigns for donations and thank you letters for deployed troops and organizing her school's patriot's day ceremony, her patriotic spirit is felt throughout her community, and students have learned throughout Anne's 24-year career to better understand the sacrifices made by our military and veteran families.

Please join me in welcoming Anne Martin, sponsored by VFW Post 1537 in Tracy, California.

(Applause)

## REMARKS BY ANNE MARTIN

MS. MARTIN: Let me begin by saying how extremely honored I am to be receiving this award. I'm humbled that you feel that I am worthy of such recognition. Thank you to each and every one of you.

I would also like to personally thank Commander Vaughn Gates from VFW Post 1537 for initially nominating me.

To my students in the Williams Middle School community, thank you for always supporting my efforts in recognizing our veterans and fallen.

And, of course, I cannot forget my husband, Phillip, and my two sons, Phillip and Armando. Thank you.

I just love teaching. I love the challenges it presents. I've loved the victories and sometimes defeats, large and small, that occur on a daily basis as struggling students strive to achieve their goals.

I've loved learning from my students as they open my eyes to new perspectives. And most importantly, I have, over the past 24 years, loved watching my students mature into independent and creative thinkers.

As the student government adviser, I have the privilege of helping our young leaders organize many activities that promote citizenship, responsibility, and respect. Together the students and I have planned and implemented canned food drives. We have recognized deployed troops and veterans through thank-you note writing, rock painting, patriotic spirit days, and door-decorating contests.

We have honored our fallen, first responders, and active duty militaries during Patriot Day memorial ceremonies. We have also coordinated Patriot's Pens essay contest at our site and a "Chain of Thanks" for our local VFW. We have organized dances, rallies, spirit weeks, fundraising activities, and even a talent show.

Although all of these activities have special meaning, my favorite is running the student government elections because it is through this activity that I can teach students about the patriotism and democracy.

I'm able to impart to them that the simple privileges of voting in a school election and just going to school has paid -- has been paid for by the sacrifices of many. That we owe our democracy to those who are willing to spill their own blood to sign that blank check in order to defend it. Watching students learn this valuable lesson as they engage in the democratic process is the highlight of my year.

What has inspired me throughout my teaching and organizing of these activities and events is you, the veteran, the defenders of liberty, and my personal heroes. From the time I was a child, my parents fostered in me a deep and abiding appreciation for those who serve or have served in our country's military, an appreciation that is my mission to impart to my students.

I was raised on stories of my grandparents hosting British and American sailors on Liberty during World War II, and the lifelong friendships

that resulted. I was told of how my uncle -- I'm sorry -- how my father's uncle, a POW in the Philippines, was liberated through the courage and sacrifice of our military. And as I grew older, my experiences grew deeper and my respect and awe for you, our Nation's heroes, became an integral part of my life.

From being overcome by emotion on my first visit to Arlington National Cemetery, by the sight of those white stones stretching for acres and acres, to the realization that these men and women, your fallen brothers and sisters, gave up their futures to ensure that I and the rest of the country and even the world had won.

From telling my own sons of the bravery of their Grandpa Phil, a Korean War veteran who patrolled the DMZ, and of their Grandpa Herb, who, as a sergeant in the Korean War, carried the BAR, to placing of wreaths at the grave sites of our town's little Arlington.

From watching my parents help out friends who served in Vietnam with a place to stay, a warm meal, and often free dental work, to walking along the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall with students and relaying to them the honor, the courage, and the brotherhood of not only those named on the wall, but also of those who came home, sometimes to unfriendly faces.

From watching my parents glow with pride as my nephew graduated from boot camp and began his journey as a United States Marine, to facing the fear a family member experiences as a loved one is deployed to war, from suffering the anxiety, the pit in the bottom of your belly when I received word that my nephew, Gunnery Sergeant George Figone (ph), Jr., who was loved as a cherished baby brother, had been severely wounded during a skirmish in the mountains of Afghanistan, to that knee-weakening sense of relief when he finally returned home.

I have felt the apprehension that comes when that same hardheaded Marine raider chose to remain in the Corps because to him the Corps was life and his teammates his brothers.

And I have felt my heartbreak as I listen to the haunting sound of Taps and watched as my mother received the folded flag that lay on Georgie's coffin on a rainy Virginia day in December of 2011.

I do what I do for all of you here. I do it for them, Gunnery Sergeant George L. Figone, his team leader, Gunnery Sergeant Jonathan Gifford, for Army Specialist Kelly Mixon, for Army Ranger Ryan Coyer (ph), for Sergeant Matthew Maddox, for all of the fallen. I do it so that their stories and yours are told. I do it so that their sacrifice and yours will not be forgotten.

I do it to teach my students about the true cost of living in a free society. I do it so that they will one day teach their children that freedom is not free. I do it because as Ronald Reagan once said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction."

We didn't pass it on to our children in the bloodstream. The only way they can inherit the freedom we have known is if we fight for it, protect it, defend it, and then hand it to them with the well-fought lessons of how they, in

their lifetime, must do the same.

Thank you-all for your service and thank you for this most prestigious honor. Thank you.

(Standing ovation)

#### INTRODUCTION OF KEVIN WAGNER HIGH SCHOOL AWARD RECIPIENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Last but not least, in the high school division, I'm pleased to welcome the National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, representing grades 9 through 12, Kevin Wagner of Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: The curriculum required in Advanced Placement courses is intense. So when a teacher is able to go beyond those requirements, it makes for an impactful experience.

For Kevin's AP history students at Carlisle High School, this impact hits close to home. Through his "Silent Heroes" project at Carlisle High School, students explore the life and service of a local World War II veteran killed at Normandy and create a Web page preserving their legacy.

Last year, Wagner's project expanded to identify local Vietnam War veterans, leading to the construction of a Vietnam Wall of Honor, which displays the names of more than 213 local veterans killed during the war. There's no doubt the impact he has had on his students is one that will last a lifetime, ensuring the stories of local veterans are remembered and treasured.

Please join me in welcoming Kevin Wagner, sponsored by VFW Post 477 and its Auxiliary of Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

(Cheering and applause)

#### REMARKS BY KEVIN WAGNER

MR. WAGNER: This may be harder than a roomful of 30 teenagers.

(Laughter)

MR. WAGNER: Good afternoon, veterans, guests, and fellow honored teachers. I'd first like to recognize all the veterans here today from the great state of Pennsylvania -- where are you?

(Cheering and applause)

MR. WAGNER: -- who saw fit to recognize my efforts in the classroom and put my name forward

for this very distinguished award.

I would particularly like to thank VFW Pennsylvania Post 477 and Post Commander Rick Olson. Mr. Olson has been an ardent supporter and a dear friend of my efforts for the past two years, since we began the Vietnam Wall of Honor. And I value his partnership that he's afforded to me.

I also would like to thank various supportive administration and all my colleagues back home in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, for their strong support every year. And to all the veterans in this hall, I am humbled by your presence.

I stand here today on the shoulder of giants, each of you for your service to our country and each of my students who make me a better person and a teacher every year. I honestly believe teachers have one of the greatest callings on earth. Each of us as educators, like each of you as veterans, know what it means to be of service to our fellow human beings.

Almost exactly eight years ago today I was afforded a unique privilege to study World War II in Normandy, France, with a student of mine, Sam Spare (ph), along with 14 other student-teacher teams. One of the requirements of the program was to research a person from our home state who's buried in Normandy American Cemetery.

Sam was lucky enough to learn of a graduate from our high school from the Class of 1941, William Thomas McCabe, who's buried at Normandy, who no one knew about.

Over the course of four months, Sam scoured the Internet, dived into the National Archives, and interviewed living family members to learn the story of William McCabe. And when we arrived at the Normandy Cemetery, Sam gave a very personal eulogy to William, standing alongside his white cross as it gleamed in the sun overlooking Omaha Beach.

But as Sam gave his eulogy to William, I remember looking out over the 9,380 white crosses and Stars of David, wondering about all the other untold life stories that were housed within each marker.

The thought that kept rolling around in my mind was each of these men left behind was not what was engraved in their stone, but it was what is woven into the lives of others that came after them and remembered their life story.

As Joshua Chamberlain once said at the dedication to the 20th Maine in Gettysburg – not far from my hometown -- in 1889, "In great deeds something abides. And on great fields something stays. Forms change and pass; bodies disappear, but spirits linger to consecrate the ground for the vision-place of souls. And reverent men and women from afar, and generations that know us not and that we know not of, are heart-drawn to see where and by whom great things were suffered and done for them, shall come to the deathless field to ponder and dream."

A month after that trip from France, Sam shared with me a story. He was sitting for his senior picture that would appear in the yearbook. And he told me that, as he sat in his starched dress white shirt and tie and blazer, he couldn't help but think of the bright smile of William T. McCabe, who 70 years

earlier sat for that same picture for the Carlisle High School Senior Yearbook. Sam wondered would anyone ever look back at his senior portrait with the same amount of respect and gratitude that he had for William.

I realize because of Sam's story that he now understood the power of sacrifice, and what so many men and women in our great country have ultimately given for our freedoms. I wanted all my students to make that connection.

All of this became the impetus for the "Silent Heroes" program, which all of my students have taken part in each year for the past eight years. The goal -- albeit lofty -- is to have all 9,380 soldiers' stories come back to life through the creation of a memorial website in their honor.

Every year each of my students selects one soldier buried in Normandy to research, build a website that tells their early life, their hometown, their high school years, and their experience during D-day. To date, we have honored 129 men and women buried at Normandy, bringing back to life their personal stories.

(Applause)

MR. WAGNER: But in the process, students have come to seemingly adopt their soldier as their own personal family member.

Just literally on Friday, with very little sleep, I have returned from a trip -- my third one -- to Normandy with 11 of my students. And after vivid -- visiting the grave of William T. McCabe for the third time, every student with me was given the opportunity to visit the gravesite of the researched "Silent Hero" they had done in the past year or two.

After all the students had completed their memorial, every single one of them asked, "Mr. Wagner, can we go back to our soldier and spend some time with him alone?"

Can you imagine what it was like and the power that was felt to see a group of young teenagers sit quietly at the foot of a soldier's grave and have a personal conversation with each and every one of them.

(Applause)

MR. WAGNER: Perhaps -- one of my students from a few years ago perhaps sums up the "Silent Heroes" project when she wrote a poem to her soldier at the end of this project. And it has always stuck with me. She selected him simply because he had the same last name that she did, but no relation.

Her poem says, "For Donald Mallard. When we first met, you in black letters and I in ignorance, name after name rolled by a screen and you captured me because you were mine. Deeper I dug but could not find you. Always you hid from my inquisitive eyes, searching, seeking, rummaging through time and space so I could hold your hand. But always there were nuggets, never rivers of gold.

"Slowly, you formed a picture in me -- vague, foggy, but there -- until I

knew you were just from the effort of looking until you revealed a face so lovely, so young, so noble, but gone. I wish now I'd been there that day to stop the bite, to catch you as I fell, because you deserved so much more from life and from me. But I wasn't. I couldn't. And I'm sorry.

"So here we are. You and me. This is my gift to you, the brave, the unknown, the hero. Just a small piece of your beautiful life so all the world can know you like I do. Sleep well under this marble cross. Guard forever these broken shores. And know that memories fade, but you will always have a piece of my heart. Thank you forever and always."

Too often I believe the men and women that serve in our military get little or no credit for their valor. I believe it is my duty to educate our young people in order to tell the stories of all of our brave men and women who have sacrificed so much for their fellow citizens throughout history.

Just as I read on a memorial wall during my recent visit last week to Normandy, "War graves are the great communicators of peace," each of the men and women who lie in those graves have much to communicate to our young people today. I have much more work to do when it comes to educating our young people about the sacrifice of war.

And you can rest assured that my work shall continue so that all of your individual stories are told for generations to come. I believe the survival of our great Nation depends on it.

Thank you again for this very high honor that you bestow upon me. It is more worthy of my students than of myself. And thank you for your service and your sacrifice to our great Nation. Thank you.  
(Standing ovation)

#### PRESENTATION OF THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL AND CITATION TO PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KEITH HARMAN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I'm honored to present our next guest with the Distinguished Service Medal and Citation in recognition of his years of dedicated service to the VFW.

A United States Army veteran, Keith Harman served during Vietnam as a crew chief and door gunner on Huey helicopters and joined the VFW in 1983. He served America's veterans for more than two decades as a county veteran service officer before being elected Commander-in-Chief of the VFW on July 26th, 2017, at the 118th VFW National Convention in New Orleans.

During his tenure as Chief, Keith rallied our membership to put "Service Before Self." And if anyone has any doubts of how serious he was about this mantra, check out the tattoo on his arm sometime.

And putting service before self is exactly what we did, celebrating many great accomplishments. We celebrated VA appeals reform and the VA MISSION Act, expanded caregiver benefits. And Keith reminded America that when our national anthem plays, we stand for our flag.  
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Please join me in honoring Keith Harman with the Distinguished Service Medal and Citation.  
(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Distinguished Service Medal and Citation awarded to Keith E. Harman in sincere appreciation and spirited recognition of his nearly 40 years of dedicated service to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

His selflessness and passion for serving others has justly earned him the respect of his peers and that of the veterans, service members, and families he has served throughout his many leadership roles within the VFW, to include his time in the high office of Commander-in-Chief. His steadfast dedication to upholding the values and mission of the VFW has left an indelible mark on the organization and has earned him our deepest appreciation.

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, 2019.

Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.  
(Applause)

#### REMARKS BY PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HARMAN

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HARMAN: Thank you. It's kind of humbling to receive an award for doing something that you truly enjoy doing.

B.J. made a comment about the kneeling for the American flag. I had been to -- I was on a conference -- or I was at the Eastern Conference meeting. I was scheduled to go home on a Sunday, received a call from the Washington office asking me -- or telling me that NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell would like to meet with me on Monday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock, and could I make that happen. And I said, "Certainly. We'll do that."

When we arrived -- Bob Wallace, Joe Davis, and myself arrived to meet with the commissioner, when we walked in the room, there were three team presidents in that room, along with Mr. Goodell's PR people. Those team presidents were from teams from the 49ers, the Ravens, and the Cardinals.

And after they told us how that, you know, their kneeling wasn't in protest of our veterans or a disgrace and everything, I reminded them that I didn't believe you would find a veteran anywhere that said that we disagreed with their right to protest under the First Amendment.

However, with that being said, if there's anything sacred to a veteran, it's that American flag because we all took an oath to defend it, we fought for it, and we died for it.

(Cheering and applause)



PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HARMAN: I don't recall the comment that the president of the Cardinals made. But my response to him was that I went to Vietnam with an entire company from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and we left Fort Campbell Kentucky March 17th of 1969. On April 27th of 1969, my unit took its first casualty. His name was Albert Austin. He was from Mesa, Arizona.

So I looked at that team president of the Cardinals, and I said, "The next time one of your players takes a knee, I would like for you to personally look up the family of Albert Austin and tell them that they're not doing that to dishonor him." Naturally, I did not get a response.  
(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HARMAN: I just want to thank you for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime. You know, it took me a while to join this organization, and I really don't know why because my -- both my parents are charter members of VFW Post 5803, and my mother was a District President in 1952 -- so that's kind of showing my age a little bit -- and I can remember as a young boy -- a young boy growing up in that VFW post.

So it did take me a while to join. And fortunately for me, I have a very supportive wife, Mary Lou, over there. Once I joined, she told me that, "You need to go up there and find out what's going on."  
(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HARMAN: And that brings us to today. You know, last year I had the distinct privilege of serving as the Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Today I'm a Post Quartermaster.  
(Laughter and applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HARMAN: I will continue to work for this organization in whatever capacity at any level that I can be of help, until either my health won't permit it or six of you come and get me and take me to my grave, whichever comes first.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity. It has been my honor and privilege to serve this great organization. Thank you.  
(Standing ovation)

FRED C. HALL MEMORIAL OUTSTANDING  
POST SPECIAL PROJECT AWARD TO VFW POST 10555

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Doc, now you got me all confused. Quit doing that stuff, group hugs.

Okay. Let me figure this out. Blame it on Doc.

Supporting our local communities is something VFW posts have been doing for nearly 120 years. From food drives and veteran day ceremonies to providing emergency disaster assistance in times of need, our dedication to improving the lives of those around us is evident in the nearly 9 million hours of

volunteerism VFW and VFW Auxiliary members spend giving back each year.

In early October, 2018, Hurricane Michael tore through Bay County, Florida, leaving destruction, homelessness, and broken spirits in its wake. Four of the five VFW posts in Florida's District 17 suffered significant damage. A couple have still -- have still yet to reopen. And most of the VFW members in the area were forced to evacuate their home.

When Emerald Coast VFW Post 10555, in Panama City Beach, Florida, survived with minimal damage, post members stepped up to the plate and jumped into action. Acting as a temporary distribution point, members of VFW Post 10555 and its Auxiliary started receiving and organizing donations from across the country that needed to reach areas in need along the coast.

Despite the damage to Florida's infrastructure and several lines of communication down in the days following Hurricane Michael, Post 10555 set up distribution points at truck stops and American Legion posts all to ensure support and desperately-needed supplies reached as many families in need as possible.

During times of crisis, it is the kindness, support, and tireless work like that of the members of VFW Post 10555, which truly showcase why "No One Does More For Veterans than the VFW."

Let's give a big round of applause to the 2019 Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project Award winner, Emerald Coast VFW Post 10555.

Accepting the award on behalf of the post is the woman behind the coordinated effort, Post Commander Susan Johnson.  
(Cheers and applause)

#### REMARKS BY VFW POST 10555 COMMANDER SUSAN JOHNSON

POST COMMANDER JOHNSON: Are there any Floridians in the house?  
(Cheering and applause)

POST COMMANDER JOHNSON: How about District 17?  
(Cheering and applause)

POST COMMANDER JOHNSON: Yeah, I gotcha.  
On behalf of Post 10555 and its Auxiliary, I would like to thank everyone that helped us. It was not just Florida. It was Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, all different people from all over the VFWs of the United States. They sent money, they sent items, and we were able to distribute it. You would not believe how many people we helped that had nothing, absolutely nothing. And it made me very proud to be the commander of Triple Nickel.

Thank you very much. It is an honor.  
(Applause)

PRESENTATION OF "52 CONSECUTIVE YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP GROWTH"  
CITATION  
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ARIZONA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: For those of you who regularly attend the national convention, the next presentation will come as no surprise.

For 52 consecutive years, the members of the Department of Arizona have come together as a team to increase VFW membership throughout the Grand Canyon State. What this department has accomplished is truly remarkable. I commend each and every member of the Department of Arizona for their years of devotion and the tireless efforts that have gone into reaching this momentous achievement yet again.

Now, in honor of their hard work and dedication, I would like to call on Lewis Wood, immediate Past Department Commander of Arizona to accept this Consecutive Years of Membership Growth Citation. Congratulations to all in the great Department of Arizona.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Certificate of Commendation awarded to Department of Arizona in recognition of the remarkable achievement of 52 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 seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 22nd day of July, 2019.

Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY PAST DEPARTMENT OF ARIZONA COMMANDER LEWIS WOOD

PAST DEPARTMENT COMMANDER WOOD: Well, clearly, it's a great honor to accept this 52 years in a row for Department of Arizona. We started this team with my Auxiliary President and all my whole team from Arizona here to "Make It Happen."

(Cheering and applause)

PAST DEPARTMENT COMMANDER WOOD: And that's exactly what we did. Now, we'll also tell you that we're not stopping here today at 52 in a row.

Next year we'll be back up here with 53 in a row.  
(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Sergeant-at-Arms, did you want to remove my daughter for laughing at me down here in the front row?

(Laughter)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Can you take care of that?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Say it again.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: My daughter, can you take care of that? She's laughing at me. Settle down.

PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION TO THE 119TH NATIONAL  
CONVENTION COMMITTEE  
TO BE ACCEPTED BY CHAIRMAN JAMES MUELLER, PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my distinct pressure to present a Certificate of Appreciation to the 119th National Convention Committee for their hard work in planning and conducting last year's very successful national convention in Kansas City, Missouri.

Here to accept the award on behalf of the committee is Jim Mueller, the Convention Committee Chairman for the 119th National Convention.  
(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Certificate of Appreciation presented to 119th National Convention Committee, in extraordinary appreciation and esteemed recognition of its outstanding dedication and persistent drive to ensure the success of the 119th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States held in Kansas City, Missouri, July 21 through 25 of 2019 -- excuse me -- of 2018.

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, 2019.

Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.  
(Applause)

REMARKS BY CHAIRMAN JAMES MUELLER, PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MUELLER: I just want to express my deep appreciation. That was the fourth national convention I was chairman of.

Because of what happened in Vietnam over there -- and it's a personal story -- I won't go into it now -- but I made a promise and pledge to God if I made it home, I'd do what I could to serve veterans and their families. And you inspire me every day, the VFW and the Auxiliary, to do more.

God bless you and keep on doing what we do for our veterans. Thank you.  
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Since the Sergeant-at-Arms refuses to remove my daughter from the hall, I might as well close the business.  
(Laughter)

## CLOSING CEREMONY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please perform the closing ceremonies for today's joint opening.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief. Comrades, please rise and give a salute to the flag of the United States.

Present arms. Order arms.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, the close of this Business Session has been completed. We stand in recess.

## ADJOURNMENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms. We are adjourned till 8:00 a.m. tomorrow morning in recess. Thank you.

SECOND BUSINESS SESSION  
TUESDAY, JULY 23, 2019

(The Second Business Session of the 120<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida, was called to order at 8:00 a.m., with Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence presiding.)

CALL TO ORDER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Everyone please start taking your seats. Sergeant-at-Arms, the hall looks a little empty this morning. Maybe the party last night was a bad idea.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Sir, yes, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now reconvene the 120<sup>th</sup> VFW National Convention. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please conduct the opening ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief. National Sergeants. Attention. Comrade National Chaplain, the opening prayer. Uncover. Parade rest.

OPENING PRAYER

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Mighty Ruler of the universe, we come before You again today as we continue our deliberations. We thank You for this enormous blessing to convene openly in a free country. Make us ever-vigilant to preserve our freedoms, and let us never forget those who have given so much to ensure that freedom. We ask that You would bless our veterans, our military, and their families. We seek Your divine guidance in all that transpires today. Dear Lord, we ask that You would inspire us with wisdom, compassion, and the courage to make difficult decisions. Help us to always choose for the good of the organization over personal wants and desires. Be with us in all our meetings. Give us grace to think what is right and be our guide and counselor as we work for the good of our great organization. All these things we ask in Your holy name. Amen.

(Amen)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Cover. National Sergeants, attention.

SALUTE TO COLORS AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrades, facing the flag of the United States, join me in the Pledge of Allegiance. Present arms.

(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 opening of this Business Session has been completed, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Sergeant-at-Arms, thank you.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Thank you, sir. Sergeants, right face. Forward march.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Please be seated. I have just one brief announcement before we begin today. Staging for this evening's march of the departments will begin at 5:30 p.m. in Hall WE2, whiskey echo 2. The march will begin promptly at 6:00 p.m. Please line up by membership ranking. And everyone is invited to walk with their departments.

#### REPORT ON CONVENTION CREDENTIALS - BETTY GRIPP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now call on Betty Gripp for the report of the Credentials Committee. Comrade Gripp.

COMRADE GRIPP: Good morning, Commander-in-Chief, Council members, and delegates. The Opening Credential Report for the 120th National Convention at the close of business at 4:00 p.m. yesterday, July 22nd, 2019, total delegates registered their credentials are 11,193; total Department Commanders, 47; total Past Commander-in-Chief, 7; total National Officers, 5. Grand total, 11,285.

#### INTRODUCTION OF QUARTERMASTER GENERAL DEBRA ANDERSON, WORLD WAR I CENTENNIAL COMMISSIONER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: As you-all know well, commemorating the wars and conflicts of our Nation's past and honoring all those who have served in them is a VFW priority. And by working together at the local and national level, we ensure the service and sacrifice of America's heroes will never be forgotten. As a World War I commemoration supporter, the VFW helps spotlight events, publications, productions, activities, and programs that allow people in the U.S. to learn about the history of the "Great War," the United States's involvement in the war and the war's effects on the remainder of the 20th century, all while commemorating and honoring the participation of the United States and its citizens in the war effort. Our next speaker is not only the Quartermaster General for the VFW, but in 2016 she was sworn in as a commissioner to the United States World War I Centennial Commission, tasked with providing public outreach, education programs, and commemorative events. Please join me in welcoming Quartermaster General and World War I Centennial Commissioner, Debra Anderson.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY QUARTERMASTER GENERAL DEBRA ANDERSON,  
WORLD WAR I CENTENNIAL COMMISSIONER

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL ANDERSON: Good morning. As the Commander-in-Chief said, I'm Debra Anderson, your Quartermaster General, and I'm also a commissioner on the World War I Centennial Commission. The commission was formed in 2013 by act of Congress to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War I. There are actually 12 commissioners on the commission. Three were appointed by the President of the United States. Six were appointed by senior members of Congress. And three were appointed by their institution by right of who they -- who they represent, and that is the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and the World War I National Museum & Memorial. So the VFW always has a member on this commission. I was appointed by the VFW in 2016. We also have an advisory board that includes past presidents, cabinet members, and ambassadors. So it's quite an honor for me to be your representative on this commission.

By the way, four of the other eleven commissioners are also VFW members. They are Terry Hamby from Kentucky who is our chairman; Colonel Tom Moe from Ohio -- who many of you may know in Ohio. He's very active in the veteran community -- Jerry Hester from North Carolina, also very active; and General Freddie Valenzuela of Texas. So the VFW is well represented on the commission. So why should we care about World War I? There are no more living veterans. But George Washington said, "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their Nation." Our VFW Congressional Charter reads, in part, "The purposes of this corporation are fraternal, patriotic, historical, charitable, and educational, and are to perpetuate -- the third purpose is to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead and to assist their surviving spouses and orphans."

So we really have a responsibility as veterans to honor and to remember those who served. And we do this in many ways, but part of this is to support educational and commemorative events about past wars and to support memorials to these wars. We have a responsibility to ensure that Americans remember our history and remember the sacrifices made by those who serve. I'd like to start with this short video clip.

VIDEO PRESENTATION

(Whereupon, a video was shown at this time.)

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL ANDERSON: "Protect our future by remembering our past." I think that's a really important thing to remember. And we have remembered our past wars. The VFW has proudly supported the



Vietnam War Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, and the World War II Memorial. And we are also now supporting the Gulf War Memorial and the World War I Memorial, both of which are not yet built. Many people are not aware of the impact of World War I that it's had on our lives, but it has been called one of the most consequential wars of our time because of its long-reaching effects. Consider this: 4.7 million Americans served during World War I. 2 million deployed overseas, and 116,516 died as a result of their service. The war has had a lasting effect on the world today and on our lives. After that war, America emerged as an economic and military super power. It paved the way for women's right to vote as women started working to support the war effort, and also had an impact on civil rights as African-Americans fought bravely in that war and Hispanics and other minority groups. It saw the emergence of modern medicine and many technological advances.

And unfortunately the war sowed the seeds for future conflicts, in terms of international relationships and geographic boundaries. A lot went wrong, particularly at the end of the war with the peace treaty, that we could learn from. World War II grew out of this, as did Vietnam and unrest in the Middle East. So the peace was not a lasting peace as they had hoped for. But as in all conflicts, our American service members fought bravely. Think about it. They crossed an ocean to serve in a country many had never been to, to fight in a war that they did not start for the ideals, not for -- not for personal gain but for the ideals of peace and liberty. And they did help win the war for the allies. And they made American very proud of their service. So let's talk about what the VFW is doing to commemorate and support the commemoration of World War I. We've helped in many ways to build awareness of what happened 100 years ago. At our convention two years ago, 2017, in New Orleans, we passed a resolution to support the commission in its mission to honor, educate, and commemorate the "Great War" and to endorse the building of a national memorial in Washington, DC.

Following that meeting, the National Council of Administration, approved a donation to help build the memorial of \$300,000, which is consistent with what we've done for past memorials. And it also was one of the earlier ones from a veterans service organization, which encouraged others to get onboard with the memorial. Last year at our convention in Kansas City, we passed a resolution to support the Valor Medals Review. And essentially what that does is it looks at medals awarded to minorities during World War I and looks for possible instances of racial bias where a medal might have been downgraded from what it was originally put in for, and to correct those wrongs that were made many years ago. And that commission has already got- -- that panel has already gotten started. And we also passed a resolution to support the Congressional Gold Medal for the Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators, who were American women who were bilingual in English and French and went overseas to help connect calls and ensure communications were good between -- or were clear between the Americans and their allies.

The VFW participated in a project called 100 Cities/100 Memorials,

where we supported state level -- or posts supported individual memorials in their communities and state-level commissions where our members were involved in activities at the state level. And VFW members participated individually and as part of their posts in events across the United States and in Europe. I'd like to highlight a few of those events so you can see how your fellow comrades were involved in this activity. April 6th, 2017, was commemoration of the United States's entry into the war, and a big celebration or a big commemoration was held at Kansas City, Missouri, at the National World War I Museum and Memorial. Many VFW members at National Headquarters, Kansas and Missouri, were in attendance as well as guests and visitors from across the country. October 6th, 2018, VFW 112 in Wichita, Kansas, had an amazing ceremony honoring Erwin Bleckley, a Medal of Honor recipient who was killed in action October 6th, 1918, so 100 years to the day. He and his copilot, Harold Goettler, were shot down flying a mission.

They were sent to locate, rescue, and resupply a combat battalion that had been isolated and cut off from the rest of the forces. They'd already made a first attempt. They'd already tried to find this battalion and resupply them, but they were unsuccessful. So they knew how dangerous this was. This was their second mission of the day. Lieutenant Bleckley is quoted as saying, "We will make the delivery or die in the attempt." So they bravely went off, under enemy fire, to find this battalion. And, unfortunately, they did not return. They were shot down and killed in the attempt. They disregarded their own safety, showing great courage and devotion to duty. And Wichita -- the Wichita VFW post recognized the significance of this hometown hero and wanted to bring the community together to -- to honor him and to recognize what he had done. Greg Zuercher, who was a VFW post coordinator for this, as well as many other members got involved with their community, with the mayor, with the Air Force base there and brought great awareness to this.

The same day the Illinois VFW had a ceremony for his copilot, Harold Goettler, in Graceland Cemetery where he's buried, to recognize his flight and his Medal of Honor. And the Department of Illinois, different commander, Don Boyer, and the District Commander, Sam Schafee (ph) you see in the second picture there, honored that pilot as well. Department of Europe has attended numerous commemorations this year, both the 100th anniversary of World War I and the 75th anniversary of the landing at D-Day at Normandy's World War II. The World War I events included ceremonies at St. Mihiel Cemetery and the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery -- both of these are American cemeteries in France -- where the day's events included wreath layings, speeches, and the reading of 14,246 names of the service members buried in the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery. Assisting the department were members of VFW Post 10810 in Stuttgart. Incoming Department Commander Joe Holder played a big role in this. And also VFW Post 605 in Paris has attended numerous commemorative events throughout the year. At the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery in September, VFW members helped light candles on every one of the 14,246 graves, and these are the stunning results at night. They almost weren't able to do this because it

rained that day. But there was a break in the rain, they got the candles lit, and it was just a really beautiful, beautiful ceremony.

In Hawaii, VFW also was very active in World War I. The state formed a World War I Centennial Task Force, and several of our members served on that task force, including National Council Member Stanley Hernandez, Colonel Art Tulak, who was the task force commander, and Fred Wong. They put together a daylong event at Waikiki World War I Natatorium on November 11th, 2018, which included speeches, a flyover, movies, and fireworks. The Massachusetts VFW has also been very active.

(Cheering)

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL ANDERSON: Go Massachusetts. They formed a World War I Uniformed Color Guard. And they were so effective, they got asked to perform all over the state at numerous ceremonies. They are pictured here at Fenway Park. They also participated in parades and presented the colors at hockey games and other events. They were everywhere, including the American Legion convention. And also shown is a TV interview, Eric Segundo and Brian Willette are doing an interview about a program called Bells of Peace, which was across the country to toll the bells on November 11th. So they got good wear of those uniforms, and they participated actively across the state and in other states. So other activities included Georgia, Nebraska, North Carolina and many other VFW departments and posts were involved. VFW members really got behind this remembrance and assisted with numerous ceremonies and events. So thank you for your participation. So the centennial is wrapping up. We have acknowledged the beginning of U.S. involvement, the battles and the individual acts of heroism, the armistice, and the end of the war.

There is one more thing left to do, and that is to finish the World War I Memorial in Washington, DC, and plans are well underway. The memorial will be located at Pershing Park. If you're familiar with Washington, DC, this is a map of the Capitol area. To the left of the red dot is the White House. South of that is the Washington Monument. At the bottom of the photo is the National Mall, which is where the other memorials and that big mall area is. So the Capitol Building is just off the page to the right. The red space is Pershing Park. So you'll see that the memorial will not be on the National Mall with the other memorials but in a park. And it's symbolically important in terms of the location. It's a high-traffic area close to the White House, two blocks from the Mall at the end of Pennsylvania Avenue, which connections the Capitol to the White House. It's really the first major national memorial that's in a park setting, which became very important as they were designing the memorial and in terms of integrating a memorial into that kind of a setting. So this is what the park looked like when we started. The central feature is the pool, what used to be an ice skating rink, which has been defunct for ten years or more. To the east is a statue of General Pershing and two walls commemorating the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I. And as you can see, the park is in disrepair.

The pool is empty and is poorly maintained. This is the design for the new memorial and park. The shallow pool will be recreated, and the landscaping will be redone to make it green, peaceful, and an inviting city park. The focal point will be the sculptor wall to the far end or the west end of the park and the edge of the pool of water. In this photo you're looking at the park from the statue area into where the wall will be. And here it is looking east toward the Pershing statue. And another view from the walkway facing the pool. The park will have an educational area called a belvedere with a view of the park and information about the war. And here's what it looks like from the other side. Here's the wall at night. There are 37 larger-than-life size figures that tell the story of a symbolic soldier's personal journey through the war. Last year I showed the video of the sculptor actually describing this wall. And if you'd like to see it, it's in the exhibit hall and there'll be volunteers there to describe the wall to you.

But it tells a story, and it's a very moving story and one that I think many veterans will relate to. It's about leaving home, joining your comrades, the adrenaline and the horrors of battle, suffering both physically and mentally, and then stoically moving forward while remembering the past, and reuniting with family a changed person. The artist is Sabin Howard, who is a world-renowned classical sculptor. And the process that he's going through to create this is truly amazing. What he started with was the concept and then he had took thousands of photos of actual models or actors in uniform in various poses so he could get a real feel for what it was going to look like. And then he took these photos and put them into sketches and put them into models until the final concept came together. The actual completed project will be 58 feet long and larger than life. And he builds it based on these four models of the figures and then in clay. And then it gets molded and then it gets cast and then it gets bronzed. So his work will be in clay and the final statue will be in bronze. So it will last for many, many years. For centuries. The back of the wall will have flowing water.

So there'll be moving water as well as the pool and an inscription. The back of the wall is meant for contemplation. And it's a place to talk about -- or to -- the inscription will talk about the search for peace, giving meaning to sacrifice, and remembering those who died. The design work is almost done. It has been approved by a number of commissions, including the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Park Service. Much of the money needed has been raised. Government agencies were able to fund some of the park work but not the memorial itself. So it's up to private donations. Several veterans service organizations, in addition to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, have given donations. Corporations, foundations, and individuals have also stepped up. The actual groundwork for the park will start this year as soon as the money is raised. And the last thing to be installed will be that statue wall, which may take three to five years to complete. It's quite a process to do something of that magnitude. The photo here is of the sculptor. So you see a person standing in front of this, and he's working here with full-size models or full-size figures of

what a part of the wall will look like.

I do encourage everyone, if you're in DC, to stop at Pershing Park to see the progress over the years and, of course, when it's finished, to go visit. So this is a summary of what's going on with the 100 anniversary. It's really exciting to see what's going on across the country and with the commission and with the memorial. I hope you see why I'm honored to be part of this commission and why your support is so important. Please do visit the booth for more information as well as some free downloads, information on becoming an AEF Memorial Corps post and other information, and the wall, the model of what this is going to look like. I thank you very much for your support and for your attention this morning. Thank you.

(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Well, to start this off for all of my brother and sister Vietnam veterans out there: Good morning, Vietnam!

(Good morning)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: That's what I'm talking about. Before I start off with the rest of this program, it's very important to recognize law enforcement. Georgia troopers, please stand up. Give them theirs.

(Cheering and applause)

#### PRESENTATION OF THE AMERICANISM AWARD TO ANN MILLS-GRIFFITHS

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: It is now an honor and a privilege to present the 2019 VFW Americanism award to Ms. Ann Mills-Griffiths, the Chairman of the Board of the National League of POW/MIA families. Let there be no doubt that our government's full accounting mission is the direct results of the National League of Families' personal involvement in forcing our government to stop being quiet about the mission in the countries of service of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. That goes for the government effort to silence the voices of the POW and MIA families. Ann is receiving this award in recognition of all that she has accomplished through almost five -- five decades of service to our Nation and the families of our missing. There is no doubt that she is in the hearts and souls of the National League of Families. Her tenure and perseverance in negotiating with foreign leaders has produced a better understanding of all the humanitarian nature of our full accounting mission, as well as producing better cooperation between the United States government and organizations tasked with research and recovery of our fallen.

She continues to make a difference, which is what this award is all about. And after decades of her celebrating the results of our mission to other families, her family has finally welcomed her brother, Jim, home from the Vietnam War. Navy Commander James Mills was buried just four weeks ago in Arlington National Cemetery after being missing in action since September 21, 1966.

The VFW Americanism Award is presented annually to an individual or organization for outstanding contributions to American principles. It recognizes exemplary achievements in promoting those values such as patriotism, commitment to service and love of country, which contributes to the betterment of American society. Comrades, it's my great pride and honor for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States to present its 2019 Americanism Award to the driving force behind our government's efforts to account for our missing, the sister of a returned Vietnam vet MIA, a former executive director and new chairman of the board of the National League of POW Families and a Life Member of the VFW Auxiliary Post 341 in Washington, DC, Ms. Ann Mills-Griffiths.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Americanism Award and Citation awarded to Ann Mills-Griffiths, Chairman of the Board, National League of POW/MIA Families, in special recognition and sincere appreciation of her nearly five decades of faithful and dedicated service to the families of America's missing and unaccounted for service members from the Vietnam War. Her tenacity and perseverance in negotiating with foreign leaders has produced a better understanding of the humanitarian nature of the full accounting mission, as well as produced better cooperation between the U.S. governmental organizations tasked with the search and recovery of our fallen and the families to whom they serve. There is no doubt that the U.S. Government's now worldwide accounting mission is the direct result of her efforts to ensure the fullest possible accounting of the missing American service members, which 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 23rd day of July, 2019. Approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.

(Applause)

#### REMARKS BY ANN MILLS-GRIFFITHS

MS. MILLS-GRIFFITHS: Well, if you -- I don't have any prepared remarks, so you'll all be glad to know that. It will be totally off the top of my head. But after being head of the National League of Families since 1978, I've learned a lot. And one of the things that has been most impressive to me is the strong leadership that the VFW has provided throughout the years I've been there. And no doubt about it that Bob Wallace has been at the lead of that. And

I've known Bob -- I don't know where he is. I can't see anything but dark out there. But Bob Wallace has been a right arm, a friend, a supporter, an advocate, and someone I could always call on no matter what happened. And it's been the VFW throughout the country that has led the way for all the major national veteran organizations. So I want to thank the VFW. So that is my number one goal here today, was to be able to thank you in person for what I have personally gone through. I saw and I heard yesterday -- I was talking to Johnny Webb, who's here from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency -- Johnny's over there somewhere in the dark -- and he was mentioning having been involved with the Vietnamese since 1982. That's when I made my first trip to Vietnam.

And I think the advantage of continuity and knowledge and tenacity and always being straightforward, finding a way to say things more in sorrow than in anger to former enemies, it teaches you a lot. It teaches you a lot about what it means for our country to stand behind the people who served who don't come back when everyone else does. The priorities can go up and down, and I've seen them all over the map. And I'll state flat out -- and it's not a political statement -- had it not been for President Ronald Reagan, when he came into office in 1981, already holding a firm commitment to the POW/MIA accounting mission, had it not been for him, none of us would be working on this issue today. Because it was he, and he alone, who raised that priority. And he had Vietnam veterans to help him.

(Applause)

MS. MILLS-GRIFFITHS: When I say we wouldn't be here, it's not a joke. There are so many things and it takes so many years to accomplish. And I hear all the time impatience. If you think you're impatient, you have no idea the frustrations of working for over 40 years directly with various administrations, bureaucracies across the board. Unless you've done it and lived and survived through it and learned what I have from it, I don't think you could -- I don't think you could work effectively in Washington, DC, to advocate for an issue. That's one of the things Bob learned. That's one of the things I learned. You can always be courteous, always be respectful. But you better have a sharp knife and know how to wield it with precision, and always be fair about it. That's another thing I've learned. Always be fair. Always tell the truth. You may say it a different way the next time, but it still is the truth and you can stand by it. Those are the kind of principles that you-all stand for and why I'm so appreciative of the veterans community and the many fine people that we have in our government just as much as I despair over some of the self-serving people that too often you encounter along the way.

I've met them all, all kinds. But there was no doubt in my mind about the core principles of the people who serve our country. Because they know why they volunteer and sign up to serve. He mentioned, with that very nice introduction and the reading of the citation, that my brother, Jim, who was only

11 months older than I am, was recently recovered. It was an astounding and actually miraculous thing because nobody ever -- including me, including my father who was executive director for one year in 1974 and '5 -- none of us ever believed because we knew nothing. It isn't like the cases of last known alive Americans who were listed as a POW or MIA. When someone is flying off of an aircraft carrier a few hundred miles an hour over enemy territory and disappears off of radar, you just don't expect to ever know. Well, we've come a long way. Scientific technology is incredible today. Ability to locate people we never thought we'd find, it's improved just amazingly. But I knew when they found the remains of the pilot of my brother's aircraft, my family's uncertainty was over.

I even had told the scientists and DPAA that they had one more shot to find identifiable remains of my brother, and if they didn't, it was okay. Because we knew what had happened to him on that day at that time in that place. So the uncertainty was ended. Uncertainty has been the motivating factor throughout all these decades. Uncertainty about a missing loved one is a terrible thing to live with. I could never focus on my brother's case because the position I was in. I took so many trips to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and Thailand, even to Russia, where Bob Wallace and I are both advisers to the U.S.-Russian Joint Commission on POW/MIAs. A lot of the senior officials in Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia I've known since we were all young. The guys that used to be at the end of the negotiating table serving and taking notes, they're now all ministers and vice ministers, deputy ministers in each of their respective governments. So we've basically grown up together.

And in Vietnam, it was restoring a relationship that had never existed with that government. It's come a long way. It is an incredible record of building a relationship and having a dialogue champ on a humanitarian basis that, despite all the differences, you can still talk to and work on together. Because there's a camaraderie amongst our military who serve. I saw it firsthand, when for the last time, in January of 2018 -- first time I mean -- we took a Retired Lieutenant Colonel Army Special Forces member of MACV-SOG who lost -- they lost so many people across the border in Laos and Cambodia, where we weren't there during the war. And we arranged for him to meet with counterpart what they call C75, the SOG killers. Their only mission in life was to kill our Special Forces people who were monitoring their movements along the border. So we set that up. It was a life-changing event for him and his wife and the Vietnamese veterans with whom he met. And that's what happened soldier to soldier. And it really was a lesson for him. He never thought he would return there. Had it not been for Vietnam veterans Richard Childress, Rich Armitage, so many more who served during the Vietnam War who led the effort for President Ronald Reagan, it wouldn't be happening. I'll be forever grateful to them. I work very closely with the governments of these counterpart countries, and I know we can do a lot more. And I'm as determined as I ever was. So I'm asking you-all to please continue your strong support. What we started for the Vietnam War now encompasses World War II, Korean War, Cold War, and even



today's wars in the Middle East.

But I can tell you for sure that had it not been for your intervention -- and, yes, I did as well -- to tell this administration that they could use that same separate humanitarian channel with Kim Jong-un of North Korea, we wouldn't have the 55 that we just got back. Things have broken down before. Our people have worked with them before. But now it's with a raised priority. And you-all should take pride in that achievement as well. Because 1,058 that we have, as of today, returned from the Vietnam War and nobody ever thought we could do it. Thanks to your support and the Legion and the DAV, and now SOA, Special Forces, Special Operations, we're going to do it. So please keep up the strong support. Know how deeply we appreciate it. How much I appreciate this. It's for everybody that I've worked with over the years, not just me. Nobody does anything all alone. I'm just more stubborn than most and very honest about what I do. So thank you. God bless you-all. And, of course, God bless our wonderful country.

(Standing ovation)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: As a Vietnam veteran myself it hit real close to home. Hal, would you take this, please.

#### INTRODUCTION OF JARED LYON, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ROESCH: Our next guest, a VFW member of Post 3308 in Tallahassee, Florida, served as a submariner and diver during his time with the United States Navy, deploying multiple times throughout the world in support of the Global War on Terrorism. As President and CEO of Veterans -- Student Veterans of America, Jared Lyon has helped forge critical business relationships, like the one with our organization, to help ensure America's service members and veterans have the tools and support needed to achieve educational success. Jared's leadership was vital in ensuring the Forever GI Bill was passed in 2017, which expanded education benefits for America's service members and veterans. Today's veterans can face any number of obstacles while furthering their education. That's why SVA's mission is one we wholeheartedly support. To be there for veterans while they pursue their education. Together, we're committed to ensuring that our Nation's veterans succeed in their educational pursuits, community service endeavors, careers, and personal lives. Working side by side, SVA chapters and VFW posts can help our Nation's veterans attain these goals. And now please give me a warm welcome to our outstanding leader and veterans advocate, Jared Lyon.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY JARED LYON, PRESIDENT AND  
CEO OF STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

COMRADE LYON: Good morning everyone. For a kid who grew up in Massachusetts, I moved my senior year in high school to Orlando, Florida, and graduated from University High School not far from this convention center at all. So it's good to be home. And I have all of you to thank for keeping me out of Washington, DC, for one more day. Thank you very much for that. I appreciate the kind introduction, and it's good to be among my sisters and brothers in arms in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I'd like to start this morning by saying a few special thank-yous, specifically to our Commander-in-Chief, B.J. Lawrence. Brother, I can't imagine anyone in the country who travels more than you and working tirelessly on behalf of veterans. I've watched this man testify before joint hearings in Congress and take the time to meet with student veterans when he attended our national conference here in Orlando this past January.

This man has always found the time for anyone that needs it. He's led this organization valiantly over the past year. And from the bottom of my heart, I just want to say thank you, sir. Doc, I am so thrilled to see that the Navy is coming back into power at the VFW.

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE LYON: I look forward to continuing to work with you and your leadership. And thank you-all for what you've done so far. I can't wait to work with you over the next year. I also wanted to provide a special thank you to the individuals who work in the policy office in Washington, DC, for the VFW: Ryan Gallucci, Carlos Fuentes, Pat Murray, Tony Lowe, and a special new welcome to Larry Lohman (ph), who just joined the team a few weeks ago. Just as we all stood watch in the military, these fierce advocates from your national staff stand watch, always making sure to fight for good policy ideas and to prevent bad ones. They're some of the finest human beings that I've ever had the chance to work with. And I'd be especially remiss if I did not take a special moment to thank Bob Wallace, who, without exaggeration, is a legend in Washington, DC. On a deeply personal level, Bob has been supportive of me in my own career. And I can think of no better mentor in my personal endeavor to serve those who have served. Bob, thank you for your years of service. Student Veterans of America is a bit unique from the VFW in the sense that our national headquarters and our DC office are located in the same building, just a few blocks from the White House. If you ever get the opportunity to visit the Capitol in the future, I'd encourage you to look us up and stop by and say hello. And to that end, joining me is the woman who leads our DC office, our Vice President of Government Affairs, an Iraq war veteran of the U.S. Army, Lauren Augustine. And she is the newest member of the VFW, having joined just yesterday at the membership booth down in the convention hall. Congratulations, Lauren, and welcome.

(Applause)

COMRADE LYON: Since the beginning of SVA in 2008, we have been fortunate to benefit from the legacy and the foundation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. And without the VFW, I can assure you there would be no SVA. I first joined the military on August 5th, 2001, having gone to MEPS not far from here in Orlando. I joined a peacetime military, and shortly after my 19th birthday arrived in Great Lakes Illinois. It was on September 11th, 2001, when I was in boot camp and the nature of my service would change, but it would change for millions in my generation. It's been the VFW that has ensured that as my generation came home, not only were we welcomed and thanked for our service, we were provided with benefits that our service entitled. After finishing my time in the Navy, I tried my hand at a few different things, from defense contracting to entrepreneurship and even serving in the front office of the Washington Nationals major league baseball team. I did all of that before using my GI Bill and becoming an SVA chapter leader at a small state school in Tallahassee, Florida, not far from here called Florida State University. But like a lot of veterans in my generation, when I got out of the military, I was too busy to join a veterans organization. I had a lot in front of me. And I kept telling myself that I'd join a veterans organization when I was older, when I had more time.

It was the VFW that changed that for me. After a Veterans Day parade in Tallahassee, Florida, in 2010, VFW Post 3308 Commander Mark Alvarez invited the members of my SVA chapter back to the post for a barbecue and fellowship. Along with my sisters and brothers in arms from Florida State University, we all joined the VFW. And we didn't just join. Because we were welcomed with open arms, we rolled up our sleeves and we got involved in our posts. I later became president of my SVA chapter at FSU. But one of the student veterans that joined the VFW at the same time as me, Raoul Perez, a marine who served during the invasion in Iraq and a graduate student at Florida State, became the Senior Vice Commander of our post, and I became the Junior Vice Commander of our post, VFW Post 3308 in Tallahassee, Florida. After I graduated from Florida State University, I went on to graduate school at Syracuse University, and I earned my master's degree. Today I'm not only the National President of Student Veterans of America, I'm also a product of the GI Bill, and most assuredly, I'm a product of the VFW. I can tell you with pride that Post 3308 remains my home post, and I count myself lucky that the VFW has always advocated for education benefits for all generations of veterans, specifically my own. Unlike my personal experience with the GI Bill, I mostly used the Montgomery GI Bill. Today's student veterans get the benefit of the Forever GI Bill, an education without an expiration date. Without you and the support of the VFW, there would be no Forever GI Bill. The Forever GI Bill was a culmination of over 20 different individual bills, including one with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math. There's now a nearly billion-dollar

scholarship fund to fund STEM degrees.

All Purple Heart recipients get full GI Bill benefits now, as well as additional support for families of the fallen. And, of course, no expiration date for the benefit that you earned due to your military service. Together the VFW, SVA, and others made sure the GI Bill would be around forever. From this generation and for all the future generations of veterans, to the VFW I saw thank you. But no good idea goes unpunished. It's one thing to pass a law, but quite another to implement one. And in the case of the Forever GI Bill, this is no exception to the rule. Last year student veterans nationwide experienced significant and painful GI Bill payment delays due to the VA's inability to effectively implement several provisions of the Forever GI Bill, causing extreme hardship for thousands of student veterans. In response, we worked arm-in-arm with a VSO community that is strong, and we worked directly with leaders across government to swiftly address many of these frustrations felt across the country. And we were pleased to see VA's eventual decision to reset housing allowance calculations in response to the blunder. Unfortunately, a crisis of this proportion was totally preventable. And we tried to prevent it. And a crisis such as this must not happen again. The application of the law should not inadvertently impact veterans because of the physical location of their classes. The GI Bill is an earned benefit. Veterans have every right to expect prompt and accurate payment of these earned benefits.

SVA will continue to be engaged with the VFW and the VA and relevant congressional oversight committees on the Forever GI Bill until all provisions are successfully implemented. To help set up student veterans for success, SVA continues to encourage VA to call upon the expertise of external entities and additional technical support for discussions on the new IT implementation that will take place. We know from the past that it takes everybody's input to make it work well and the way that they were intended to. And the ability to maintain a historical reference point to inform our future work is paramount. This past summer, in June, it marked the 75th anniversary of the original GI Bill, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. This benefit wasn't just for college. It offered a suite of opportunities such as home loans, farm subsidies, the ability to start a business, unemployment compensation, and so much more. Many of these benefits, in addition to education, were also quite successful and codified into law as their own stand-alone provisions. But back in 1944, leaders in higher education were not as welcoming to student veterans as we would have all hoped. Yet despite the challenges, nearly 50 percent of World War II veterans used their GI Bill for education and training. This being the case, it should come as no surprise that less than 5 percent of World War II veterans ever used unemployment compensation benefits.

As we look forward to the GI Bill, there's one story that is unique that I think explains the success of student veterans very well because his story is no different than any generation that followed World War II, from Korea to Vietnam to the Gulf War to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan now we are looking. There was a young 19-year-old who became, at the time, the youngest

naval aviator in naval history by the name of George H. W. Bush. He served in the Pacific as a pilot, and it was probably best known for the plane that went down named Barbara III. It's because being a pilot in World War II was certainly very dangerous. Barbara I crashed in training, and Barbara II was shot down by enemy fire. Barbara III, the crew perished and George H. W. Bush was the lone survivor. He was rescued by a U.S. submarine and eventually came home to recover in the United States and used the original GI Bill to achieve a bachelor's in economics from Yale. If you look at the top three majors of student veterans today, like the President, they earn high-achieving degrees.

Today student veterans are majoring in business, science, technology, engineering, math, and health-related fields. George H. W. Bush was super-involved when he was on campus. And if you look at it, he was actually a member of the cheerleading squad, and he was a varsity athlete on the college baseball team. He actually went on to participate in the first two College World Series. He was also a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society. Very active in his student veteran organization on campus. And just like today's student veterans, he was leading in the classroom and outside. I've met five United States presidents in my life. And I had the chance to meet George H. W. Bush a few months before he passed. He "coined" me. And on the back of his coin is something that I think is indicative of this generation. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador of the United Nations, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. He was Vice President of the United States and President of the United States. And inscribed in his challenge coin is a notion that any definition of a successful life must include service to others. This generation, my generation, the post-9/11 era of veterans is looking for a way to continue to serve, and the VFW empowers us to do that. As we say at SVA, we are yesterday's warriors, today's scholars, and tomorrow's leaders. Today student veterans have the highest grade point average nationwide. We graduate at significantly higher rates than just about any other student in college. We get marketable degrees that are leading us to successful careers after graduation.

After World War II, student veterans led the nation of greatness by democratizing higher education for women and people of color and first-generation college students. And they quite literally built the American middle class. You can rest assured that the most recent generation of veterans is not only proving that that was wrong, but we are harnessing the transformative power of higher education to improve our own lives and lives of our families, our neighbors, and our fellow citizens. And because we've done the research at SVA, we know that from the first 1.854 million individual records of veterans using the GI Bill that student veterans are quite literally among the most successful students in higher education by any measure. At SVA, we pride ourselves in being an inclusive organization, where all veterans, regardless of gender or era of their military service are welcome with open arms and an equal opportunity to serve. Student veterans are quite literally talent hiding in plain sight, excelling alongside our civilian peers. The data show us that today's

student veterans succeed at higher rates than traditional students with a 72 percent success rate compared to only a 66 percent for those who have never served in the military. But the prevailing narrative about veterans in this country does not reflect the success we are having. Counter to the facts, sadly a lasting myth persists: That veterans are charity cases; that we're broken; that we're not smart enough to go to college, let alone succeed in college or after graduation. Whether spoken aloud or even lurking internally as a subconscious thought, this is a false perspective and we must challenge it.

But while student veterans are succeeding, they would be better set up for success with your help. Across the country, student veterans rely on your leadership in local VFW posts to inspire your local SVA chapters. You heard that right. Though your service is completed, we are asking you to extend your commitment to serving by reaching out to local Student Veterans of America chapters and hosting them in events at your posts and in the communities where you live. Today's student veterans are succeeding quite well. Our national Student Veteran of the Year is a woman named Alexandria Sawin, an Air Force veteran. She's majoring in biology at Boston College, having just transferred from the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. She's a mom and an active-duty military spouse, with her husband just getting ready to retire from the Air Force. When Alex was an undergraduate at UNLV, she partnered with her local VFW post to conduct a walk across the state of Nevada to raise awareness for veterans who have fallen on active duty service. They carried a dog tag for every veteran that has perished on active duty. Working with their local VFW posts, they also raised funds to send nearly 20 student veterans from UNLV to SVA's national conference. And she's not unique.

Grayson Farmer, an Army veteran who currently serves as the chapter president at Appalachian State University is pursuing a bachelor's in marketing with a focus in digital marketing, and is working full-time while he's supporting student veterans on his campus, functioning at the local VFWs in the state of North Carolina. And even carrying on his grandfather -- who's a World War II veteran's -- tradition of homemade barbecue sauce. He uses the proceeds of selling that barbecue sauce to fund his Student Veterans of America chapters. Now, more than ever, we are working together to improve the livelihood of veterans in college who consistently burn the midnight oil, earning higher GPAs than their civilian classmates who never served in the military, and who lead in the classroom, in their SVA chapters, in their local communities in all 50 states, U.S. territories, and four countries overseas. With just over 1,500 chapters, there's over 750,000 student veterans currently on a campus with an SVA chapter. And none of that would be possible without the VFW. Specifically, we partner with the VFW on a unique program for the past few years called the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellows, where we bring ten top-performing VFW and SVA members of both organizations who study a policy issue that they want to see change the country for the better for our sisters and brothers in arms.

They receive mentors from the VFW, and they fly to Washington, DC, for the VFW Legislative week, where they witness our National Commander-in-

Chief testify before Congress, and they move their idea forward. One of those alumni from the first class of the VFW-SVA Fellow is an Army veteran named Carlos Santana, who I just returned from Hawaii where he works now in the office of Senator Hirono as a result of his VFW fellowship. And he just organized the first ever statewide summit for Hawaii, the islands, and U.S. territories. He has not only achieved a bachelor's degree and a master's degree but just started law school at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. And a VFW-SVA Fellow is an example of empowering the next generation of advocates. And it's but one simple example of the work we're all doing together to give veterans every chance to succeed upon their return home from military service. The education they obtain is repaid to our society many times over and what they contribute to all citizens of the United States. The educated generation of veterans does this as teachers, scientists, mental health counselors, entrepreneurs, engineers, lawyers and doctors and in every role in between in our hometowns in our Nation's (unintelligible). SVA was founded in 2008 by a group of 20 student veteran organizations from as many college and university campuses from 15 states.

They came together to unite under one banner at our first national conference in the snowy suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, in 2008. As a matter of fact, one of our founders is here. He's a proud VFW member of Post 423 in Michigan and a graduate of the University of Michigan. I'd like to acknowledge my good friend and VFW member Derek Blumke.

(Applause)

COMRADE LYON: The women and men who make up our founders were inspired by the notion that any nation that makes a great distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools. We, the generation that took to arms after September 11th, 2001, are ensuring that our military remains the most lethal fighting force for freedom and democracy the world has ever known. And when we take off our uniforms as every generation of warriors has done before us, we're going to school. Last year alone, nearly 74 percent of my generation was on a college campus within seven months of getting out of the military. As we use the GI Bill and attend classes, we are carrying on the legacy of the VFW to a new generation of Americans, many of whom did not serve their country on college campuses nationwide. This new generation of student veterans are quite literally the ambassadors of the all-volunteer force. As my old commander used to tell us, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." With the VFW, student veterans will never again go alone.

And with the VFW, I know SVA will go far and we'll do it together. I want to thank you, each and every one of you, for the difference you've made and will continue to make both in the lives of individual student veterans, their SVA chapters, and for the Nation by fostering the next greatest generation of leaders. Thank you-all for your time this morning. I'm proud to be a part of this

fine organization. I can't wait to meet many of you over the next two days.  
Thank you.

(Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS,  
HONORABLE ROBERT L. WILKIE, JUNIOR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my honor to introduce the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Robert L. Wilkie, Junior, who one year ago today was confirmed by the Senate to lead our Nation's second largest federal department. Since being sworn into office a week later, he and his department have faced a host of challenges from fending off privatization claims to implementing the VA MISSION Act, improving the appeals process for VA claims, modernizing the electronic health records system, helping veterans transition back into civilian life, and combating veteran suicide. Let there be no doubt that the VFW regards the VA as an irreplaceable national resource that cannot -- I repeat, cannot -- be replicated by a civilian health care system that also has waiting lists and by civilian doctors who can augment but not replace the continuity and continuum of care that only our VA is capable of providing to America's veterans.

I say "our VA" because 100 years ago our forefathers created the VFW Washington office to petition Congress for veterans benefits and to ensure those benefits were properly provided. To say our services are needed just as much today as they were 100 years ago is an understatement. But it's a job we willingly take, which is why our international cadre of more than 2,100 accredited service officers helped more than 526,000 veterans to recoup more than \$8.3 billion in earned disability compensation and pension in 2018, to include thousands of transitioning service members on the two dozen military installations we service. The Secretary spent his youth at Fort Bragg as the son of an Army artillery officer. Today Secretary Wilkie is also known as Colonel Wilkie in the Air Force Reserve, and he previously served in the Navy Reserve as an intelligent officer. Prior to joining the VA, he served under Defense Secretary Jim Mattis as the Under Secretary of Defense for personnel and readiness, a position portfolio that included force readiness, guard and reserve component affairs, training, personal requirements in management, and equal opportunity, MWR, and military family quality-of-life programs.

He also oversaw military health care. So he understands that bad press about one military hospital is not a blank statement against all military hospitals, which is an unfortunate perception that can apply to the VA too. He served as the acting VA Secretary for a month and a half prior to his nomination. During that time, he was often seen walking the posts inside the VA, getting down into the trenches and talking with the troops. I see that as positive because you can't restore the faith of veterans in their VA unless you communicate and improve the morale of the employees who accomplish the



mission. Please welcome the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Robert Wilkie.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS,  
HONORABLE ROBERT L. WILKIE, JUNIOR

SECRETARY WILKIE: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. And thank you to your National Commander. When President Trump announced the formation of the PREVENTS task force on veteran suicide, the VFW was there. And B.J. was standing next to the president when he signed that very important and long-overdue executive order. So I thank you very much for that.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: Thank you to your national leaders, but there is one person I want to single out. In the 1960s, as many of you know, a focal point of the fight in Vietnam was in Hue City, as the Marines fought wave after wave over North Vietnamese troops to defend Vietnam's ancient capital. And there was one Marine there who stood out not only because of his enormous stature, but because he was in the front line leading other young Marines in that desperate battle. For the last 18 years, he has been your legislative director in Washington, DC, leading the fight on an equally dangerous hill, Capitol Hill. And when I was thinking about Bob's service, I thought about the great Airborne General Matthew Ridgway. In 1986 Ronald Reagan gave General Ridgway the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and he said, "Heroes come when they are needed. And great men come when courage seems in short supply." Bob Wallace is both a hero and a great man. And I thank him for everything he has done for his country.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: While we celebrated two anniversaries this year -- the 75th anniversary of the assault on Hitler's Fortress Europe, and the 75th anniversary of the signing of the GI Bill by President Roosevelt, the most transformative piece of legislation, outside of the Civil Rights Act, in the history of the United States -- I celebrated a more somber anniversary. Some of you who've heard me speak know that I talk a little bit about growing up at Fort Sill and Fort Bragg and the experiences I had as a kindergarten and elementary school student. Because there were oftentimes when my classmates were called to the principal's office, and it wasn't because they were going to a doctor's appointment. They had received bad news from Southeast Asia. That is what happened on April 4th of 1975. We were in the last days of the fight in Southeast Asia, and President Ford ordered the evacuation of all of the

orphanages in Saigon. It was called "Operation Baby Lift."

One of those Air Force sergeants who volunteered was a fellow named Denning Cicero Johnson of Harnett County, North Carolina. He was on the C-5, the last one that lifted off from Tan Son Nhut on April 4th. A faulty cargo door forced that plane down. 138 lost their lives. 11 of them were airmen, including Sergeant Johnson. On April 4th of this year, I escorted his daughter, Denise, my friend and classmate, to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial 44 years after that day, and she touched her father's name on the last row of the last panel, 1W in the center of the memorial. So so much has changed since those times. A change for the better. My childhood memories of Vietnam. My father was gravely wounded in the invasion of Cambodia. He returned to us after a year in an Army hospital weighing half of what he did when he went. Two years later he returned to Fort Bragg as a senior officer in the All-American Division. But even for someone wearing the red beret, the times were hostile.

He was not even allowed to wear his uniform off of Fort Bragg. Those times have changed. And they've changed in part because of the tireless and selfless service of the VFW. We are in a pro-veteran country now. I look around, I see people welcome warriors home. I see people standing for veterans at the Little League and Major Leagues. Videos of veterans surprising their children at school have become a national phenomenon. It seems that even most in Hollywood are pro-veteran. And in a political climate when Republicans and Democrats can't agree on the time of day, one thing that they are certain about is support for those who have borne the battle. This organization played an important and pivotal role in changing the culture of the United States of America. And I thank you on behalf of a grateful country.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: VFW knows something about where we came from and the importance of reminding us all of America's history. As B.J. mentioned, this organization was born 120 years ago, and this is your 100th anniversary in dealing with the ins and outs of Washington on behalf of America's veterans. You helped establish the legacy that I am privileged to be part of today to make sure that we memorialize veteran service across the generations and for all time with a robust, vibrant, and everliving Department of Veterans Affairs. But there's something else that is happening across the country that reinforces the importance of what you do. Many of the burdens borne by American's veterans are now the same issues that all of America is facing. Things like suicide, opioid abuse. And your VA is playing an important role in the President's fight to tackle these terrible issues.

As B.J. knows, suicide prevention is the President's number one VA priority. As long as we are still seeing veterans struggle, it is our duty to help them find their way back into the community of brotherhood and family. They need our love and support. As this group too well knows, 20 American veterans take their lives every day. About half of these warriors are people over the age

of 50, and most of those are from the Vietnam era. To put that in perspective, Lyndon Johnson left Washington, DC, 50 years ago in January, and we are still dealing with the effects of that terrible conflict. Of the 20 veterans who commit that tragic act, we only see six. But here is what we are doing for the six we do see. Veterans who walk through our doors for health care will be screened for mental health. Since October 1st, we have screened 900,000 of your fellow veterans. We also provide same-day mental health care. And just as importantly, we are talking about this issue within the Department of Defense.

The practice of my father's generation not to talk about these problems is giving way to an open discussion among our service members who have learned the importance of looking after each other. But no secretary of this department can solve this problem from Washington, DC, especially when most of those we seek to find are not in our VA. This problem is bigger than one program or one department or even the whole of government. And I'm going to need the help of your membership and every other VSO and NGO in America if we are going to solve this nationwide tragedy that's affecting both veterans and nonveterans. Our country will not get anywhere on veteran suicide until it finally has a national conversation about life, and that is a conversation you can start today.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: In a perfect world, our veterans would not be surrounded by government programs. They would be surrounded by family, friends, and neighbors. So veterans can play a big part -- a big role to talk about the value of carrying on amongst peers. And that discussion is probably the most powerful tool we have. In the meantime, the President has empowered your department to be the tip of the spear of this effort from the government side. In March, as B.J. knows, he signed an executive order creating a task force that will create a national strategy for reducing veteran suicide. I co-chair the task force. And I'm honored in that capacity to start this conversation in Washington with the President's cabinet. But we will not simply focus on the last tragic act of a veteran's life. If we do this, this will be another Washington report that will serve as a doorstop for future generations. If we do not talk about mental health -- and I've said before this country isn't even at the sputnik stage when it comes to talking about mental health across our country. If we don't focus on mental health, addiction, and homelessness, we will never get a handle on suicide amongst veterans. Now, one result I do expect is the creation of a template for how government, VSOs and NGOs and companies can work together to identify those who are at risk and get them the help that they need.

We've done this before in our battle to end veterans homelessness. And I think it is the key to making progress on veteran suicide. We made progress by working hand in hand with you and local officials to identify those veterans who are homeless or who might soon be homeless. That has yielded incredible results in dozens of communities across the nation. Cities the size of

Houston and Jacksonville and Atlanta have eliminated veterans homelessness. And we think we can repeat that kind of success by finding local partners that finally understand the turmoils that our veterans suffer. Opioid addiction is another factor that has hit both veterans and the rest of the country. And it's another issue in which VA is leading the way. When I was in the White House with President Trump last month, I was privileged to tell him that we have reduced our opioid prescriptions by 51 percent, and we are continuing to make progress. We are also looking at other options that would have never been considered in my father's era, alternatives to opioids like tai chi and yoga and acupuncture. If I had told my father that we would treat the terrible pains that he left the service with with acupuncture and yoga, my nose would have been flat against my face.

(Laughter)

SECRETARY WILKIE: But the culture has changed, and you have helped change it. As I noted earlier, VA is also at the center of another transformative period. The implementation of the MISSION Act. The MISSION Act makes the greatest changes in the way VA operates since General Bradley sat at the desk that I now occupy. But while General Bradley gave us the modern VA system, Trump has allowed us to revolutionize the way we look at veterans by saying it is the VA's job to fit the needs of the veteran. It is not the veteran's job to fit the needs of VA's bureaucracy.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: Under the MISSION Act, veterans can get care in the community if a VA facility is too long of a drive, if it doesn't have the care that they need, and only react when it is in the best interest of the veteran. And it finally gives the veteran what all of your neighbors have had, and that is the option of using urgent care close by without having to drive several hours to reach the VA. One veteran in Kansas has already said, "This change is a godsend since it means I don't have to drive two hours each day to see a VA doctor when I have a sore throat." Now, some fear –

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: Some fear that the VA's MISSION Act means privatization, and the end of the Veterans Affairs Department as we know. But I was privileged to present to the Congress, in March, the largest budget in the history of this department.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: I am a pariah in the Cabinet Room because I'm the

only one who was told specifically by the President of the United States, "You don't have to come up with budget cuts." \$220 billion calling for a workforce of 390,000 Americans is no way to privatize an organization.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: When some people warn that the private sector will put the VA out of business, I will tell you -- after a lifetime of watching veterans and being part of your community -- veterans want to go where people understand the culture and speak the language.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: That can never and will never be duplicated in the private sector. And veterans are voting with their feet. We had 44,000 calls to VA on the first day of the MISSION Act, June 6th of this year. But most of those calls were asking questions about urgent care. They weren't asking questions about how to get into the private sector for specialty care or primary care. Why? Because our veteran satisfaction rates now sit at 89.7 percent.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: There is nothing, absolutely nothing in the private sector that comes close to that and veterans are choosing VA because that is where they want to be. So what is -- what is coming for us? Our VA population is changing. When my father was commissioned two months before President Kennedy was inaugurated, the number of women in the Department of Defense was less than one-half of 1 percent. When I was the Undersecretary of Defense under General Mattis, the percentage of American women in uniform on active duty was 17 percent and is going to 20 percent by 2025. What does that mean for the VA? It means that today 10 percent of those we serve are American women. And that number will reach 20 percent in the next few years. Our budget is changing. Nine and a half billion dollars was spent last year to provide health services for America's women, and I expect that number to go higher.

(Applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: America's women veterans are more likely to receive breast cancer and cervical cancer screening in VA than they will ever get in the private sector. And we are very proud of that. So as I said, while the MISSION Act has changed giving veterans more choice, it is our goal to make that choice a tough choice. We know, by the way veterans are acting, that that choice for them to decide between our VA and the private sector is getting tougher every day because we are improving every day. And I thank you and I thank the President for the leadership. One last thing, we are embarking on

January 1st finally, finally taking care of those in the Blue Water Navy from Vietnam.

(Cheering and applause)

SECRETARY WILKIE: We are following the law passed by Congress which requires us to implement those benefits on the first day of 2020. As we speak, we are focused on training and hiring and putting in place the policies and procedures needed to process claims and provide the benefits that you deserve once the new year begins. We will be ready to assist our Blue Water Navy veterans. In the meantime, I ask the VFW -- and I mentioned this to Bob Wallace -- to please encourage your fellow warriors to set the conditions now for the claims that they will be filing, and that we will be ready to take care of them. So Blue Water, MISSION Act, veterans approval. These are your victories. They don't belong to any president. They don't belong to any federal department. I am grateful to the VFW not only for strengthening our work at VA but because you deliver something else to veterans that is not ours to give: A community that exists outside of the federal government, a community that cares about veterans when they return, when they fight, and in every stage of their lives. Working together, we can fulfill President Lincoln's charge to care for those who have borne the battle and heed another one of my favorite lessons from World War II. I mentioned the greatest of airborne warriors, General Matthew Ridgway, who led the All-American Division in North Africa and Sicily and planned the airborne assault on Hitler's Fortress Europe by "The Screaming Eagles" in the All-American Division on June 5th, 1944.

(Airborne!)

SECRETARY WILKIE: He wasn't allowed to go with the division, with the corps that day. He was behind in England. And he slept restlessly in his cot. And he actually fell out of his cot he was so distressed. And he reached for the Old Testament, and he reached to the Book of Joshua to the greatest battle in the history of the Hebrew people. And he pulled down the reference to God's promise to Joshua, that I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. That is our shared cause, the VA and the VFW, to not fail or forsake those who have experienced the incommunicable experience of a war, those 41 million Americans who, since the first shot was fired at Lexington Green in 1775, have never failed or forgot their country. I thank VFW for everything you have done to this republic. I thank you for what you mean to your fellow warriors. God bless you and this great organization. And thank you for the honor of having me.

(Standing ovation)

SECRETARY WILKIE: Thank you-all very much. That's not a bad salute for an Air Force officer, is it?

(Laughter)

SECRETARY WILKIE: Thank you. Thank you-all very much.

(Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF GENERAL CHARLES HORNER  
NATIONAL DESERT STORM MEMORIAL

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ROESCH: I asked for the privilege to introduce our next guest. Many of you, Fritz and myself, followed this individual into combat. After Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990, over a half a million of America's finest bravely fought to expel what was then the fourth largest army in the world. Once the dust settled, nearly 400 [sic] brave American men and women died as a result of their commitment to freedom. Our next guest flew more than 110 F-105 and 105 Wild Weasel missions over north Vietnam before commanding all Allied Air Forces during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Retired Air Force General Charles "Chuck" Horner is often referred to as the architect for one of the most successful air campaigns in American History. Learning on his experiences and lessons learned from the Vietnam war, his leadership ensured the success of Operation Desert Shield and Storm and led to the liberation of Kuwait. A major facet of the VFW's mission as an organization is to ensure that those who have gone before us in war are properly and promptly remembered and honored.

Time and time again VFW members spoke loud and clear in support of the National Desert Storm War Memorial. And we've all believed that our war veterans deserve not only the recognition but to have a physical site to which it will help provide healing during their lifetime, unlike many World War II veterans who waited 60 years for their memorial to be completed. And nearly 30 years after the end of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, we still stand ready to show our support for the National Desert Storm War Memorial. Please give a warm welcome to someone who learned in Vietnam how not to fight the next war, a Silver Star recipient, VFW Life Member, General Chuck Horner.

(Cheering and applause)

REMARKS BY GENERAL CHARLES HORNER

GENERAL HORNER: Thank you. I'm always amazed when I hear these introductions. I say, "Who in the hell is he talking about?"

(Laughter)

GENERAL HORNER: My war was Vietnam. That makes me old and slow and makes me very comfortable with most of the people in the audience. But I do feel it's an honor to be here with you because of your advocacy for our veterans and for our active-duty forces and the defense of this Nation. Today I'm worried about our national defense forces because they spend a long time in small-unit combat in wars of questionable outcome. And it may have denied our ability to conduct securing the air dominance in the contested airspace or managing a five-corps attack with heavy armor or amphibious operations or even control of the sea. And now we're also faced with two -- two forms -- new forms of warfare: In cyber and in space. And in some ways our country is like we were in 1942 in North Africa, where we were ill-prepared for a large-scale war, and also in Vietnam in 1965 when I went to war. But the failures we experienced in those two wars provided valuable experience and lessons learned that did result in victory in World War II and in Desert Storm. So we can be thankful that we do learn. Unfortunately, we have to learn over and over and over.

In February of this year, we dedicated a site -- Secretary Cheney and I spoke at a site dedication for the Desert Storm Memorial. And there was a article in the "Washington Post" said, "Why do we have to have an award" -- "a memorial for Desert Storm? So few people were killed and it only went six weeks." And I was a little upset with it because obviously the guy that wrote that had never met a Gold Star mother or had to talk to the widow of someone who served under you. But I did think about that, and it caused me to wonder, "What was so special about Desert Storm?" And then I got to thinking, you know, in this 20th century we've only had three major parades down -- in Washington and in New York honoring our military forces. The first one was after the World War I, when America came to realize that we were a powerful Nation. And we entered that war afraid our forces would not be particularly effective because of our youth, and we were coming from a hangover from the Civil War. And suddenly we emerged there as the dominant force in the battlefield. And so there was a great sense of national pride that built among both the north and the south of this country, which had been divided before that.

Then in World War II, tremendous parades. And the reason for that was because World War II was a war where everybody was involved. We're (unintelligible) at home. Women leaving housewives and becoming -- building airplanes. And as a kid, we used to take our wagons out and go gather papers and tin cans and even toothpaste tubes and help with the war effort. So at the end of that war, there was a great relief that went through our Nation to have it over with, to get the boys home. And so that was important. I marched in the parades in Washington and in Desert Storm. Now, being Air Force, I'm not a very good marcher. And, in fact, there's a picture of me in front of all my guys behind me. I'm the only one in step. All the rest of them are marching to some drum someplace.



(Laughter)

GENERAL HORNER: But the thing that impressed me so much was the euphoria that people had after Desert Storm. And I remember walking back -- in New York, walking back to the hotel after marching all the way down Fifth Avenue in a flight suit and an overseas hat, and women were coming up and hugging me and kissing me. And I can tell you I liked it.

(Laughter)

GENERAL HORNER: But I said, "What was the difference," at that time. And the difference was Desert Storm restored our Nation's faith in its military. And more importantly, it restored our Nation's faith in itself. And we must never lose that again.

(Applause)

GENERAL HORNER: And we aren't losing it because after Desert Storm parades, I got back and people would say, "Thank you for your service." I thought, "Hey, I was enjoying it. I did it 'cause I liked it." And I -- I was humbled by that. And yet even today you still hear people say, "Thank you for your service." And so Desert Storm is important. But I think to understand Desert Storm you have to understand Vietnam also. In Desert Storm we had a president who knew combat. And he gave us goals that were achievable with military force: "Liberate Kuwait," a noble goal achievable with military force. He also cautioned us about the loss of life. I was at Camp David with Norm Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell. And President Bush was only concerned about two things, the loss of life -- and he was talking -- at first I thought he meant U.S. life. And then he said, oh, he means coalition life. And then he realized he meant also Iraqi life. And for a veteran of Vietnam, that made my heart pound in my chest. Because in that war the measure of merit was number of people killed. And I found that, personally, obscene.

The other thing is he said to fight as a coalition. And we did that. We didn't have it -- Americans got to lead, but we were not in charge. We had two commanders: Norman Schwarzkopf and Khaled bin Sultan. And we did that so that we would not make the mistake of thinking we knew everything. We would listen and work as a coalition. And it worked. We had a Secretary of State, Jim Baker, who went out and he formed a solid coalition. I read books about fighting as a coalition in World War II, and it sounds like it's harder to get along with your allies than it is with the enemy. And we never had a single problem in Desert Storm. Everybody worked as one. We pulled together. We had a Secretary of Defense who did two things. First of all, he ensured we had whatever we needed to fight to win. And the second thing Secretary Cheney did is he never gave us rules of engagement.

War is ugly. War is horrible. War is wasteful. And what happens is the politicians leading the military into war will try and isolate themselves from the bad things happening. So they start doing rules of engagement. And when you start having rules of engagement, you have politicians who are not committed to victory.

(Applause)

GENERAL HORNER: Fortunately, Desert Storm was led by officers and NCOs who had experience in Vietnam and knew what to do and what not to do. So we need both a Desert Storm Memorial, and we need a Vietnam Memorial. And, fortunately, they're very close to one another, about a block away. And the reason for that is that the political leaders and military leaders in the future, when they contemplate unleashing the dogs of war and all the horror that that brings, they have a place to go and think about their decision before executing. And they need to look at that Vietnam War and see all those lives that were lost with no victory. And they need to go to the Desert Storm Memorial and say, "There can be a way to fight a war, but you better know what you're doing before you start it."

(Applause)

GENERAL HORNER: What I was most pleased about Desert Storm is we fought it, and we fought it hard and viciously. We got it over with, and thereby limited the loss of life and damage. If you can be proud about war, I guess that's good enough. But the thing also is we must always remember that Americans are a little different than a lot of people. If we go to war, we're going to demand victory. And that's what leaders have know before they start something. We're making this memorial. We're in our fundraising now. And I must -- glad to report that we've got tremendous support from the leadership of the VFW. Over half a million dollars has been provided. In fact, I was presented three checks, which immediately flew out of my hands into one of the board member's today. So thank you for that. It's important, and we will work hard on that. I'll be at Booth 436 if anybody wants to talk to me. I have to drive back home this afternoon. So I'll be leaving at about -- Elvis will be leaving the building at about 11:30.

(Laughter)

GENERAL HORNER: But I must say, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for your service to this Nation I love. Thank you.

(Standing ovation)

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ROESCH: General Horner, there's

-- there's one more thing.

GENERAL HORNER: You guys are organized.

(Inaudible discussion)

COMRADE CARROLL: Jeff Carroll, Commander of the Department of Georgia. General, I just want you to know Georgia will always remember. And on behalf of the VFW members and the VFW Auxiliary in the Department of Georgia, I want to present you with this check for \$30,000 for the memorial.

(Cheering and applause)

GENERAL HORNER: I'm humbled. I thank you. And how 'bout them 'dogs.

COMRADE CARROLL: How 'bout them 'dogs. Yes, sir.

(Inaudible discussion)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: General -- General, I was Army. We're not unorganized. That was a surprise.

GENERAL HORNER: I'm telling you, I'm not a Thunderbird. I'm not used to smiling.

(Laughter and applause)

PRESENTATION OF VFW COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S GOLD MEDAL  
OF MERIT AND CITATION TO MAJOR GENERAL KELLY McKEAGUE, DIRECTOR OF  
DPAA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Our next award is the VFW Commander-in-Chief's Gold Medal of Merit, which is presented at my discretion to an individual or organization for outstanding contributions to our American way of life, our military, our institutions, and our citizens. It is my honor and a privilege to present the VFW Commander-in-Chief's Gold Medal of Merit to the Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, Mr. Kelly McKeague. Director McKeague's selection was based on his leadership of the full accounting community, first as commander of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, then as Deputy Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, and now as its director. America performs humanitarian missions around the world, but Mr. McKeague leads the only U.S. government organization that performs humanitarian missions 24/7 just to benefit fellow Americans, to provide the fullest possible accounting of more than 82,000 missing and unaccounted-for Americans going back to the beginning of World War II.

The task is a difficult one. From deserts and glaciers to rice paddies, jungles and mountaintops, from aging witnesses to acidic soil, over water losses, catastrophic explosions, and aircrafts simply disappearing off radar scopes, the numbers are just as daunting. 72,000 from World War II. 7,600 from Korea. More than 1,580 from Vietnam. 126 from the Cold War, and 6 from Operations El Dorado Canyon, Desert Storm, and Iraqi Freedom. Due to a myriad of obstacles perhaps only a third can be found. Yet the more than 700 military and Defense Department civilians who work with him are all in when it comes to providing the fullest possible accounting to another American family. One identification at a time to fulfill a soldier's promise to never leave a fallen comrade on the battlefield. It is with great pride and honor that I present the VFW Commander-in-Chief's Gold Medal of Merit to an individual who -- whose heartfelt dedication to the mission is well known and gratefully appreciated by every family he and his organization touches, to a retired Air Force Reserve Major General and Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, Mr. Kelly McKeague.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit and Citation awarded to Kelly K. McKeague, Director, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, in special recognition and sincere appreciation of his outstanding leadership in directing the U.S. government's fullest possible accounting mission and for his sincere compassion to the families of the more than 82,000 missing and unaccounted-for American service members his organization exists to serve. From negotiating with countries to investigating, recovering, and identifying our mission, the organization he leads touches lives every day. It honors the soldier's promise to never leave a fallen comrade on the battlefield, and it stresses to foreign governments that the recovery and mission of our missing is a humanitarian mission that transcends politics, all of which 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 23rd day of July, 2019. Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY MAJOR GENERAL KELLY McKEAGUE, DIRECTOR OF DPAA

MAJOR GENERAL McKEAGUE: Good morning.

(Good morning)

MAJOR GENERAL McKEAGUE: To Commander-in-Chief Lawrence of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, thank you for this award, which I will cherish simply because I cherish the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I am truly humbled and grateful to receive this award, but I do so in honor of and on behalf of the 750 military and civilian professionals whose dedication and passion I witness every single day as part of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. Researching, investigating, recovering, and identifying missing Americans from our Nation's past wars is both a sacred obligation and a moral imperative. And I salute the VFW for their longstanding and profoundly effective commitment that their comrades in arms will return home one day. Every single day the VFW's commitment is manifested in extraordinary ways. Across the globe you fly the black-and-white POW/MIA flag proudly over your posts. You attend the military burials where your comrades in arms have been returned to American soil. Since 1991, your national commanders and your executive director have visited DPAA teams laboring in the jungles of Southeast Asia. And since the mid-2000s, your leaders have met with Russian and Chinese officials to advocate for their support. At every level of the VFW, you are assertive, you are vocal about why this mission -- as unique and noble as it is -- must be preserved, must be sustained, must be appropriately resourced, and more importantly must hold the Nation's commitment.

Each of the 82,000 that are missing that your Commander-in-Chief talked about, every single one of them has a unique story. And as daunting as the numbers are, it's because of those unique stories that we at DPAA are not undeterred. In fact, it's why our unflagging commitment to this mission motivates and sustains us as we labor all across the globe. And most recently because the VFW personally engaged with President Trump and pressing him to seek from the North Korean leader a commitment for the return of Korean War remains inside North Korea, it's because of that personal engagement of the VFW that it became one of the four commitments from last year's historic Singapore Summit.

(Applause)

MAJOR GENERAL McKEAGUE: Through each of these examples, the VFW leads the way. And more importantly, you are making a difference for your comrades in arms who are missing, and most importantly for their Gold Star Families who still grieve to this day and who anxiously await answers. In 1920, after World War I, then Vice President nominee Calvin Coolidge said this, "A nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten. A nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten." Thank you for the VFW for never forgetting.

(Applause)

MAJOR GENERAL McKEAGUE: And even more so thank you to the VFW for backing up your strong verbal commitments with tangible actions that champion the POW/MIA mission in the halls of Congress throughout communities in America. Thank you for your tangible actions and your commitment. In fact, I'm going to take liberty with your motto and recommend to your outgoing National Commander that he change it from "No one does more for veterans" comma, "including those who have yet to be returned."

(Applause)

MAJOR GENERAL McKEAGUE: Thank you again to the Veterans of Foreign Wars for your unflagging commitment to your comrades in arms who deserve to be brought home and to their families. May God bless each of you. May he always shed his grace on all the VFW stands for. May he bless all the VFW accomplishes. And may he always strengthen the beacon on the hill that is America. God bless you-all.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, I can't say it enough. Director McKeague and his staff are the tip of the spear when it comes to fulfilling our solemn promise of leaving no one behind. As he leaves the room, let's once again raise the roof and show him our appreciation.

(Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you.

#### INTRODUCTION OF MARINE CORPORAL MATTHEW BRADFORD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Our next guest is Corporal Matthew Bradford. On September 11th, 2001, as just a freshman in high school he watched the terrorist attacks on America's soil and knew, at that moment, he wanted to join the military after graduating. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and was deployed to Iraq in September, 2006. On January 18th, 2007, he was severely injured after stepping on an IED. His left leg was immediately removed from the blast. His right leg was severely damaged. Shrapnel took his eyesight, and he suffered multiple injuries to his arms, loss of movement in his right hand, and damage internally. He would spend the next three weeks in a coma and undergo multiple surgeries at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, to include amputation of his right leg. After an extensive recovery, on April 7th, 2010, Corporal Bradford reenlisted in the Marine Corps, becoming the first blind double amputee in the history of the Marine Corps to do so.

He was assigned to Wounded Warrior Battalion East Camp Lejeune,

North Carolina, from July 2010 to July 2012 and retired as a corporal on August 1st, 2012. Matthew has never let his injuries define who he is or what he can do, and lives his life pushing through limitations. He lives by the words "No legs, no vision, no problem." He lives a life of inspiration and motivation, and his resilient attitude impacts everyone he interacts with. Currently, Matthew works for Kentucky State Congressman Andy Barr as the National Security Fellow for Kentucky's 6th District doing veterans outreach and assistance. He believes in serving others as a way of giving back to those that served him while in recovery, and as a way to not forget our veterans who have sacrificed so much for our country. Please join me in welcoming VFW Life Member retired Marine Corporal Matthew Bradford.

(Standing ovation)

#### REMARKS BY CORPORAL MATTHEW BRADFORD

CORPORAL BRADFORD: Good morning.

(Good morning)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: Before I get started, where's my Kentucky veterans at? I know they're in here somewhere.

(Cheering)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: There we go. It's a true honor to be here. Thank you, VFW, for -- for having me join you-all today. It's an honor to be in the same room with all of you-all. And from the bottom of my heart, I thank each and one of you-all for your service to this country. Because without your service, we'd be living in a different world today. So thank you so much.

(Applause)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: On January 18, 2007, my life changed in a matter of seconds. One bomb exploded underneath me and sent my life from light to dark in a matter of seconds. Throughout these last 12 years many people have asked me what was going through my mind, what was I thinking. And honestly while I was laying in my own blood on that Iraqi street, I can never find the answer to those questions. But let me take a minute to go through my story and who I am today and what I've overcome, and that will answer the question that I couldn't have on that day in January of 2007. Watching the terrorist attacks in 2001 as a freshman in high school, I knew that it was my purpose to serve this country, even though I was only a freshman. So I set my mind up, and three years later I signed up through the delayed entry program because I wanted to fight for this country, and I wanted to fight the enemy to

make sure that another 9/11 does not happen ever again. So September of 2005 –

(Applause)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: Thank you. So as I turned 18 August of my senior year in high school, I went to the MEPS station, I signed my name, and I received the date of when I would go to recruit training. And pretty much less than a year -- a little over a year later, September of 2005, I was standing on the yellow footprints on Parris Island not really knowing what's going on. Because it's a lot different getting yelled at face to face than it was on a TV then. But three months later, receiving my Eagle, Globe, Anchor, I finally realized for somebody who had many struggles with life growing up, back and forth from a divorced family, I finally -- I finally found something in my life that I was good at and I enjoyed doing. And I was serving this country and serving something way greater than myself. As I mentioned earlier the reason why I joined the Marine Corps is because I wanted to deploy. And exactly a year later on September 11th, 2006, I was in Kuwait on my way to Iraq. We walked into a situation in a country that was firefight after firefight, many service members being wounded and unfortunately being killed. We actually had to fight our way onto our own FOB. And for the first couple of months, Marine after Marine was either being wounded or killed. Our whole battalion lost 23 Marines during that deployment and over 100 were wounded, either severely or not severely.

But as we walked away from that country, we were all wounded because we were all fighting the enemy in our head, no matter if we were -- no matter if we were wounded on the battlefield. But through my Marine Corps career and everything afterwards, it has helped guide me through this life and direct me through this life. And everything that I learned in the Marine Corps, it motivates and inspires me each and every day to go out and do these unbelievable things even though the obstacles and the challenges I have facing me each and every day. So some of the things that I've come up with these last few years is things that I'm sure many of you-all have heard. It's the simple phrase of adapt and overcome, lead by example, attitude is everything, and to never quit. On January 18th, 2007, as I mentioned earlier, a day that changed my life, I had to learn to adapt and overcome. And it was tough because here I am as a 20-year-old, wasn't really focused too much on school. The only thing I wanted to do was to serve this country, to deploy as many times as I possibly can. And it was taken from me. One wrong step. I was walking patrol past the compound wall. I looked down to my right, and inside a ditch lay command wires and a pipe underneath the road. And as I was standing directly over that pipe, it exploded right underneath me, sending shrapnel into both of my eyes, blinding me.

As I laid there, hearing the Marines around me doing everything they can to get me out of that area, out of that danger zone, putting tourniquets on my legs. You know, and for the next three weeks I stayed in a coma. I didn't



know if I was alive, if I was dead. I didn't know what was going on. And as I woke up from that coma three weeks later, I realized everything that happened to me on that day was the worst thing that could ever happen to me at all. You only see these kind of injuries on TV. You never expect it to happen to yourself. And for the few years that I was in the Marine Corps, I felt like I finally figured out my own life, and I decided to join the Marines and here I am doing it the right way. And in a matter of seconds, my whole life was flipped upside down and taken from me. And as my dad told me in the hospital room about my injuries, about losing my legs and my vision, I was crushed. I was devastated. I hated life. Then that was when I realized that I didn't want to live anymore. So I wouldn't eat. I wouldn't talk to anybody, and I just wanted to lay there and just die in that hospital bed. I didn't care too much about my vision. It was my legs. I wanted my legs to grow back. But for some strange reason, the light flipped on one day. There was a Marine in the detachment that would come and talk to me each and every day. He would not talk about my injuries. He would not talk about my service. He would be my -- he was my friend. We would talk about other things. And that helped me realize that there's life outside those hospital doors. With no legs and no vision, there's many things in this world that I could still do, but the first thing I have to do is to learn to get out of this hospital bed.

I was so skinny and weak, it was hard for me to even lift my head up off that bed. But once I got my mind straight and I started creating these goals within my head, I realized that going from the hospital bed to the wheelchair, the wheelchair outside those hospital doors would be easy. Because at the end of the day and all the nurses, the corpsman, the doctors, the Marines, my family, my friends, they still talked to me and still treated me as a Marine. And going through these difficult moments in my life, I realize that all my brothers in Iraq, who I truly miss and who I truly wanted to be with, would not want me to give up on life and quit. They would want me to fight it out, and they would want me to overcome this new challenge in my life. So with the Marine and his guidance, I realized then that this is what I want to do. I want to stay in the Marine Corps, and I want to help out other severely-wounded service members. Because at that time in 2007, I was probably one of the worst injuries coming home from Iraq or Afghanistan. So I started creating these goals, a broad goal of reenlisting in the Marine Corps. I knew the challenges would be tough. But you know what? Hey, we all face challenges each and every day. So it's just another thing in my way. And I started creating these goals.

But before I knew about the broad goal, I had to create these minor goals, as I mentioned about going from the hospital bed to the chair, outside the door. I would have to learn how to walk again. I wanted to figure out how to walk on two prosthetic legs before I figured out how to walk on prosthetic legs with vision loss. And five months after my injury, I stood up on my prosthetic legs for the first time. And a year later, I went to the blind school. And I learned everything I could from independent mobility to Braille to learning how to navigate around a computer, email, and I even built a birdhouse. And I don't know about you, but a table saw scared me when I had vision. So with no vision

...

(Laughter)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: But thankfully I didn't lose no fingers or anything. So ... But all along this way I had to learn that I couldn't do it the normal way. I had to adapt to these injuries, these circumstances and I've got to find ways to overcome it. And for the next three years I stayed focused on reenlisting in the Marine Corps because that's one thing I want to do. People would talk to me each and every day, it was like, "Matt, you would make so much more money if you get out of the Marine Corps and retire and get your disability paycheck." And I'd look at them straight face to face tell them, "I didn't join the Marine Corps for money. I'm here to serve my brothers and my sisters who are tragic" -- "severely wounded who need my help and assistance right now."

(Cheering and applause)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: So with all of that, on April 7th, 2010, I raised my right hand and I reenlisted in the Marine Corps, becoming the first blind double amputee in the history of the Marines Corps to do that. And I was on my way to North Carolina to the Wounded Warrior Battalion in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. And for the next three years I would work with the severely wounded, with the wounded. And not even that, I would work with the Marines who weren't wounded, and I would inspire and motivate them to go out and do things that they never thought they would do. In 2011 I had the opportunity to go back to Iraq on a closure trip. This trip took me to a place where I was severely injured, a country that took so much from me. But it also gave me the opportunity to leave that country on my own two feet. As standing there underneath the flagpole raising an American flag that's been with me everywhere from Hawaii to Iraq to each hospital I visited -- each hospital I was in, sitting there thinking, "I joined the Marine Corps to fight and to deploy, and I can't do that no more. But I can share my story, and I don't have to be in uniform." You know, and thankfully with the opportunity to reenlist and serve out two more years in the Marine Corps, it gave me that opportunity and that closure to say that it's -- it's over. You know, to walk away from the Marine Corps. But I could still hold my head up high because for the rest of my life, I will always hold that title as United States Marine.

(Cheering and applause)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: And through everything else in the last seven years, I have learned to look at life in a different light. I've learned to accept the things, accept the hard work, be dedicated, determined to whatever task got put in front of me and go after it. I left North Carolina to move out to Kentucky

because my dream school was University of Kentucky. I graduated from there in May of 2017 with multiple degrees. And believe me, it was tough to go back to school and be around a bunch of 18-, 19-year-olds that probably never left their county or they spent so much time on Facebook and Instagram. But I realized, working with the professors and learning to do things my way, it helped me overcome. And as a struggling student in high school who didn't really care too much for high school, I graduated with a 3.1 GPA. I'm very proud of that. That's for sure.

(Applause)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: But in life, we always face these challenges, difficult moments. You know, to me I always compare life to a Spartan race. You walk perfectly for a few feet, then you've got a 6-foot wall that you've got to overcome. Sometimes the easiest way is to climb the wall to get over it, not turn around or find the easy way around. And you know what? These challenges motivate me each and every morning when I wake up. Because I know each day is a challenge. But at the end of the day when I put my head on that pillow, I knew I lived a successful day and I accomplished every task that I put in front of me. So the next thing that I was talking about was leading by example. And through these last 12 years I have surrounded myself by some amazing people. Speaking of the Marine earlier who spoke with me day in and day out, not about my injuries but about my life. You know, and my family, my friends. And in 2007 when I was learning how to walk and learning how to be comfortable with myself and these prosthetics, it was my physical therapist who saw the frustration in my eyes one day when I was learning how to walk. I was going from the left wall to the right wall, not wanting to fall. And with double amputations I kept trying to scissor kick, basically tripping myself. And he stopped me because he saw this frustration, and he said, "Matt, whatever you do, I will never let you fall. Just walk."

And later on in life, I've realized that the whole "just walk" method is how we live each and every day. I never know what my next step's going to be, but I'm going to take it. And it's going to be -- it's going to be forward. I might walk around on two prosthetic legs and I might look at a dark screen each and every day, but my feet are facing forward and my vision on life is 20/20. And with that mindset –

(Cheering and applause)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: And I realize each and every day is that way. We never know what tomorrow or next week's going to hold, but we got to get through today. And that's the way I look at my life is, "We'll worry about today, and then when tomorrow is here, I'll worry about it." And so I just walk through life. I walk through each obstacle in front of me. And these are things that I've -- that's motivated me along this way. And another person that has really inspired

me along this way was -- was my senior drill instructor, which is -- and the Marine Corps is a small world, I'm sure Marines in here know. But the day of my injury, when they put me in the back of the Humvee, the last words I heard was, "You'll be fine, Bradford." And then I passed out. Not knowing -- not knowing where I was going, not knowing if I was alive, if this is it, if my life ended at 20. But I know each and every day when I'm facing these struggles, these challenges, I know at the end of the day everything's going to be fine. So I use that, and that plays in my head each and every time, each and every event that I do. Because at the end of the day, it's going to be fine. And lastly, I was directed and guided by the one true leader, the great Lord above. I was not the most religious 20-year-old or a kid growing up. I went to church with my granny, and she had to basically feed me candy to keep me quiet and awake in the back of a church.

(Laughter)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: I was a 19-year-old living in Hawaii, loving life and living it to its fullest. But I stepped on an IED, and somebody was looking out for me. The Lord above was looking out for me. He already had my next mission mapped out. It was my next job, my next patrol to pursue this mission to encourage others, to inspire others and motivate them to go out and live their life beyond their own bare minimum. I challenge myself each and every day because I get bored with doing the same thing over and over again. But I know if I can inspire and motivate one person today, then I -- that's a job well done. The Lord directed me down this mission, and I'm going to do everything I can to fill this mission and to continue inspiring and motivating others to get off their couch to go out and walk a 5K, do a Spartan race, do whatever. You know, and through it all, through every challenge and difficult moment I've had, I've kept a positive attitude. And I realize when you walk into situations with a positive outlook on that situation, you're at a higher risk of succeeding. If you walk into any situation realizing you're going to fail or you're negative about it, then you are going to fail. So I maintain a positive attitude on everything in life. Because you know what? That's how we have to live our life.

You know, if you live your life down in the dumps and you're just hating everything that you do, then you're never going to accomplish anything in this life. And through it all, as I mentioned earlier, I live my life for those 23 Marines that were killed in Iraq on my deployment. I live my life for my wife and our three kids. And I know that they would want me to live my life to the fullest. So I honor them each and every day through every event, every race, every obstacle that I climb. It's for those Marines. The Marine Corps always faithful, faithful to my brothers, to the Corps, to the country, to my family. You know, my wife is truly amazing and our three kids are amazing. And every day that I wake up -- you know, we always have these dark moments in our life. You know, I pray every night that I'm going to wake up one day and see my wife and see our kids. And I wake up and I open my eyes and see darkness. I go through my

morning routine. I put my prosthetic legs on. And the minute that I feel like that I'm like, "I don't feel like going out in the world today," I just start questioning life, my seven-year-old daughter walks into the room and says, "I love you, Dad." And for the rest of my life, I will never let her, her brother and her sister or her mother live a day without me in their life. They're my daily motivation, and they're the reason why I do what I do to inspire veterans, to inspire civilians, to motivate them. Because if I can teach them anything in life, it's to go out and live their life.

So in 2009, as I close, I walked the Bataan Death March. It was the first event that I did after my injuries, a little over two years since I'd lost both my legs. And I walked 10 miles in eight hours, but I didn't walk all 14. It was the first event that I ever quit on. Despite my injuries, despite my restrictions, limitations, whatever, I don't use those excuses. I quit. The guy walked over to me that worked the event was like, "10 miles. That's it?" I was like, "You try doing this with no legs and no vision, you know."

(Laughter)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: But you know what? For the next 10 years everything that I've done in life, I've used that quitting those 10 miles as motivation. It's guided me through seven Marine Corps marathons, seven half marathons, Spartan races, to just last week when I attempted to climb Mount Rainier for the second time. I also did a 200-mile bike ride from Seattle to Portland. It's those things -- it's that motivation that has guided me these last 10 years. And this past March, I walked up there and I attacked that Bataan Death March again, and I completed 14 miles.

(Cheering and applause)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: The last mile was the most difficult mile. My legs were sore. I was tired. And with each step, I wanted to stop moving. I wanted to quit. But then I realized -- as my feet kept moving, I realized while I was laying on that Iraqi street 12 years ago that this is my new mission in life, that I want to use -- give everything I got to inspire to serve this country. When I raised my right hand and I went and stood on those yellow footprints, my service did not end when I said that I was done with the Marine Corps. I'm continuing serving the veterans today. Because for us, as veterans, we need to continue serving each other because we're the only ones that understand each other. We need to be our brothers' keeper, and we need to watch out for our six. And that's what I realized in that last mile, that no matter the obstacles, no matter the pain, I'm going to continue to keep pushing myself because I know that somebody is paying attention, that somebody is watching, that somebody is following. When I was in therapy going -- learning how to walk, my physical therapist walked over to me and said, "Matt, you might not see this, but each and every day when you walk into therapy and you sit on this mat, people

watch you. They watch you walk in here and put your legs on and stand up and walk out." And that's what it's all about. It's about being your brothers' keeper and being there for your veterans. So for the rest of my life, this is my mission in life is to serve veterans. Because I stand here in front of you-all -- and I'm sure there's a few that's, you know, inspired by my story, but I'm surely inspired by your story. We're all a family. Once a bullet flies over our head or a bomb explodes underneath us, we're bonded together. I really appreciate the opportunity to stand in front of you today, to be amongst family. This is the only family reunion that I enjoy going to. I don't even go to my own family reunion.

(Cheering and applause)

CORPORAL BRADFORD: Thank you. But thank you so much for your service to this country. And for me, probably one of the youngest veterans in here, when I served, you know, we were maintaining your legacy on what you defended. To all of you-all, thank you so much for everything. God bless and semper fidelis.

(Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Semper fi, let's raise the roof.

(Cheering and applause)

PRESENTATION OF CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION  
TO STEVEN M. LEWIS, COFOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF U.S.  
RESTAURANTS, INC.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Well, I've said it before, and I'll say it again: We simply would not be able to do what we do through our Unmet Needs program without the generous support of Burger King franchisees. To date Burger King franchise owners have donated an astounding \$6 million to Unmet Needs.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: This was through their biannual fund-raiser for the program. U.S. Restaurants, Incorporated, which operates 32 Burger King stores, has been instrumental in the success of these fundraisers, generously contributing over \$164,000 to Unmet Needs.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: This morning we're joined by Steven Lewis, the cofounder and president of U.S. Restaurants, Incorporated. At

16 years old, Steven began making hamburgers in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at no other place than a Burger King restaurant. Then after three years in the Navy, Steven returned home and worked his way up the Burger King corporate ladder before cofounding U.S. Restaurants, Incorporated, in 1985. As a respected national leader among Burger King franchisees and the Burger King Corporation, Steven has had a major impact on the growth of the annual Burger King Unmet Needs fundraising campaign. We're extremely fortunate to have an ally in Mr. Lewis and are truly grateful for his support and generosity to the Unmet Needs program. And now it's my pleasure to present him with a Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of the VFW.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Certificate of Appreciate presented to Steven M. Lewis in spirited recognition of his generous and dedicated support to America's veterans, service members, and their families through the VFW Unmet Needs program. Since 2014 he has been instrumental in ensuring the continued success of this assistance program which exists to help provide relief to those experiencing financial hardships due to military service. His benevolent loved contributions totaling more than 164,000 are deeply appreciated and have earned him the admiration and appreciation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. In Witness Whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars this 23rd day of July, 2019. Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.

REMARKS BY STEVEN M. LEWIS, COFOUNDER AND  
PRESIDENT OF U.S. RESTAURANTS, INC.

MR. LEWIS: Ladies and gentlemen, I am so honored and humbled for this award. But I have to say that what I've seen this morning tells me that I'm not worthy. I'm not worthy based on everything that you folks do here at the VFW. It's really an honor for us to be able to raise funds for the Unmet Needs program. And really, quite candidly, it's really pretty easy. And why is that? I've heard it this morning from everybody who has spoken. You heard today that I was in the Vietnam War. I was in that -- that period I was in Westpac. My home base was (unintelligible) Japan. And we always were talking about whether or not we should be in this war, et cetera, et cetera, and all the home front issues and so on and so forth. But today we heard about Desert Storm and the difference between those two conflicts and the way that Americans perceive our military folks. Ladies and gentlemen, every single one of you in this room should be as proud as I am and I was to serve this great country.

(Applause)

MR. LEWIS: I had some really interesting times in the Navy, and I'm a proud Navy man. And it's so great -- love those Navy guys. Right?

(Cheering and applause)

MR. LEWIS: I had -- all of my uncles were Navy guys, World War II guys. And I want to make a shout-out, if you don't mind to the VFW Post 6316 in Blaine, Minnesota. Are they here today? Sergeant John Price? Are you here? I wish you were. Because I also want to thank you, at that VFW post, for taking such good care of my uncle.

(Applause)

MR. LEWIS: He just got out of the hospital. And the first thing that he said to my aunt was, "I've got to get over to the post so I can get my burger and my Diet Coke. I've got to get over there and see my buddies." Now, I've got to tell you something at 83 or 84 years old, this is what that man's looking for? It'd do my heart very, very, very, very good for doing those types of things for my uncle. And I sincerely appreciate it. Believe me. What you do with Unmet Needs to help our servicemen with their short-term issues financially -- I think we all can thing back to the days when we were young and we were in the service and we had no money. We had no -- we couldn't rub two nickels together. These folks are called -- they're called to serve our country and leave their families and end up with some financial difficulties. All of you -- all of you in here deserve such great gratitude for what you do. I thank you. It's a small, small thing that we do. But, man, am I proud that we can do it for the VFW.

(Applause)

MR. LEWIS: And last but not least, as I look up at the board and I see our Burger King logo up there with the VFW, it brings me to an acknowledgment that I really want to make here. And that is to Mike DeRosa. I think most of you know Mike. Mike is the individual who brought the Unmet Needs program to the Burger King franchise community. It was his leadership. It was his steadfastness that has created this pool of money for the Unmet Needs program to use for our servicemen. So if you don't mind, I'd like to ask Mike to stand up, to take a bow -- and I know he takes a bow probably at every one of these events.

(Applause)

MR. LEWIS: But it was Mike who did this, who started this program. And I have to tell you that getting any Burger King franchisee to do anything is not easy, but he made it easy. Great work, Mike. And then Mike also knows that I'm the guy who hired him back in 1973 --

(Laughter)



MR. LEWIS: -- in Minneapolis, which also proves the level of talent that I have in identifying good people.

(Laughter)

MR. LEWIS: And with that said, I'd also like to acknowledge my wife, who is sitting here in the front row, who has been by my side for 30-plus years. And my good friend, Jim Myers from Burger King Corporation, who came out of his way to come up here today to see if I could actually talk in three minutes or less. But, no, Jimmy, thank you for coming. It means a great deal to me. Ladies and gentlemen, I also want to announce today that I'm going to give \$1,000 to the Pershing Park Commemorative World War I Museum, and \$1,000 to the Desert Storm program.

(Applause)

MR. LEWIS: I'm so honored -- so honored to be here. I'm so lucky to be an American. I'm so lucky to have been able to serve our great country. My God bless all of you. God bless America. And let's continue to make America great again. Thank you very much.

(Standing ovation)

INTRODUCTION OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL FERRITER,  
PRESIDENT & CEO OF THE NATIONAL VETERANS MEMORIAL  
AND MUSEUM, COLUMBUS, OHIO

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It is now my privilege to introduce our next guest speaker. Representing the National Veterans Memorial and Museum in Ohio. And with 35 years in the United States Army commanding soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and international forces at every level, retired Lieutenant General Michael Ferriter is a staunch advocate for veterans and the vital role they played in America's storied history. The National Veterans Memorial and Museum opened last October in Columbus, Ohio, to honor veterans' contributions to our free and safe society. The memorial and museum will serve as a tribute to the sacrifices of service members and their families, serving as a reminder to all of the importance and value of military service. It will share the stories and experiences of the men and women who have served their country, including those who made the ultimate sacrifice while doing so. Ladies and gentlemen, here to share more on the National Veterans Memorial and Museum, please join me in welcoming retired Lieutenant General Michael Ferriter.

REMARKS BY LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL FERRITER,

PRESIDENT & CEO OF THE NATIONAL VETERANS MEMORIAL  
AND MUSEUM, COLUMBUS, OHIO

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FERRITER: Well, it's a great day to be a veteran. It's a great day to be here in Orlando at the national VFW conference. It's a great day to be with you. And, frankly, I told my wife this morning this is probably one of the bigger groups of people that I may ever have spoken to, and certainly the most distinguished and honorable group of men and women. And I'm really humbled to be here. I'm really humbled to follow Corporal Bradford, General Horner, and the king of Burger King. Just what a lineup of super people who are here to honor you. So thanks for having me. And thank you, B.J. Lawrence, for your service and your commitment. And I recall when we were all brigade commanders, a bunch of us went through the retirement ceremonies. We were at Fort Benning. General Carter Ham, Frank Helmick, myself -- it's a great group -- and Nolan Bivens. And we would say things like this: We would say, "Today on the stage we have over 200 years of experience serving our country. And they do it for duty and humanity. But they'll go back to their neighborhoods, and they'll do all the honey-dos that they're told to do. "And after about six months, they'll start organizing things in the neighborhoods. And pretty soon the kids will be in a little platoon formation, and they'll be marching and saying, 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir.'"

And then we would say, "But then they'll do something much grander. They really will demonstrate inspired leadership and make a difference in their communities." I retired five years ago this month, I guess. And so I'm really being introduced and experience so many groups that I probably took for granted and didn't honor, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars is one of those. I served in Mogadishu, Somalia, during that "Black Hawk Down" time in 3rd Range Battalion. And then I served three tours in Iraq. And we all are brothers, and we have something in common. About 13 months ago I was in Columbus, and I got a phone call and they said, "Would you like to be" -- or, "Are you interested in competing to be the President and CEO of the National Veterans Memorial and Museum?" I said, "It sounds intriguing. You know, tell me about it. Where is it?" They said, "Well, it's in Columbus." And I said, "I'm in Columbus, Georgia. I don't see it anywhere."

(Laughter)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FERRITER: And they said, "No. It's in Columbus, Ohio." So I learned to say (unintelligible). So I traveled there and interviewed a few times, and I found an amazing thing there. And I'd like to ask just that we roll the video if it will come up.

VIDEO PRESENTATION

(Whereupon, a video was shown at this time.)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FERRITER: How about that?

(Applause)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FERRITER: So let me tell you just a little bit. The -- it's an amazing, amazing architecture. Every week we get word that we won another competition that we didn't even know we were entered into. My brother-in-law said -- in Las Vegas one day says, "You just won the Dirt Daddy Award." I said, "All right. That's great." There's 128 million pounds of concrete and rebar. The only pillars are the pillars of Honor, Connect, Inspire and Educate. So we exist with a mission to honor all of us in this room, your service and sacrifice and that of your family members; To connect American veterans, since so few really understand us, and the veterans back to America; To inspire everyone to something -- some selfless service bigger than one's own happening, whether it be a school teacher, first responder, or military member, or life after your service as you guys are doing; And then to educate the kids K through 12. But we've actually found that often we're educating America about veterans. More than connecting, we actually spend a lot of time trying to let them know how we think and what we do. What's unique -- if there's a second slide, go ahead and throw that up there. What's unique about it is so Senator Glenn used to look down on an old vet's facility in Columbus, Ohio. And he felt it didn't do justice to veterans, and it certainly didn't honor them. It had things like Britney Spears concerts and cat shows and the Arnold muscle show. So he said, "Let's fix it up." And they said, "It's going to cost \$32 million to fix it up." So he said, "Let's knock it down, and let's build another one." And so they did. Go to the next slide.

They started with 250 veterans who each had compelling stories. And they were asked to tell their stories about a nation called and why they joined. Like Brian Vargas, whose father was a Marine. You just can't be a man in a Marine's house unless you joined up to be a Marine. Right? And so it's family business for all of our services. But they down-selected to 25 of these veterans who each tell their story of the oath of office, basic training, first deployments, combat operations, families of the fallen, coming home, and then life afterwards. Very compelling in all that. Next slide.

You're not going to see a lot of helicopters hanging from the roof or tanks out front because it's the videos of those inside these 14 alcoves, as well as an amazing timeline that tells a story from 1775 to today. But we're much more than that. When they interviewed me and said, "Would you like this position," I said, "It's really amazing, but it's insufficient to the needs of our veterans." And they said, "Well, General, we just put \$92 million into this building. What did we miss?" I said, "Oh, you didn't miss anything. You did -- did a great job. Thanks a lot. And people will come and see it. But we're much more than that." So I said -- they said, "Well, what would you do?" I said, "Well, the first thing we'll do is build the virtual tours. If you're in a vet's home in Tampa or Tacoma or San Diego and you can never get to us, we'll bring the museum to

our veterans." We have a video booth downstairs where you can come and you can tell your story. But we'll create a virtual video booth. And, once again -- and then I said, "Airstreams is going to give us a couple of trailers, and we'll put a traveling tour and a video booth in that. And we'll drive around and be outside a Kroger's, a Safeway, or Burger King, whatever. And if you just happen to be walking by, you can go in and tell your story or go through the tour." And then I met the CEO of Airstreams. And I said, "Hey, for about three months, I've been telling everyone you're going to give me two trailers." And he said, "How about four?" And I said, "Well, any commander knows a broken-down water buffalo in these motor pools a bad thing.

So I'll start with two. And if I get them on the road, then I'll come back." And then I went to the local Ford guy and I said, "Hey, I got two trailers. I don't have any trucks. So I need two trucks." And so he gave us two F250s. And we'll drive those around. Then we started rally point. Each first Saturday of the month we bring any veteran who wants to come in for a brunch, and we ask them questions like, you know, "Hey, where are you sleeping at night?" Sometimes say, you know, "I run a business here in town," or sometimes they say, "I'm sleeping in my car." And we say, "That's a no-go. So we're going to hook you up and take care of you." Or, "Where do you work?" And if they don't have employment, we're going to help them out. And we are helping them out. And then we started for -- I learned a word that I didn't use a lot before -- called underserved kids. I used to would've said inner city kids, but there's actually a place called the Appalachia, pretty basic living out there too. So Youth Ambassadors program we're standing up where they can actually come in and be the docents or the guides. And we hope some day at the Ohio State University some history professor says, "Yeah, I was just some 13-year-old kid in, you know, some region of Ohio, and suddenly some crazy general had me in a museum walking people around." We've reached out -- a lot of our veterans, the younger ones leave service, they get into communities, they get into companies. And when it's time to be promoted, they'll say, you know, "We're going to promote your buddy over here because you don't have any leadership certification. What were you doing? Your buddy was doing night school. So what were you doing?" And our veteran says, "I was doing night patrols when that person was doing night school." So Ohio State, Arizona State, and Harvard are setting up programs for our veterans to come through us to get leader certification so they can better themselves.

(Applause)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FERRITER: Thanks. So I have a top ten that -- so when they hired me, they said, "General, two things you need to do. One, you need to hire your staff because you're the only guy we've hired. And number two, you need to open in 100 days." So we've been just a magnificent startup since day one with the greatest people on earth to have joined my team, and I've joined their team and we're getting after it. We're going to do a thing in the

next year called "Big Serg" because all of us coming out of service want to mentor and lead someone. So, like, Big Brother, Big Sister, we'll have veterans in the neighborhoods taking care of the kids, being that mentor and that role model that our veterans want to be and that many of our children need. We'll also do a Letters Home project. So you'll come and see several iPads in our cafe, and you can say, you know, "New York vets homes," it'll bring up one in your town, and you can write, "Hey, Sergeant Jones, I understand you're in the vet home there. I just want you to know if you ever need anything, just send me a note or call this number." So we reach out. And the bottom line is we're going to be a platform to draw people to. So I expect a future VFW convention to be in Columbus, Ohio, and your galas and dinners to be in the museum. Veterans are free. Active duty are free.

It's important for me to tell you that we are the National Veterans Memorial and Museum. And when John Glenn had the idea, they said, "Let's go to Washington, DC, and be an affiliate to the National Veterans Memorial and Museum." And then they found out there is no national veterans -- so being a good Ranger, we thought, "Well, we'll just occupy by force and declare it." And that's good for Rangers, but smarter people said, "No. We'll push it through Congress. We'll get the President to sign it." And he did sign it. We are the National Veterans Memorial and Museum. We don't get a penny from the federal government or state government. So I've seen four or five checks thrown around here while I was waiting to speak. I don't know if someone's going to sneak up and give me some money.

(Laughter)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FERRITER: But I don't want a check. What I want is this: I want every one of you to go back to your congregations and your VFW halls, and all I want is 10 percent of your team to be members. Right here is Sarah Sykes. Stand up. You won't see her. She's sweet and petite.

(Applause)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FERRITER: But this is your -- your memorial and museum. It's built for you. It tells your story. And we'll get out there and ensure we're doing fine on fundraising and the like. We want your membership. We want your participation. We want you to visit for sure. I want to say a few other things. In the period between 2014 when I retired and last summer when I was hired, I got to work with a lot of veterans groups. I started the Veteran Business Alliance with 300 companies to include Black Rifle Coffee and Leadslinger Whiskey, (unintelligible), the Veteran Golfers. My wife said, "Let me get this right. Golf, whiskey, tobacco?"

(Laughter)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FERRITER: And I said, "Of course. Your point is

what?" So we helped a lot of them out. On the floor down in there, somewhere around 700, you're going to see the Veteran Golfers. Josh Peyton's right here. He didn't come with me, but he linked up. Stand up, Josh. So this young guy served in combat with my son Dan, who shamelessly we put in that video that you saw with my son Paddy shamelessly there with his son. But Josh came to me as I retired -- he's medically retired, an Army Ranger, infantry captain -- and he said, "Hey, sir, we're going to start a thing called the Veteran Golfers Association." And 6,000 members are now golfing. You need to join the Veteran Golfers Association. There's a chapter in your state. After five years now, not one suicide of a group of more than 6,000 veterans. Let's give Josh and his team a big round of applause.

(Applause)

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FERRITER: So the deal is this: When you get veterans together, they make things better. When you give them a mission, they make things really better. And when you give them comradeship, they make things better for each other. The National Veterans memorial and Museum in Columbus, Ohio, is your safe rally point, assembly area. It's where wingmen and Ranger buddies and shipmates, battle buddies come together. Please come and visit us. I really want to thank B.J. Lawrence and all the people who allowed me to kind of run in the door at the last second and be a part of this. We are new, but we're not a hostile takeover. So we got to get the word out. And I love all of you for what you do. Thank you so much. God bless you-all and God bless VFW. God bless America.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, I just want to let you know while I was out in the great state of Ohio for Founders Day, I had the opportunity to be blessed with a private tour of the museum. And, General, you gave one heck of a description and briefing. But I'm sorry to tell you, words -- words just cannot honestly describe the tribute to America's veterans at the museum. So if any of you have an opportunity to visit, please do. Please think about helping the museum out and joining. It's -- it's a legacy. And we have to continue that, keep that going to honor our veterans. And, General, I sure appreciate you coming out and letting us know about it. It is new, and I definitely will be back to visit. Thank you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I have a couple of announcements I'd like to make real quick before introducing our next guest. I'd like to ask all committee chairmen and vice chairmen and staff advisers to please start making your way to the stage. We will be doing committee reports

here momentarily.

PRESENTATION OF VFW COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF'S GOLD  
MEDAL OF MERIT AND CITATION TO BRIGADIER GENERAL JACK HAMMOND

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Far too often our men and women return from war with invisible wounds. From military central trauma and posttraumatic stress to traumatic brain injuries and depression, it is our job to ensure America's service members receive the care and healing they deserve. Our next guest, retired Brigadier General Jack Hammond relies on his 30-year career with the U.S. Army to aid him in his role as executive director of Home Base, which is a partnership between the Boston Red Sox and the Massachusetts General Hospital. Home Base operates America's first and largest private sector National Center of Excellence for the invisible wounds of war. Over the past decade it has treated and cared for 20,000 veterans and military families from all 50 states at no cost to them. During his military career, Brigadier General Hammond commanded troops at the platoon, troop, battalion, and brigade levels both at home and abroad, including Iraq in 2003 and Afghanistan in 2002, and from 2011 to 2012. In 2011 he became the first Massachusetts officer to achieve the rank of general in a combat theater since World War II. I now have the distinct pleasure of presenting the VFW Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit to a person whose three decades of experience with leading American servicemen and women at home and abroad have made him a true friend and ally of the VFW, Executive Director of Home Base and Life Member of VFW Post 8818 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, retired Brigadier General Jack Hammond.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Commander-in-Chief Gold Medal of Merit and Citation awarded to Brigadier General Jack Hammond, U.S. Army retired, in special recognition and sincere appreciation of his faithful and honorable service to our Nation, and his unwavering commitment to ensuring the Home Base program provides compassionate care and support to all those who have bravely worn our Nation's uniforms as they fight the invisible wounds of war. His personal experience and understanding of military culture provides him the unique and invaluable insight into the specific needs of veterans and their families and his dedication to ensuring America's brave heroes receive the care they deserve has earned him the deepest respect and admiration 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 23rd day of July, 2019. Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.

(Applause)

## REMARKS BY BRIGADIER GENERAL JACK HAMMOND

BRIGADIER GENERAL HAMMOND: Good morning everyone.

(Good morning)

BRIGADIER GENERAL HAMMOND: Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence, thank you for this great honor and thank you for recognizing the lifesaving work being performed each day by the amazing team at Home Base. As a Life Member of the VFW, I'd like to express my profound thanks to you, the past national commanders and the VFW leaders from across the nation for their steadfast service and support for our nation's veterans and military families. As someone who grew up in a military family and grew up around uncles that all served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, all I heard was the stories. I spent many, many days meeting with my uncles at the VFW in Reading, Mass., where I grew up. My departed sister, Barbara served in the auxiliary in the DAV for most of her adult life. So the VFW has a very, very close place in my heart. Finally, I want to thank my fellow veterans for their service and their families for their sacrifice. Each veteran here today had the courage and patriotism to raise their right hand and swear an oath to defend this Nation with their life, if necessary. And each of you stepped into the breach and felt the hot blast or the cold frigid air of a foreign land in a hostile fire zone. So thank you.

Before I begin my remarks, I'd just like to give a shout-out to my Massachusetts veterans that are here today joining me, especially Past State Commander Keith Jackson from Massachusetts for connecting Home Base with Commander B.J. Lawrence and the VFW national leadership.

(Cheering and applause)

BRIGADIER GENERAL HAMMOND: Together with our new state commander, Jeff Najarian, we're working closer with our Home Base team to connect veterans in need to the care they need and the support they need as they continue on with their life's transition. I retired from the U.S. Army after more than three decades in 2012 and had a unique opportunity to develop a new model of care for veterans and their families who are affected by these invisible wounds. When I first deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 and '03, I had no real understanding of these injuries. If you walked away from an ambush or an IED blast, you basically high-fived your friends. And if you had any lingering problems, you just sucked it up and moved on. But as these deployments continued and our Nation continued fighting these wars, we began to understand the impact of these injuries much better. We started to see a rise in the number of veteran suicide and suicides involving active service members.

My wife spotted my challenges long before I did. And I was



(unintelligible) told to get some help. She's a lot smarter than I am, and she's also a nurse and a veteran. This treatment allowed me to continue to serve effectively and ultimately return to war. As most of you know -- and the Secretary spoke about this earlier today -- we face an epidemic in veteran suicide. The numbers are staggering and getting worse despite our best efforts. I've lost far more friends and comrades to suicide than I did leading three combat commands. We know 20 veterans each day take their life. The suicide rate for our special operations folks is on the rise and grew by 300 percent in 2017 to 2018. Home Base, as we heard, is a partnership between the Boston Red Sox and the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. These are both marquis organizations that have invested heavily in this. And if you weren't a Red Sox fan before today -- which I'm sure most of you are -- you probably will be. Between the Red Sox and Mass General, they have raised more than \$60 million to pay for care for our veterans.

(Applause)

BRIGADIER GENERAL HAMMOND: Their efforts clearly demonstrate a commitment of a grateful Nation to support our warriors. As mentioned before, Home Base has provided care and support to more than 20,000 military veterans, actively serving members of the military, and military family members. To improve our Nation's impact, though, we realized you can't do this alone, and we built some strategic partnerships to include the VFW. Our friends at Fisher House -- many of you know them -- Ken Fisher, the Wounded Warrior Project, and, of course, we have partnered with the VA. Through a unique program we developed several years ago, we have built a program that enables us to compress roughly 18 months of therapy into 14 days. Through this program, we can fly veterans in from anywhere in the United States and, frankly, anywhere in the world. And I can tell you the furthest service member we've flown in was from Okinawa, Japan. All of this care is provided at no cost by some of the best clinicians in the world. Mass General Hospital has been able to draw, from its faculty at Harvard Medical School, some of the best clinicians and put them to work at Home Base.

The key to success, I think, really is the fact that we build teams as they go through this -- this care, and we have a 95 percent completion rate. If you don't complete a medical course of treatment, you're never going to get better. The challenge we have moving forward, though, is this epidemic continues to grow. And I'm -- I, for one, am pretty sick of citing the number of 20 a day without taking some type of positive action. Last year we met with our governor and our legislature and received some funds and began a suicide prevention program in Massachusetts that started with training 75 clinicians in the outlying areas and more than 500 first responders and veteran service agents so that they could identify veterans and get them connected to care. This year we'll be working with the State Commander of the VFW, our first responders, and we will redouble our efforts and double the number of people

trained and launch a statewide suicide prevention campaign. This model is easily replicable and the governor of Massachusetts will be meeting with governors in Utah to try and promote other states to adopt this and support it with funding. As Secretary Wilkie mentioned, the President talked about a community-based effort to end suicide prevention.

The challenge is the funding at the community-based level. And right now that's probably going to have to come from the states. So our government is willing to work with any governor of a state to try and build that type of program. But like many of you, I have learned that the government can't solve all our problems. And as I learned in combat early on, if you have a complex plan, it's probably not going to work. So today I am asking for your help with a simple solution that could help with our veterans suicide challenge. Each of you sitting here today has the potential to save a life. And what I'm going to ask you to do is pretty simple, but it sounds a little more complicated. It doesn't cost a penny. It doesn't require any legislation. All it requires is a caring friend who's willing to speak up and take some action. If you know a veteran who is not doing well and struggling with a mental health issue, I would ask you to sit down with that veteran and ask them to turn over their weapons to you as a brother. This is not an antigun thing. I own two personal firearms myself. This is a pro-veteran thing. Or as the doctors of MGH tell me, it's an anti-bullets-in-my-patient thing.

It's also a math thing. These numbers are stunning. Half of every veteran -- half of the veterans in this nation own a firearm. Two-thirds of veteran suicides are attempted with guns. And of these, 85 percent of them are completed. As you can imagine, a bullet is not a forgiving tool. By contrast, if you take every other means of suicide attempts in the country, less than 5 percent of them are completed. Take a minute and think about that. 85 percent successful if you use a gun, less than 5 percent successful if you don't. Of those people that aren't successful, 9 out of 10 of them will never die by suicide. Non-gun-related suicides end up with this giant mulligan that a bullet won't offer. So what I'm asking you to do is just help your friend not have access to a weapon when they are at risk. It's as simple as that. Most suicides are attempted within 10 minutes of making a plan. It's an impulse thing. So if we can keep a little time and space between a person that's at risk and a firearm, we can actually make a big difference. And I can tell you, as a commander in the Army, if somebody had a mental health issue and we were overseas, that's the first thing we did was separate them from their weapon just to safeguard them. So what I'm asking you to do moving forward is simple: Ask your brothers and sisters if you can hold onto their weapons. You're not surrendering to any outside authority, just a brother. If you can't convince them to do that, ask them to store their ammo and their weapons separately. Ask them to put a gunlock [ck] in place of the safe. Whatever you can do to create some space between that can save a life.

Once you identify a veteran at risk, call me. We will fly them in from anywhere in the United States. We have three partners -- at UCLA, Emory in Atlanta, and Rush in Chicago -- that will do the same. Our goal is to get these

veterans the help they need, and then they can go back and use their firearms, you know, in a productive, safe manner like the Second Amendment authorizes. But for the time being, we just want to safeguard them. Losing a soldier to combat is a terrible consequence of war. Losing a veteran to suicide is a tragedy that can destroy an entire family. Together we have all pledged, as service members, never to leave a fallen comrade behind or a wounded veteran behind. This is our opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. I want to thank each and every one of you for the work you do each day to reach out and help our fellow veterans in their transitions and guarantee them the life that they well earned and well deserve. So thank you-all and God bless America.

(Standing ovation)

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS BY SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF DOC SCHMITZ

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: I have a public service announcement. The lunches obviously are a bit delayed, but we will have them. And I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize the Department of New York, Commander Todaro, seems to be missing, but Senior Vice Howard, sir. You're welcome. Of I've got to take care of my own department. You know that. And if you haven't noticed the two state troopers from Georgia are escorting the young lady from the National Home. If you want that free get-out-of-jail card from Georgia, you will register and give a donation. Thank you very much.

(Laughter)

#### INTRODUCTION OF SERGEANT ALLEN JONES

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: I have the distinct pleasure to interview -- not interview, but introduce a very, very short special guest who happens to be a personal friend of no other than the President of the United States of America. Allen Jones -- notice he's standing up now. He is a little bit short. He is a World War II veteran from the great state of Pennsylvania, and one real nice guy.

(Cheering and standing ovation)

#### REMARKS BY SERGEANT ALLEN JONES

SERGEANT JONES: I said to the Commander-in-Chief this morning -- I wanted to ask him a question if I could speak to the convention. I think he had a second thought knowing that the President of the United States didn't say no to me; so he said I could. I'm going to be as brief as possible. I wanted to thank those of you that were in Kansas City and made a new page in the life of my

family in giving us the opportunity to be in the Oval Office with the President of the United States. I only wish –

(Applause)

SERGEANT JONES: I only wish that every one of you would have that opportunity. My wife is not with me today. She's home not feeling good. So, sweetheart, I know you're looking and listening to your husband, and I'll be home shortly. But while we were in the Oval Office, the President of the United States gave all of my family the opportunity to speak. After we were with him -- it was my 95th birthday -- and they had a cake for me. The experience for my family was like this: My son-in-law said that he saw the other side of the President of the United States, as well as I did and my family. I want to say that I believe that the President of the United States has the best interests of our country at heart. While I was in there, I had another picture. And I said to the President of the United States, "Will you sign this for me?" And he said he certainly would. When he was finished signing it, I said to him, "Mr. President, may I have that pen?" And he graciously gave it to me. So thanks again for the opportunity that you and the Veterans of Foreign Wars gave to my family to have a new page in their life. Thank you very much.

(Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Allen, as a Korean service veteran to a World War II veteran, I want to humbly thank you for your service and all you continue to do for our organization through your service. You are truly a dedicated member and represent us well and have for a very long time. Thank you, sir.

SERGEANT JONES: Thank you very much.

(Applause)

#### REPORT ON CONVENTION RULES CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN E. HAMILTON

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now request the committee reports, beginning with the Committee on Convention Rules by chairman John E. Hamilton, Past Commander-in-Chief.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. The Committee on Rules met July 21st, 2019 -- Convention Rules. At this point, I'd like to introduce the vice chairman of the committee: Past Commander-in-Chief Larry Rivers from Louisiana who now resides in the state of Florida. I would like to thank Comrade Rivers and the members of the staff for their assistance. Please refer to your Schedule of Resolutions booklet on

pages 29 and 30. You will find the proposed convention rules for the 120th VFW National Convention. During our deliberation, with input from our Convention Parliamentarian Fritz Mihelcic, one change was made. Rule 16 has been changed to comply with the Robert's Rule of Order Newly Revised. With that, the committee has agreed on the following recommendation, which I respectfully submit for your consideration:

1. That in accordance with the National By-Laws, Manual of Procedure, and with any exception noted here, the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised shall be recognized as parliamentary authority for this convention.

2. That when a registered delegate desires to make a motion or address the convention, the delegate shall rise, address the Chair as "Comrade Commander-in-Chief." And after being recognized, shall state their name and post number and a department before proceeding.

3. A registered delegate shall be permitted to speak but twice on 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 and voting, provided that the chairman of the convention committee may speak as frequently as necessary in conjunction 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 delegation 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 a committee no later than 4:30 p.m., Tuesday, 23 July, 2019, 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 will 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 referring to their committee, shall first read the number of 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 or such resolutions, the chairman shall read the number and the 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 and it be approved, in which case it shall be brought up for debate and convention action.

7. The 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 that sponsored legislation not expressly proposed by the members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

9. Only delegates to this convention may speak in debate, making motions, and vote during convention proceedings.

10. Delegates shall vote individually on any item of business coming before the convention and cannot be required to vote as a block with others from their delegation.

11. Voting strength shall be determined by those delegates registered as of the close of the convention's registration booth the previous day and as reported to the National Convention.

12. The department commanders will receive, prior to the beginning of each Business Session, a list of posts that are properly registered delegates -- that have properly registered delegates. Only delegates representing those posts listed on the report will be afforded voting privileges. On roll calls, the department commander of each delegation shall poll their delegation's registered delegates on the floor and shall announce the vote of their 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 fractional part of a vote.

14. Reconsideration of a motion or a resolution upon which final disposition has been made shall not be allowed after the meeting at which it was acted on has been recessed unless the body is notified of such contemplated action prior to the close of that meeting.

15. When the report of the department commander of a delegation is not acceptable to all registered delegates of that delegation and a poll of that department of registered delegates is demanded by three registered delegates of such 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 as defined within Robert's Rules of Newly -- Robert's Rules Orders Newly Revised, except 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 national office shall be limited to five minutes each. The time allocated to encompass all seconding speeches shall determine -- shall be limited -- excuse me -- to four minutes total. Nomination and election of National Officers will be held according to the Congressional Charter By-Laws Section 617 of the National 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 a disturbance which interferes with the

orderly procedure of the convention.

19. The Commander-in-Chief may, as may be necessary and appropriate through informing the membership of the activities of this convention, authorize that all or parts of the convention be streamed throughout the website of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

20. Consent of two-thirds of the voting strength of this convention present and voting is necessary for the suspension of the rules of the convention.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I move that these rules be adopted to the convention at this time.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion that has duly been made by the chairman. Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? All in favor of the motion by the chairman, please signify by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay. Motion carries.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, in addition to Robert's Rules of Order calls for the adoption of the convention agenda. Therefore, I move that the convention agenda that's currently displayed on the VFW Convention app, and as from time to time may be adjusted by the Commander-in-Chief, be adopted as the official agenda of the 120th National Convention. I so move.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion to adopt the agenda. Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Hearing and seeing none, all in favor of the motion, vote by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay. Motion carries.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAMILTON: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that concludes my report. Thank you for the opportunity to serve on this committee.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL BY-LAWS, MANUAL OF PROCEDURE  
AND RITUAL

CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ALLEN "GUNNER" KENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We'll now have a report of

Committee of National By-Laws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual, Chairman Allen "Gunner" Kent, Past Commander-in-Chief.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: Commander-in-Chief, thank you very much for this appointment, I think.

(Laughter)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: The Committee on National By-Laws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual met Sunday, July the 21st, 2019, and deliberated a lively debate for two hours. And, Commander-in-Chief, I am pleased to state we finished our work and are prepared to make our report. At this point, I'd like to introduce the Vice Chairman of the committee: Past Commander-in-Chief Thomas Pouliot from the great state of Montana. I would also have all the committee members stand and be recognized. Committee members, please stand. Make sure you know where the mics are, committee members. Please give these men and women a big hand as they worked hard on Sunday.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: Some day I'm going to be on a By-Law Committee, and we're going to have three resolutions like all these other people do.

(Laughter)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: I request you please refer to your booklet as I slowly read the proposed amendments recommended for adoption. Boy, do I need these instructions. Comrades, the proposed changes to the By-Laws and Manual of Procedure are in the booklet you received in your registration packet. First I will read the committee's recommendation for approval, then a motion will be made to adopt those proposed amendments. If a delegate wishes to set aside a proposed amendment, you will approach one of the microphones, state your name, your post number, and department, and ask that the amendment be set aside. After set-asides have been identified, we will vote on the motions to adopt the other proposed amendments the committee recommended for adoption. After these are done, we will discuss any set-asides. After we complete the proposed amendments and discussion, I'll read the proposed amendments the committee rejected. Unless these amendments are adopted through a motion, duly seconded and passed with an affirmative majority vote, they will die based on the recommendations of the committee.

Please refer to your booklets as I slowly read the proposed amendments recommended for adoption. Commander-in-Chief the committee recommends for approval the following proposed By-Laws amendments: B-3, B-



4, B-5, B-6, B-7, and B-9. Commander-in-Chief, in keeping with the rules of this convention, I move adoption of these proposed amendments. Are there any set-asides? Mic No. 3.

COMRADE BACHAND: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Benny Bachand, Delegate, Post 4287, request that B-7 be set aside.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: Requests B-7 be set aside. It's been requested that B-7 be set aside. Are there any other set-asides?

(Inaudible discussion)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: So we will now vote -- I can't see that. Microphone 3.

COMRADE MOEN: Corey Moen, Department of North Dakota, Post 12169. Set aside, please.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: Which one?

COMRADE MOEN: B-7.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: 7 set aside. Commander-in-Chief, in keeping with the rules of this convention, I move adoption of these proposed amendments except B-7 which has been set aside. I so move.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion that's been duly made by the chairman of the committee to adopt B-3, 4, 5, 6, and 9 and to set aside 7. Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Hearing and seeing none, all in favor of the motion to adopt, please signify by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay. The motion carries. Now we discuss B-7. We will now go into discussion on the set-aside of B-7. Chair recognizes Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE BACHAND: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Benny Bachand, Delegate, 4287, Orlando, Florida. Let me read to the convention the governing body composition as currently in our By-Laws. "The supreme power of this organization shall be lodged in the national convention. The national conventions consists of the Commander-in-Chief, Past Commanders-in-Chiefs, National Officers, the Adjutant General, Inspector General, and Chief of Staff who are members in good standing, all National Council of Administration Members, Department Commanders, and elected post delegates." The governing body is the legally constituted body of the VFW. We have the authority to formulate the policy of the VFW." This amendment, if adopted, will significantly alter the governance of the national convention. It would allow non-delegates to have a vote and a voice in this convention. I don't believe that's what this intended. Each and every one of us were elected as a delegate from our post. Now, this proposal means that those folks who could not or would not get elected as a delegate would have the authority to speak and vote

at this convention.

I think this is a bad precedent where you have to be a delegate on your district and your department level. And so you should be a person who is an elected delegate to be -- speak and make policy decisions here on the national convention floor. I would strongly urge that each and every one of us vote that we do not want to allow non-delegates to speak at our national convention. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No.

3.

COMRADE MOSKE: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Dave Moske, Post 1064, Delegate, West Virginia. I also urge the delegates of this convention to oppose B-7. We currently elect our delegates. And while I don't believe that we have the leadership that would abuse this power, allowing our Commander-in-Chief to appoint as many chairs or members and give them that electoral vote sets aside the balance that we currently have. So I urge you to keep the voice with the delegates and to keep us the speaking voice of this organization. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, Comrade.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No.

2.

COMRADE STONE: Comrade Commander, David Stone, VFW Post 3917 and the Department of Colorado Commander. Comrades, I speak against this change. When we look at Robert's Rules of Order, you'll find that a characteristic of deliberative assembly is at -- that is a convention, is that a group of people having the freedom to act in concert to determine the course of action to be taken in the name of the same group. The actions are defined by our members in our posts whose voice is exercised by the delegates that they elect. Any measure that is taken by this or any convention that erodes this basic right of membership cannot be allowed to prevail. Comrades, do not allow this to happen.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No.

3.

COMRADE MOEN: Corey Moin, Department of North Dakota, Post 12169. My comrade that spoke first from Florida pretty much said what I was going to say --

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I'm sorry, Comrade. One second. Can you move a little closer to the mic, please. Thank you.

COMRADE MOEN: My comrade from Florida that spoke first pretty much said what I was going to say. So without beating a dead horse, we need to

abolish this and not pass it. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you. Chair recognizes Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE KENT: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Gunner Kent, Delegate, James R. "Bob" Currie Post 9972. I hate to disagree with my good friend from Florida. But as a Past Commander-in-Chief I am a part of this convention, and I sometimes am not registered as a delegate. But I get to speak and I get to vote. All we're saying on this is if you're a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, you should be allowed to get at these microphones and say your piece just like everybody else does. We shouldn't say, "You can't talk. You can come to the convention and spend your money, but you can't talk about an issue that you feel strongly about." I fully agree we should support this amendment and pass this by-law. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you. The Chair recognizes Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE PROHASKA: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, David Prohaska, Post 4434, Department of Michigan, Delegate of the convention. Just to back up some of the things that Gunner has stated and to take away any -- I don't know -- misguided information of -- that was previously given, not all members of the convention are elected delegates of their post. We believe that if the Commander-in-Chief recognizes somebody out in the field and honors them with an appointment to this convention, places them on a committee, that they shouldn't have to deny or reject that -- that appointment because they're not an elected delegate of their post. In some cases, committee appointments are made after the election of delegates takes place at the post. And so we don't want them to have to give up that appointment. This is simply a way for those committee members and staff that are placed on committees who may not be an elected delegate of their post to be part of the convention.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, Comrade. Chair recognizes Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE MOSKE: Comrades, Dave Moske again, 1064, West Virginia Delegate. While I appreciate what Chief Kent said and what the staff member said, the issue isn't having a voice here. The way that this proposal is written, it gives ultimate power possibilities to the Commander-in-Chief. If you can overload the whole delegation by appointing as many members as you want to a committee, is that the way that we've set up -- is that the democracy that we use to make these decisions together? Thank you, Commander.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Commander-in-Chief recognizes Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE BACHAND: Commander-in-Chief, Benny Bachand, Delegate, Post 4287. I think Dave has pointed out the issue here. The problem is is that

there are committee members that would be appointed by the Commander-in-Chief who are not delegates. Each and every one of us have the opportunity and the right to go to our post and get elected as a delegate. If members of the national committees can't get elected as delegates, then maybe they shouldn't be accepting the appointments from the Commander-in-Chief.

(Applause)

COMRADE BACHAND: That's the voice of our organization. Maybe our posts don't want to elect those people to represent them here at the convention. So, again, I strongly urge that we -- we defeat this and keep delegates controlling our organization. Thank you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE DURKIN: Commander-in-Chief, Jim Durkin, Department of Texas, Post 12104. I stand in favor of this for the same reason that our friend from Florida stated. People are selected by Commanders-in-Chief, recommended by their Department Commanders for the outstanding job they're doing. They come here to the convention to be committee members, and then are denied the right to speak on the floor. I just don't think that's fair. It might be a talent someone at the post missed. But others in the organization -- it's just not the Commander-in-Chief who's making the appointment. It's through the recommendations coming from that department. And I think they should have the right to vote if they're the ones determining which resolutions we see and don't see. Thank you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you. Chair recognizes Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE DUNCAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Jonathan Duncan, Post 1829, Missouri, and a Delegate of this convention. I stand in favor of this amendment. And to refute what my good friend from West Virginia said, there are currently over 11,000 registered delegates for this convention. And to say that a Commander-in-Chief is going to be able to appoint more than 11,000 appointments to somehow nefariously overload this convention, I think is a gross miscalculation and a half truth. So it is -- it is my recommendation that this body adopt this amendment. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you. Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE BEAMS: Good morning, Commander-in-Chief, Will Beams, Department of Arkansas, Post 2278. Understanding the purpose of this resolution is to include the Commander-in-Chief's committee leaders and

whatnot to the convention. And I understand of the purpose of it. I just think the language -- the specificity of language is not there. And I think we need to not approve this and try for some different language for the same intent.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No.

2.

COMRADE STONE: Commander, David Stone, Department of Colorado. Again, I want -- I speak in opposition to this. As it is currently stated, the members of our committees exercise their privileges and their rights through those committees that are representative and then presented before the membership as we do here on the body. It is not appropriate for them to be assigned rights that are given to those members at the posts, by the posts, simply because they're sitting on a committee. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you. Chair recognizes Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE HASKINS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Sam Haskins from Post No. 1034, Brattleboro, Vermont. I stand here opposed to this by-law change. I cannot believe that I heard the Past Commander-in-Chief Kent say that he has been at a national convention and has not been registered. I would think everybody should be registered at this national convention to vote, no matter what. I mean, I agree that it should still come from the post. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, Comrade. Just to clarify the statement was he was not registered as a delegate, not at the convention. Chair recognizes Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE RASKIN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Rick Raskin, Department Commander of Virginia, Post 7589. While our By-Laws may trump Robert's Rules, Robert's Rules specifically says that if you are in attendance at a session or meeting -- I can't remember the exact words -- everyone in attendance has the right to speak on any motion. I believe that anybody here who is a member of the VFW and is registered at this convention should have the right to speak. You're a member. You paid your dues. You have the right to speak. Now, where we get into some conflict, I think some people are getting a little confused that the right to vote might be associated with that right to speak. And I remind everyone here that we vote delegate strength on these things. So I think that's a moot point about being concerned about if people are going to vote. They're only getting the right to speak. To the second point, if the Commander-in-Chief chooses to appoint people to committees and people fear that he may be trying to overload the convention, does anyone have any idea of the number of people he would have to appoint to make that effective? It's crazy. I think this thing should go and should be -- I move that it should be adopted.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No.

3.

COMRADE BELTRAN: Butch Beltran, Department of Nevada, Post 12119. I call for the question.

(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion to call for the question. Do I have a second? Chair recognizes Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE RASKIN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Rick Raskin, Department Commander of Virginia, Post 7589, I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion and a second, which is required a two-third vote of the body. All in favor of the motion to call for the question, vote by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay.

(Nay)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Motion carries. On B-7, the proposed By-law, we will now vote. The motion was made to adopt B-7. Motion was made to adopt. All in favor of the adoption of B-7, vote by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay.

(Nay)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: The adoption of B-7 has failed.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: Now I will read the proposed By-Law amendments the committee recommends for rejection, which will die unless a motion is made for adoption. Commander-in-Chief, these proposed amendments are B-1, B-2, and B-8. Are there any set-asides? No, not set-asides. Are there any motions to adopt these three -- any of these three? Hearing none, they die. I will now read the proposed amendments to the Manual of Procedure the committee recommends for adoption. Commander-in-Chief, these proposed amendments are M-1, M-2, M-3, M-4, M-5, M-6, M-7, M-8, M-9, M-10, M-11, and M-12. Commander-in-Chief, in keeping with the rules of this convention, I move adoption of these proposed amendments. Are there any

set-asides?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Hearing and seeing no set-asides, we have a motion that's been duly made by the chairman of the committee to adopt proposed amendments to the Manual of Procedures M-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Hearing and seeing none, all vote by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMRADE PARKER: Comrade Commander, Mel Parker –

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: One second, Comrade. I would remind anyone that I'm really trying to talk slow to give people time to make it to the microphone. Please, if you have to make your way from the back of the room or you expect to talk on a proposed motion or amendment, please make your way to the front of the room in advance so we don't disrupt the proceedings. Comrade, I will allow this one time to go ahead and address the Chair. Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE PARKER: Commander-in-Chief, Mel Parker, Post 6284, Delegate. I'm sorry for being late, but I was on the other side of the room and ran as quick as I could. We skipped M-13, sir. (Inaudible discussion)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: M-13 was not moved for adoption.

COMRADE PARKER: Okay. Thank you. I'm sorry.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: That's all right. Everybody makes mistakes.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: That was a good workout, though.

(Laughter)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Once again I will restate, we have a motion by the Chair to adopt M-1 through 12. Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Hearing and seeing none, all in favor of the motion to adopt, signify by the sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay. The motion carries.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: Now I'll read the Proposed Manual of Procedure amendments the committee recommends for rejection, which will die unless a motion is made for adoption. Commander-in-Chief, that proposed amendment is M-13. Anybody at the mics? All right. M-13 dies for lack of a motion.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KENT: Commander-in-Chief, that concludes the work of the By-Laws Committee on behalf of myself and Vice Chairman Pouliot, and all of our members. We thank you for your confidence

placed in us to administer this committee. And we thank sincerely the Adjutant General Kevin Jones's staff for all of their assistance. And thank you, again, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, sir.

(Applause)

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND INTERNAL ORGANIZATION –  
CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RICHARD L. EUBANK

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We will now have our Report of Committee on Finance and Internal Organization, Richard L. Eubank, Committee Chairman, Past Commander-in-Chief. Sorry. And dual Triple Crown recipient.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF EUBANK: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief for the appointment as the chairman. Comrades, I am pleased to report that the Committee on Finance and Internal Organization met Sunday afternoon and discussed the items before the committee. The committee -- can I have all the committee members please stand that were on finance. Please stand and be recognized. And thank you for your help with getting this stuff done.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF EUBANK: The Vice Chairman, Past Commander-in-Chief John Moon from Ohio, recognize you. Thank you, John. The proposed resolutions were distributed to each department or posted online. These resolutions are contained in the booklet that you received at the registration, plus each member of the committee received an additional booklet at our meeting. Commander-in-Chief, the committee recommends for approval for the following proposed resolution: Resolution 201, which is the periodic reevaluation of the VFW National Resolutions. And according -- Commander-in-Chief, I move for adoption of this proposed resolution.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion that's been duly made by the chairman for adoption of 201. Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? Is there any discussion? No one running from the back of the room. Perfect.

(Laughter)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All in favor, vote by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay. Motion carries.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF EUBANK: Also reviewed by the



committee and recommended for disapproval is Resolution 202. Is there any motion to adopt 202? I apologize. It dies by a lack of motion. Commander-in-Chief, this concludes my report. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: You-all had Past Chief Eubank and Moon up here and you let them off the hook easy.

(Laughter)

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON GENERAL RESOLUTIONS -  
CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF EDWARD S. BANAS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We'll now have report of Committee on General Resolutions, Chairman Edward S. Banas, Past Commander-in-Chief.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BANAS: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. The Committee on General Resolutions met Sunday, July 21st, 2019, and discussed three resolutions brought before it. At this point, I'd like to introduce the Vice Chairmen of the committee who stand behind me, Past Commander-in-Chief John Gwizdak from the great state of Georgia, Past Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman from the great state of Ohio, and Past Commander-in-Chief William Thien from the great state of Indiana. I would also have our committee members stand to be recognized. So if you're on this committee and you're at this hall, Comrades, please stand so we may applaud you.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BANAS: The committee did not have any recommendations for adoption. Therefore, in accordance with the convention rules, I will read the resolutions the committee disapproved. Unless those resolutions are adopted through a motion duly seconded and passed with an affirmative majority vote, they will die based on the recommendations of the committee. Commander-in-Chief, these resolutions are 301, 302, and 303.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: On 301, 302, or 303, is there a motion to adopt either one of these? Chair recognizes Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE WISEMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Ken Wiseman, Delegate, Post 1503, Dale City, Virginia. I move for the adoption of 301

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion to adopt 301. Is there a second? Floor recognizes Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE DOZIER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Carl Dozier, Delegate, 2894, Virginia. I second.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion that has been duly seconded to adopt 301. Is there any discussion on the motion? Floor recognizes Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE DOZIER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Carl Dozier, 2894, Department of Virginia. I urge the convention to pass this. I'm a Gold Star

father. Are there any Gold Star parents in the crowd?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BANAS: Comrade, will you please speak into the microphone.

COMRADE DOZIER: I'm sorry. If there are any other Gold Star Families present, it would be interesting to note. Okay. I assume there aren't any. I'm a Gold Star father as well -- right here with me. I am a Gold Star father. The Honor and Remember flag is a daily reminder, much as the POW/MIA flag is, to bring national awareness. When we look at our national colors, we don't think of the dead. In fact, we've got too many of our citizens who don't think of anything. But the Honor and Remember flag is an educational tool to bring to the public the sacrifices of the families, of the thousands of soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen that have died. Over 3500 flags have been presented across this country to families in remembrance of their lost one. And in keeping with what our mission is -- to honor the dead by serving the living -- I think that this flag represents what we stand for. So I strongly urge the convention to pass this resolution. Thank you, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you. Chair again recognizes Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE WISEMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Ken Wiseman, Delegate, Post 1503, Dale City, Virginia. As a young veteran and as a member of this organization, I stand on the shadow of some giants and I stand on the shoulders of others. And Colonel Dozier's son, Staff Sergeant Jonathan K. Dozier, was killed in Iraq. His post is the Staff Sergeant Jonathan K. Dozier Memorial VFW Post in Chesapeake. Multi-time All-American, multi-time Community Service of the Year post. They're seeking to honor not just Jonathan Dozier, but all of those families and all of those who fell. This isn't -- this does not replace the American flag. It adds to what that means. We already have one day of the year where the POW/MIA flag flies instead of the American flag above the White House. This is a tool to teach. This is a tool to remember those who have served and sacrificed. And this is not in any way going to do anything other than continue what our very ideals and values as an organization have been for 120 years. So I urge the convention to adopt. And I think the Commander-in-Chief for the time.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you. Chair recognizes Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE HOLLAND: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, John Holland, Delegate, Post No. 1, Department of Colorado, Past National Chaplain. Comrade Commander, I would like to say that I've seen the American flag draped many a casket, and the American flag does remind me of ours who have died in combat every time. And I've conducted a couple, three funerals while I was at it and have seen the flag folded, have helped fold the flag. And I speak in opposition to this item.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No.

2.

COMRADE MALDONADO: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Post 4384, New Mexico. When I entered -- COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrade, can I get you to state your name, please.

COMRADE MALDONADO: Oh, Roy Maldonado. When I joined this organization, not just this, the military, I raised my hand to the U.S. flag, and I'd like to be buried with the U.S. flag. Thank you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes again  
Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE DUNCAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Donny Duncan, VFW Post 2239, Colonial Heights, Virginia. I stand here in support of this resolution. I happen to have one of these flags at my house. It was presented to my wife on behalf of her brother, United States Marine Franklin Hemp, KIA822-1969 in Vietnam. I also stand here to represent the 40 Gold Star Families that I personally know. And we all -- well, most of us have this flag. All we are asking for is for it to be -- to present to Congress to have this flag flown everywhere. And it needs to be flown everywhere. It's not to replace the American flag. When you're buried, our flags come folded. And when it's unfolded, it's never folded again. So, sir, I recommend that the convention accept this resolution. Thank you, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No.

3.

COMRADE HOOMANAWANUI: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Jonathan Hoomanawanui, Hawaii, Post 2875, Delegate. There is no other flag but the United States flag.

(Applause)

COMRADE HOOMANAWANUI: No other flag but the United States flag. Red, white, and blue. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you. Chair recognizes  
Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE DOZIER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Carl Dozier, Post 2894, Department of Virginia. This flag does not in any way replace the American flag. I received a folded flag at Arlington Cemetery when my son was laid to rest. That flag sits on my mantle, never to be unfolded, never to be displayed. This flag is meant to be displayed as a symbol of remembrance for those who have fallen. When you look at the American flag, people do not think of that. But this is a tool of instruction. We adopted the POW/MIA flag as a means of instruction, to remind the American people of those who were lost and miss -- missing. This is a reminder. 26 states across this country have

adopted it. Florida just did. The governor, two weeks ago, signed it. I would like to see the organization that I belong to, that my son belonged to, that my father belonged to, recognize this as a symbol. That's all it is. It's not replacing the American flag. The American flag's still going to be on our coffin when we're laid to rest. Thank you, Comrade Commander.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No.

3.

COMRADE BIGELOW: Commander-in-Chief, Roland Bigelow, Post 793, St. Johnsbury, Vermont. I call the question.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion on the floor calling for the question. Do we have a second? Chair recognizes Microphone No. 2.

COMRADE GODDARD: Commander-in-Chief, Kelly Goddard, Post 4469, Beckley, West Virginia. I second that motion. COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I have a motion on the floor that's been duly seconded calling for the question. Is there any discussion -- correction. All in favor vote by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay.

(Nay)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: The ayes have it. Motion passed. Now, on the question, we have a motion on the floor to adopt 301. This has to be passed by a majority. All in favor of adoption of 301 vote by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay.

(Nay)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: The majority has it. Motion fails.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BANAS: Are there any motions under 302 or 303?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Chair recognizes Microphone No.

1.

COMRADE O'BRIEN: Robert O'Brien, All-State Commander, Past Commander, Post 3970, Sutherlin, Oregon. I move for the adoption of 302.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion on the floor to adopt 302. Is there a second? Seeing no second, the motion fails for lack of a second. Comrades, I'm not going to keep going back and disrupting the order. There was not a second. I called for a second. The Chair rules the motion fails by a lack of a second. We need to get on the ball on these motions if we're going to do it on the seconds, please. Is there a motion to adopt 303? Seeing none, rejects 303 by lack of motion.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BANAS: Comrade Commander, I thank you very much for the appointment, as do the other vice chairmen. Enjoy the convention.

(Applause)

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY & FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF PAUL A. SPERA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We'll now call on our report of Committee on National Security & Foreign Affairs, Chairman Paul A. Spera, Past Commander-in-Chief.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SPERA: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I report that your convention Committee on National Security & Foreign Affairs convened at 2:00 p.m. Sunday, July 21st, 2019. Your instructions were read, roll call was conducted, and action was taken on the resolutions referred to this committee. For their support, wisdom and guidance, I would like to thank the vice chairmen of the National Security & Foreign Affairs Committee: Past Commander-in-Chief James Nier from Texas, the chairman of the POW/MIA subcommittee, Past Commander-in-Chief James Mueller from Missouri, and the vice chairman of the POW subcommittee from Wisconsin, Past Commander-in-Chief Thomas Tradewell. If there are any members of the National Security & Foreign Affairs Committee, please stand so that you can be recognized and so that we can thank you for your service.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SPERA: I also extend the committee's gratitude and my personal appreciation to our committee adviser, VFW National Security & Foreign Affairs Director, John Towles. A very special thank you is extended to all members of the National Security & Foreign Affairs Committee and the Subcommittee.

And, Commander, with your permission, I will begin the committee report by presenting those resolutions the committee recommends to be approved as written. If for any reason you or the delegates to this convention would like a resolution set aside for further discussion, please so indicate after we have completed each segment of the report. I will now proceed by reading the resolution numbers and titles that the committee recommends for approval

as written. "No. 401: End Sequestration." "No. 402: Oppose TRICARE Changes." "No. 403: Keep Defense Budget Relevant." "No. 404: Preserve the All-Volunteer Force." "No. 405: Link Military Pay Increases to Private Sector Increases." "No. 406: Increase and Extend Thrift Saving Programs Match." "No. 407: Sexual Assault Incident Reporting and Treatment." "No. 408: Assistance Program Mandate." "No. 409: Establish the Armed Forces University." "No. 410: Support Stability and Relief for Military Families." "No. 411: Provide Full Concurrent Receipt of Military Retirement Pay and VA Disability Compensation." "No. 412: Revise Unfavorable Discharge Review Procedures." "No. 413: Repeal SBP-DIC Offset." "No. 414: Provide Equity and Benefits to All Reserve Component Members." "No. 415: Support the Republic of China on Taiwan." "No. 416: Support the Republic of Korea." "No. 417: Support the State of Israel." "No. 418: Call for More Unilateral POW/MIA Actions by Vietnam." "No. 419: Protect POW/MIA Full Accounting Mission Funding." Comrade Commander, I move to accept the committee's recommendations to approve these resolutions. Are there any set-asides? Does anyone want any of these resolutions set aside?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Hearing and seeing no set-asides, we have a motion by the chair of the committee to adopt 401 through 419. All in favor of the motion to adopt 401 through 419, signify by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay. The motion carries.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SPERA: Commander, I will now read the number and title of the resolution that the committee recommends for rejection as written. Unless the resolution is asked to be set aside, no further motion is required and it will be based on the recommendation of the committee. "No. 4-2-0" -- "420" -- "Recognition for Afghan and Iraqi Combat Translators."

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Floor recognizes Microphone No. 3. Thank you for letting me know you're there.

COMRADE WISOR: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, James Wisor, Post 2290, New Jersey. I make a motion for the adoption of Resolution 420: Recognition of Afghan and Iraq Combat Interpreters.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion on the floor to adopt 420. Is there a second? Is there a second? Hearing and seeing none, the motion will die by the lack of a second. Therefore, 4-2-0 will be rejected and not adopted.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SPERA: Commander, this concludes the committee's report on National Security & Foreign Affairs. And on behalf of the vice chairmen and all of those on the committee, thank you very much for this appointment.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We'll now have a report of subcommittee on POW/MIA, Chairman Jim R. Mueller, Past Commander-in-Chief. Oh, that was included? We're good? How about Furgess? Somebody all right back there? It felt like somebody fell.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS  
CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN FURGESS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Correction. We'll call to the microphone for a report of Committee on Veterans Service Resolutions, Chairman John Furgess, Past Commander-in-Chief.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: Comrades, I stand here at this hour because the person Commander-in-Chief asked to chair the committee is on doctor's orders not to travel and at home. And I want you to join me in a moment of silence for a quick and speedy recovery for Past Commander-in-Chief John Biedrzycki.

(Moment of silence)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: Thank you. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief, for this appointment. I want to recognize our great Past Commander-in-Chief and Vice Chairman of the committee John Stroud of Nevada. Chief? Thank you.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: If you served with us on the Veterans Service Resolution Committee, please stand so we can thank you at this time. Committee members, please stand.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: Thank you very much. Commander Lawrence, I report that your convention Committee on Veterans Service Resolutions convened at 2:00 p.m. Sunday, 21 July. Roll call was taken and preliminary matters were discussed. The committee was divided into three subcommittees, to carefully deliberate each of 37 resolutions that we were assigned. The subcommittees were established as follows: Subcommittee 1, Veterans Health, chaired by Raymond Denisewich from Rhode Island and Vice Chairman Christine Smith from Pennsylvania. Staff advisers were Jim Moss, Assistant Director, Veterans Health Policy, National Veterans Service; and Carlos Fuentes, Director, National Legislative Service. Subcommittee 2, Veterans Benefits chaired by Eric Drake from Ohio and Vice Chairman Daniel Arnold from

Montana. Staff advisers were Brad Hazell, Assistant Director, Compensation and Pension Policy, National Veterans Service; and Gabby Kavicki (ph), Legislative Associate in the National Legislative Service. Subcommittee 3, Veterans Economic Opportunities, chaired by Jim -- Jason Smith from Florida, Vice Chairman Lisa Robinson from Alaska. Staff advisers were Chris Mikankowitz (ph), Associate Director, Training, National Veterans Service; and Patrick Murray, Deputy Director, National Legislative Service.

Before proceeding to the report, I want to express appreciation, particularly to Ryan Gallucci, Director, National Veterans Service, and Carlos Fuentes, Director, National Legislative Service for the valuable technical guidance which they and their staff provided to this committee, one of our largest committees, and I'll humbly say one of the most important committees. I also want to thank Craig Otto (ph), National Veterans Service staff, who served as our committee secretary and coordinated the results of our deliberation. Commander, with your permission now, I will begin the committee report by presenting those resolutions the committee recommends to be approved as written, then proceed to report those resolutions which were approved as amended and those that were rejected. If for any reason you or your delegates or the delegates to this convention would like a resolution, quote, "set aside" for further discussion, please so indicate after we have completed each segment of this report. I will now proceed by reading the resolution numbers and titles that the committee recommends for approval as written. Comrades, my voice is failing me. I'm going to ask the Vice Chairman to come read these resolutions and the titles. Chief? Excuse me.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF STROUD: That's what vice chairmen are for, to pinch hit when needed. Chief Furgess, thank you. Resolutions approved -- recommended for approval as written: 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 611, 612, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 633, and 634. Commander-in-Chief, I move to accept the committee's recommendation to approve these resolutions.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Are there any set-asides? Seeing and hearing none, we have a motion that has been duly made by the chair -- correction vice chairman. Is there a second? We have a motion to adopt. Is there a second? Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE HOOMANAWANUI: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Jonathan Hoomanawanui, 2875, Delegate from the state of Hawaii. I move to accept it.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion and a second. Is there any discussion? Any discussion? Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE KEMP: My name is Charles Kemp -- Commander-in-Chief, my name is Charles Kemp from Post 12043 in Maricopa, Arizona. I'm very supportive of these type of things because I've been dealing with multiple disabilities that were service connected. And anything that can be done for veterans in this area would certainly be helpful. So I want to -- as a disabled veteran, I want to support -- I'm very supportive of the work of these



resolutions. Therefore, I would encourage approval.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you. Is there any discussion? Microphone No. 3.

COMRADE SHAWNS (ph): Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I am Steve Shawns from the Department of Colorado, a registered Delegate with Post 3917. I move to set aside 619, Toxic Exposure.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: 6?

COMRADE SHAWNS (ph): 1-9.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: 1-9 is not part of the motion, Comrade.

COMRADE SHAWNS (ph): Very well. Very well.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Hearing and seeing no other discussion, all in favor of the motion to adopt, signify by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay. Motion carries.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: Commander-in-Chief, I will now read the resolution numbers and titles and the committee recommends approved as amended. "610: VA Health Care for Women Veterans." "613: Research on Medical Cannabis Treatments." "619: Toxic Exposures." "632: Improve Disability Compensation Accuracy for PTSD Incident." "635: VA Medical Diagnosis." Commander, I move to accept the committee's recommendations to approve those resolutions as amended.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion to approve 610, 613, 619, 632, and 635 as amended. Is there any discussion? Hearing and seeing none, all in favor vote by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay. Motion carries.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: Yeah, those did pass, Comrades. Thank you. I will now read the resolution numbers and titles that the committee recommends for rejection. "636: Homeless Veterans Priorities." "637: Recommend rejection in favor of Commander-in-Chief Resolution 624." "637: Endorse a National Charter for the National American Indian Veterans Incorporation." Recommended rejection as this is out of order for the VFW to endorse another organization for their charter. Commander, I move to accept the committee's recommendations to reject these resolutions.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: The committee is recommending rejection of 636. Is there a motion to adopt 636? Is there a motion to adopt? Hearing and seeing none, 636 rejects by a lack of motion to adopt. 637

committee chairmen recommends rejection. Is there a motion to adopt? Hearing and seeing none, 637 dies with rejection from lack of a motion.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FURGESS: Commander-in-Chief, I want to thank the committee for its hard work on these resolutions and the VFW departments all across our organization who called our attention to the issues like falsely laboring certain veterans diagnosed with substance abuse disorder, improving disability compensation for survivors of military sexual trauma, extending benefits to early Vietnam veterans, creating equitable education benefits for overseas families, supporting Mare Island Cemetery, extending leave protections to disabled veterans who work for the federal government, and studying whether antidepressant drugs are contributing to veteran suicides. This is important work of our organization. And I thank my comrades in this committee for your dedication to serving the needs of our veterans. Commander-in-Chief, this concludes the committee's report on Veterans Service Resolutions.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, as evident by the staff members and committee members present on the dais, this is a very, very integral committee and does the great work of our organization. So on behalf of this committee and all previous committees, let's give them a round of applause for all their work.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Folks, before we conclude, we made the announcement earlier that the luncheons -- we were running behind, but the luncheons will go on as scheduled at 1:00 p.m. immediately -- today. Also, for the 2019-2020 commanders, as the invite indicated for your luncheon only, spouses are included.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: And for the record, all committees are dismissed.

#### CLOSING CEREMONY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please perform the closing ceremonies for today's business meeting.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief. National Sergeants, attention. Comrades, please rise. Comrade National Chaplain.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Dear Heavenly Father, may we always look to You for guidance. Help us to process all the valuable information we have received and enable us to incorporate it into our service in our respective departments. Lord, thank You for the opportunity we have had today to hear from an amazing young man, Matthew Bradford, and the inspiration he is for all of us. Help us to remember his words when we face our challenges. We thank You also for the good work that is being accomplished to commemorate and honor our veterans at the World War I Desert Storm and Veterans Museums

and Memorials that we were privileged to hear about this morning. And now as we close for the day, may Your peace abide with us and refresh us. May we assemble again tomorrow in peace and harmony. In Your most holy name we pray. Amen.

(Amen)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Cover. National Sergeants, attention. Comrades, a salute to our national colors. Present arms. Honor arms. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that closes this business meeting, sir.

#### ADJOURNMENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms. We are adjourned till 8:00 a.m. tomorrow morning.

(Whereupon, the meeting was duly recessed at 12:39 p.m., to reconvene on Wednesday, July 24th, 2019, at 8:00 a.m.)

THIRD BUSINESS SESSION  
WEDNESDAY, JULY 24, 2019

(The Third Business Session of the 120<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida, was called to order at 8:00 a.m., with Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence presiding.)

CALL TO ORDER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: If I can have your attention, please. Before we reconvene the 120th VFW National Convention, for those in attendance this morning, I would like to make a brief statement about yesterday's proceeding.

Those of you in the room who attended the Patriotic Rally last night, I want to make you fully aware that although the organization contracts entertainment for our membership's enjoyment, from time to time there may be audio and visual effects during the course of that entertainment that are beyond our control and certainly we did not have an opportunity to review prior to the performances.

Last night's performance by Sailor Jerri contained a music video that I certainly had not seen before, nor had your national officers and staff. In reviewing the video during the performance of one of the songs, I observed a few images, quite frankly, that were a little troubling. And I understand, as a body of veterans, that although the realities of war can be disturbing and troubling, we certainly had no intent to have that music video contain images that might have offset triggers or bothered people or had an emotional effect of those that have served in combat.

Quite honestly, Comrades, there was a clip in that video that affected me as well. So the national organization and the leadership certainly understands if it affects us, it could affect our membership. And as your Commander-in-Chief, I take full responsibility of my watch, and I apologize if any of those video clips had any effect on you. That certainly was not the intention of an entertaining night.

So with that said, again, I apologize and we will move forward and try to devise a plan that we can review such material in advance.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now reconvene the 120th VFW National Convention. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please conduct the opening ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Commander-in-Chief. National Sergeants, attention. Comrades, please rise. Comrade National Chaplain, the

opening prayer. Uncover, parade, rest.

## OPENING PRAYER

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Dear Heavenly Father, we are assembled once again to continue the work of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. We trust that all that has transpired here this week has been done honorably and is acceptable to You.

We thank You for this great country and for those who have given so much to ensure our freedom. We thank You for the opportunity to serve. And may we always serve with humility, compassion, and integrity.

Bless us now with Your divine wisdom and honor us as we resume our deliberations. We thank you for all the successes of the year that is ending and ask for Your divine blessings as we elect and install our leaders for the coming year.

Grant Your special blessing upon all who assume those duties. Guide them in the performance of their office and bless them with the knowledge and understanding they will need.

Walk with each of us in heart and mind day by day, giving us wisdom in our decisions and Your aid in fulfilling the mission of our organization. No one does more for veterans!

All these things we ask in Your holy name. Amen.

(Amen)

## SALUTE TO COLORS AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Cover, National Sergeants. Attention. Comrades, facing the flag of the United States, 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, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms. Everyone, please be seated.

## REPORT ON CONVENTION CREDENTIALS - BETTY GRIPP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I would now like to call on Betty Gripp for the final report of the Credentials Committee. Comrade Gripp.

COMRADE GRIPP: At the close of business 4:00 p.m. yesterday, July 23rd, 2019, total delegates registering their credentials are: Delegates, 11,193; Department Commanders, 47; Commander-in-Chief, 7; National Officers, 5. A grand total of delegate strength: 11,285. Total registered for the 120th National Convention: 2,392. Commander-in-Chief, this is my final credentials report for the 120th National Convention. (Inaudible.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All right. Thank you, Betty. For those that don't know, Betty was my classmate and she does a tremendous job. Thank you, Betty, for all your tremendous work on the committee.

## INTRODUCTION OF NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Adjutant General.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Ladies and gentlemen, standing behind me are the elite, our VFW National Sergeant-at-Arms. I want to express my appreciation to this group of individuals 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 individuals are strictly volunteers. So obviously this is 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 Sergeants-at-Arms.

Bryan O'Brien is a Life member of Post 2550 in Dunedin, Florida. He has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms team for 20 years and has served as the National Sergeant-at-Arms for 14 years. He is a past All-State Post, District, and County Commander. In 1982 Bryan was named the VFW's National Young Veteran of the Year.

He served in the United States Air Force as a skilled radar intercept control technician. His awards include the Air Force Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, and the Korean Defense Service Medal.

After working for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation for 31 years as a senior controller and supervisor in Boston, Bryan is now retired

and a member of the Massachusetts Policemen's Association.

He is simply an outstanding leader with ultimate character and integrity.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Joy Ausman has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for 23 years and is a Gold Legacy Life member and Quartermaster in Lewiston, Idaho, Post 10043. She is also a Life member of Cloquet, Minnesota, VFW Auxiliary to Post 3979.

Joy is a past District Commander, past District Quartermaster, past Post Commander, and is currently employed by Clearwater Pipe Corporation as the Director of Health and Safety.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Next is Jim Galen who has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for 18 years and is a Life member of Post 6802 in Richmond, Michigan. He is a past All-State Post Quartermaster and past All-State Post Quartermaster -- or excuse me. He is a past All-State Post Commander and past All-State Post Quartermaster. He served as the Post Quartermaster for 19 years and is a past District 5 Commander. Jim retired after 30 years of service from General Motors.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Keith MacDonald has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for 25 years and is a Life member of Post 5867 in Lakeside, California. He retired from the United States Navy after 23 years and -- 23 1/2 years as a Senior Chief Petty Officer.

Keith is a past All-American Post and All-American District Commander. Keith is currently serving as the Chief of Staff for the Department of California.

Keith works supporting the DDG-51 new construction program to Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command in San Diego, California.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: George Lott has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for 10 years. He is a Gold Legacy Life member, a past Commander of Lieutenant Robert A. Madden Post 10152 in Ogdensburg, New Jersey, and a past New Jersey District 21 Commander.

He is a United States Army combat veteran and was an Army drill sergeant who taught basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, for 3 1/2 years after returning from Vietnam.

Currently George serves as the Department of New Jersey's Sergeant-at-Arms and has held that position for 32 years.

George was employed as a police officer in his hometown of Ogdensburg for 34 years and retired in 2008 as the Chief of Police.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Gary Gamble has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms since 2015. He served honorably in the United States Marine Corps and earned his VFW eligibility while serving in the Persian Gulf War in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm with the 1st Marine Division. He retired after 20 years of service in the Reserves at the rank of gunnery sergeant.

Gary is a Life member of Post Hubert-Fortiers-O'Grady VFW Post 345 in Redford, Michigan, where he has been a member since 1993.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: He is a past All-State Post Commander and a past All-American District Commander, and has served in many elected and appointed positions at all levels of the organization. He is currently serving as President of District 4 VFW Riders and District 4 Judge Advocate. Gary also serves as the state membership and VFW Riders Director.

In addition, Gary is a lieutenant on the Department of Michigan Honor Guard. He is also a member of the American Legion Post 32.

As an avid motorcycle rider, he and his wife, Lynne, enjoy riding their Harley-Davidson Ultra Glide Limited motorcycle while participating in VFW-related projects.

Gary also serves on the Allocation Committee for Michigan Bikers Helping Veterans. Gary is also a member of the Michigan Patriot Guard Riders as well.



He is employed by BorgWarner Corporation in Auburn Hills, Michigan, as a technician. Gary and his wife, Lynne, have been married for 37 years and have two grown children.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Lora Land is a Gold Legacy Life member of Post 9191 in Killeen, Texas. She has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms since November, 2016.

She is a past All-State, All-American Post Commander. In 2015 Lora was named the top Commander in the state of Texas. Lora is the first woman veteran to serve as the District 14 Commander, where she achieved All-State and All-American honors.

She served as the Women Veterans Chair for the Department of Texas since 2016 through 2018. Lora has served as a National Aide-De-Camp from 2017 to 2018.

Lora was a sergeant in the United States Army where she was a motor transport operator. She earned her VFW eligibility by serving in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm with the 24th Infantry Division in Fort Stewart, Georgia, and the Republic of Korea.

Lora now devotes her time to her family and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Sherrod Nathan Conyers is a native of Southern California and emeritus All-American and All-State Post Commander of PFC Adrienne L. Mitchell Post 2122 in Inglewood, California, where he is a Gold Legacy Life member. He is also an immediate past District 4 Commander. He has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for three years.

Sherrod's military career began after becoming a direct-commissioned second lieutenant from Tuskegee University's ROTC program into the United States Army.

Sherrod earned his VFW eligibility deploying to Jordan and Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom and to Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. During his four years of active duty in the military he was promoted to the rank of captain.

Sherrod is a Life member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated, a

member of 200 Corinthians Masonic Lodge, and was commissioned as an Honorable Kentucky Colonel.

Sherrod is currently retired from DOD service and serves as a full-time spouse and father.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Brian Willette has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for three years. He is a Life member of Post 3104 in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Brian is a five-time All-American Post Commander and past All-American District Commander. He currently serves as the Department Sergeant-at-Arms.

Brian retired from the United States Army as a staff sergeant. He completed his basic infantry and airborne training in 1983. Brian deployed to Bosnia in 2001 with the 29th Infantry Division in support of Operation Joint Forge.

In 2010, he deployed to Afghanistan with the 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. His awards include the Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, and the Combat Action Badge.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Folks, these are the individuals 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 and represent the organization well.

(Standing ovation)

#### NATIONAL SERGEANTS-AT-ARMS MAKE TWO PRESENTATIONS

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: We will now have two special presentations from Bryan O'Brien on behalf of the National Sergeants.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrades, we have, over the years, in the 15 years that I've been at the helm of the National Sergeants and the 21 years total, I have worked with some very distinguished, dedicated individuals

such as those that stand behind me.

They are people that get up early in the morning, as you know, and they put you to bed at night. I have never worked with a more dedicated group of veterans than these that stand behind me and those that have worked with me in the past.

But we just don't go right here with the sergeants. There are individuals that have helped us along the way. And last year, we recognized two individuals that do an outstanding job behind the scenes and they have taken care of the sergeants. This year will be no different.

We have a presentation to be made. And if I may have at this time -- Sergeant, escort Vanessa Kane to my station.

Everybody pretty much knows who Vanessa Kane is. But there are times that the sergeants can't make it in on time or they need a little extra space for rooms and availability at every convention or every conference. Vanessa has gone out of her way to help these sergeants, and she's made it comfortable for us along the way.

So, Vanessa, on behalf of the Sergeants, the National Sergeant-at-Arms Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Certificate of Commendation presented to Vanessa Kane in recognition for your distinguished service in furthering the principles and objectives of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Sergeants Team.

Presented this 24th day of July, 2019, signed by me, the National Sergeant, Bryan P. O'Brien, on behalf of the National Sergeants Team.

(Applause)

#### REMARKS BY VANESSA KANE

MS. KANE: Kevin said don't give me the mic. I just want to say briefly it is my -- Saturday was my 21st anniversary with this wonderful organization, and this is my 22nd convention. It is my honor and privilege and a blessing to work for and with you-all. Thank you.

(Applause)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Unlike Vanessa Kane, this next gentleman you probably don't recognize that much, but you see his work at every convention, and it's hard work. Because sometimes you just can't find

what room you're going to be in, what floor you're going to be on, and what time you should be there. This man does that for you.

Every beginning of a convention, this gentleman has come forth to the Sergeants and he has totally typed out or written out every single room, every single floor, and every single place that we have to be at this convention during the week.

He doesn't have to do that, but he has helped the Sergeants along the way. And we are very -- so very happy to recognize him for helping the Sergeants when we have limited time to get from Point A to Point B where we can't recall and find out where we're going to be.

So, Lewie Cooper, if you would please step forward.

(Applause)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: The citation reads, "National Sergeant-at-Arms Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Certificate of Commendation to Lewis B. Cooper.

"In recognition of your distinguished service in furthering the principles and objectives of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Sergeants Team."

"Presented this 24th day of July, 2019. Signed by National Sergeant-at-Arms Bryan P. O'Brien on behalf of the National Sergeants Team."

Thank you, Lewie.

(Applause)

#### REMARKS BY LEWIS B. COOPER

MR. COOPER: Let me just say this is certainly an honor this morning and a surprise. It's always been my pleasure -- I call them the Sergeants Corps -- to work with them the past 13 years. I felt I did my job as best I could. And anything I could do for them, maybe help them a little bit. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: We started this last year. We'll continue

it on as long as I am the National Sergeant. And I'm sure that whoever takes my place will do the same. These are the people that are behind the scenes that do the job.

Much like your Sergeants, you might not see us around too much until you see us on the floor, but we're active. We keep active. But we want to have help along the way, and these people do it for us. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

ANNOUNCEMENT OF WINNERS OF NATIONAL BUDDY POPPY CONTEST AND  
SILENT AUCTION RESULTS BY LYNN ROLF, DIRECTOR OF VFW PROGRAMS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Now, to announce the 2019 National Buddy Poppy contest winners is Lynn Rolf, Director of VFW Programs. Welcome to the stage Director Rolf.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Good morning, Comrades.

(Morning)

COMRADE ROLF: 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 debt and our service to the living veterans. For decades VFW members have distributed the beloved Buddy Poppy to millions of Americans across the country.

Today we are taking a few moments to honor and recognize those whose passion and creativity have taken Buddy Poppies to the next level. These are individuals and posts who have used their Buddy Poppies in creation of exceptional and inspiring works of art and displays. Hopefully each of you took a little time this week to go through the little veranda and seen all the Poppy displays.

They're absolutely breathtaking.

This year's entries were judged by the National VFW Programs

Committee Chairman Tim Borland, accompanied by committee members Quincy Myrick, Kirk Rosa, Mary Smith, and Curt Watts. And the 2018-'19 Auxiliary Buddy Poppy VFW National Home Ambassador Renee Fulk, and the 2019-'20 Auxiliary Designate for the Buddy Poppy/VFW National Home Ambassador Betty Stahm.

These displays were judged on effectiveness, clarity of theme, suitability, and originality, and the number of poppies used.

You'll see up on the screen Category 1 for the public promotion of a poppy campaign:

Honorable mention goes to Jefferson County Memorial Post 3522 and its Auxiliary out of Charles Town, Virginia.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Correction. West Virginia.

Third place: General Dwight D. Eisenhower Post 3279 and its VFW Auxiliary out of Abilene, Kansas.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Second place is VFW Auxiliary to the Mecklenburg Post No. 9488, Charlotte, North Carolina.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: First place is Hometown-Murray Post 9773 and its VFW Hometown, Illinois.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Category 2 for the use of poppies in a memorial and inspirational display: Honorable mention goes to the VFW Auxiliary to the Captain John P. Monahan Post 12136, Indian Land, South Carolina.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Third place, Dusenberry-Flannery Post 2064 and its

Auxiliary, Maybrook, New York.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Second place, the Roscoe Post No. 2955 and its Auxiliary, Roscoe, Illinois.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: First place the VFW Auxiliary to the Verle Huffman Post 9644, Fort Logan, Colorado.

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Category 3 for artistic and decorative use of poppies. Honorable mention goes to VFW Auxiliary to Clyde E. Newman, Junior, Post 10054, Pahrump, Nevada.

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Third place, VFW Auxiliary to the Sergeant J.D. Wadkins, Junior, Post 3713 Coolidge, Arizona.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Second place, the Doucet-Aucoin Post No. 8971 and its VFW Auxiliary, Eunice, Louisiana.

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE ROLF: First place, the Crawford County Post 4549 and its Auxiliary, Robinson, Illinois.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: Illinois was top of the game this year. And last but

certainly not least, the Director's Award is given to the Buddy Poppy display that the judges, in my opinion, most creatively and effectively represents the intent of the Buddy Poppy program.

I am pleased to announce that this year's recipient of the Director's Award is the Hugo Matejcek Post No. 3723 and its VFW Auxiliary from Owatonna, Minnesota.

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE ROLF: For this year's silent auction, 40 Departments donated items, many reflective of their home states and commonwealths. For the last 19 years, this auction has raised money for issues that we hold near and dear to our heart. I am proud to announce that this year's recipient will be our National Home.

Commander-in-Chief, I'm very proud to announce that this year's auction raised a total of \$5,367. And I'm pleased to present you with a large check to our National Home.

(Applause)

COMRADE ROLF: God bless you-all. Thank you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I thought Lynn was setting me up for failure there. I couldn't find my page. Thank you, Lynn.

PRESENTATION OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL AND CITATION TO  
GARY BARRINGER BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: It's truly an honor and a privilege for me to present our next guest with the Distinguished Service Medal and Citation in recognition of his admirable years of loyalty and service to the VFW.

Gary Barringer served on the National Sergeant-at-Arms for nearly 22 years, retiring from the team in 2017.

He is a Gold Legacy Life member of Post 9134 in Rockwell, North Carolina, past North Carolina Department Commander, and has been Post



Quartermaster for over 30 years. He also serves as Post Adjutant.

Gary serves as the Veteran Affairs Voluntary Service Representative for the Department of North Carolina at the W.G. "Bill Hefner" VA Medical Center in Salisbury, North Carolina.

Gary's commitment to veterans, service members, and their families and to our organization's mission has been truly extraordinary. For his many years of dedicated service, we owe a lasting debt of gratitude to him. Please join me in honoring Gary Barringer with the Distinguished Service Medal and Citation.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Distinguished Service Medal and Citation awarded to Gary Barringer.

In sincere gratitude and esteemed recognition of his distinguished record of exceptional and resolute service to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States as a member of the National Sergeant-at-Arms. Steadfast in his efforts to maintain order, he efficiently and successfully executed his duties, thus contributing to the success of the VFW mission.

His loyalty and commitment to the VFW, along with the professionalism with which he fulfilled his duties, have a long-lasting legacy that will not soon be forgotten, earning him the utmost appreciation 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 24th day of July, 2019.

Signed by B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, and Kevin Jones, Adjutant General.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY PAST NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS GARY BARRINGER

COMRADE BARRINGER: My Comrades, it has indeed been a pleasure of mine serving on the National Sergeants for all these years. And I thank the national staff and everything for this recognition. I will cherish this medal for the rest of my life.

I'd like to thank my comrades from the state of North Carolina for all

they have done for me and --

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE BARRINGER: Thank you-all.

And everyone else that's in here with us while I was on the Sergeants, and for all of your kind and -- I guess you would say words that you've all said to each and every one of us. And I truly thank each and every one of you. And I salute you-all.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Would all Past Commanders-in-Chief please report to the dais.

INTRODUCTION OF SUPREME COMMANDER EMIL SOLTESZ, MILITARY ORDER  
OF THE COOTIE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: A trip to almost any VA Hospital will reveal the important work of the Military Order of the Cootie. Each year the Cooties spend thousands of hours bringing comfort and laughs to our hospitalized veterans. Their commitment to "Keep '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 99th Supreme Scratch in Kansas City last July.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the Supreme Commander of the Military Order of the Cootie of the United States of America, Emil Soltesz from the great state of Ohio.

(Boo)

REMARKS BY SUPREME COMMANDER EMIL SOLTESZ,  
MILITARY ORDER OF THE COOTIE

SUPREME COMMANDER SOLTESZ: Such a lousy welcome. It took me all year to train that gentleman to take his gavel with him when he left. I've been told to keep it short, so that's essentially what I'm going to attempt to do here.

The membership report, we reached 91.88 percent. Not nearly as well as our Commander-in-Chief. We have 11,320 members.

Inspections, we are at 94.76 percent, and we have 271 inspections out of 286. And for our purpose and existence, we have done \$5,105,595.05. We have reached 211 percent of our goal for the year. I'd like to thank the VFW, the Commander-in-Chief definitely, for his assistance and help during the course of the year and all the officers and members of this organization.

And with that, I bid you good day.

(Boo)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: They got enough fines out of me this year. I'm not giving them no more.

GREETINGS AND INTRODUCTION COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF B.J. LAWRENCE  
TO VFW AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT SANDI KRIEBEL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, please draw your attention to the center aisle. I'm extremely pleased that here to visit our convention today is a woman with whom I have been proud to serve with over the past-year.

Sandi Kriebel has worked tirelessly on behalf of the VFW Auxiliary for many years and has certainly left an incredible legacy for others to follow. I admire her deeply. She is a true, true, loving and caring and outstanding leader.

Please give a warm welcome to a wonderful woman from Ellicott City, Maryland, Sandi Kriebel, National President of the VFW Auxiliary.

(Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort our National President to my station. Please be seated.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY VFW AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT SANDI KRIEBEL

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: Good morning.

(Good morning)

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: Are you having a great day?

(Yeah)

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: Commander-in-Chief Lawrence, National VFW Officers, and VFW members, it is such a pleasure for me to be with you this morning and have the opportunity to greet you one last time as your National President of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary.

To some very special VFW delegates in the office -- in the audience, my very own Department of Maryland.

(777)

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: Thank you. That's my District 777. I can't even begin to express how grateful I am for all the love and support you have given me in the past six years of this amazing journey. You believed in me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

This amazing, once-in-a-lifetime journey of being the VFW National President ends later today. A journey that has taken me across the country and over oceans. A journey that has shown me the love, passion, and dedication of this great organization and our mission.

It has been my greatest honor, one that I have dreamed of since I was a young girl to represent this organization as your National President. I have been so inspired by each of you. The hospitality and kindness shown to me by the VFW has been and will always hold a special place in my heart.

To the VFW "Make It Happen" team of state commanders.

(Cheering)

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: Let's hear that again.

(Shout-out)

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: From the VFW "Make It Happen" team

of state commanders.

(Cheering)

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: I especially want to thank you for the support you showed for your department presidents and the members of the VFW Auxiliary. We are a family.

Now, I have a song here -- thank you.

I have a song here I would like to sing. Some of you have sang it with me. And it's just to the song "We Are Family," and I changed the words a little bit. So I'm going to kind of sing the first time around. So if you could listen to the words and sing with me, I would appreciate that.

And this is how it goes: We are family, the VFW and Auxiliary. We are family, comrades, brothers, sisters, and me. We are family serving our veterans in need.

Okay, everybody? Let's go. We are family, the VFW and Auxiliary. We are family, comrades, brothers, sisters, and me. We are family, serving our veterans in need.

Okay. Now, one more time. Let's hear it. We are family, the VFW and Auxiliary. We are family, comrades, brothers, sisters, and me. We are family, serving our veterans in need.

Okay. Now I'm going to say "one, two, three," and when I do, we're going to say "We are family." And I really need to hear that.

One, two, three. We are family.

(We are family.)

Thank you. And do you know what? When you said "We are family," you smiled. You actually smiled. And that's what this is all about.

One of the things as a family, we do need to stay focused and treat each other with respect and to educate all our members on the meaning and the purpose of what this great organization is all about.

I want to thank the Commander-in-Chief Lawrence and his lovely wife, Mary. I can honestly call you true friends and partners in this crucial mission of ours. You believed we could "Make It Happen," and we did together. Because of you, we're becoming a real VFW family that supports and promotes one another. B.J. and Mary, it was my absolute honor serving side by side with you.

To every veteran in this room, thank you for your service to our country. You share an unshakeable bond with one another that is stronger than most will ever know. The bond of combat military service is a unique experience that permits the VFW to achieve greater success for veterans everywhere and for the military community at large. Congratulations to you and to our Commander-in-Chief for reaching over 100 percent plus in membership, something that has not been done for 27 years.

Thank you, Commander B.J., for being my Uncle Sam. You made a great one. And for always including me as National President and the Auxiliary as one VFW family.

(Applause)

NATIONAL PRESIDENT KRIEBEL: I truly want to thank each and every one of you. And I have said this many times before, and I'm going to say it again because I feel it's important: Ronald Reagan once stated that some people go an entire lifetime wondering if they have ever made a difference. You, our American heroes, you've already made that difference. Thank you so much for my freedom and democracy that I get to share each and every day. I love you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: While Sandi was talking, she presented me with a custom pair of American flag cuff links.

Thank you, Sandi.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Before you depart us, Sandi, I just want to say we've been personal friends for over 16 years. And I have the utmost respect for you, as you know. You truly believe in both our organizations, not just the Auxiliary. And you have a passion for serving our veterans, our military, and their families.

I will always treasure and cherish our year together as National President and Commander-in-Chief. But, most importantly, I will always treasure the guidance and education you've given me over the last 16 years to make me a better person and a better leader for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I love you. Thank you for all you do.

(Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort our National President from the hall and back to her meeting area. Thank you.

(Standing ovation)

INTRODUCTION OF AL LUGO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF  
VFW RETIREMENT HOME IN FORT McCOY, FLORIDA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Our next guest is here representing a very unique and special endeavor that's very close to home here in the great state of Florida. Retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Al Lugo, Junior, is the Executive Director of the VFW Retirement Home in Fort McCoy.

Located just about two hours north of here, the VFW Retirement Home is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit 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 the facility is to provide a homelike atmosphere to veterans who have proven their loyalty and patriotism by serving our country in foreign lands during a time of war. The home's guiding principle is to provide affordable, independent living accommodations to VFW and Auxiliary members and their spouses.

The doors to the VFW Retirement Home opened in October of 1991. The facility is spread out over 42 acres and rests among tranquil oaks and palms.

Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to Al Lugo.

(Applause)

REMARKS FROM LIEUTENANT COLONEL AL LUGO

LIEUTENANT COLONEL LUGO: Good morning. Thank you, Chief. Some of you took a trip with us on Sunday to the village that you know it was all about.

I appreciate the Chief allowing me the opportunity to say a few words.

We want to present him a small token of appreciation for everything he's done, not only for the hundred percent but for his leadership and for his mentorship across the country. And I shared some time with him in mid-January here in Orlando at the Student Veterans Association VFW convention.

So at this time, I'd like to present the Chief a small token of appreciation from the Department of Florida, Chief.

Key to the Village Director's Award presented to B.J. Lawrence, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Army, Veterans of Foreign Wars United States 2018-2019.

Commander, thank you for your leadership, mentorship, and friendship from the resident staff and board members of the VFW Veterans Village presented 24 July, 2019, Orlando, Florida. Thank you, Chief.

(Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF PAST COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF BY  
ADJUTANT GENERAL KEVIN JONES

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: At this time, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce our Past Commanders-in-Chief attending this convention: 1976-1977, RD "Bulldog" Smith.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1983-1984, Clifford J. Olson, Junior.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1988-1989, Larry W. Rivers.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1989-1990, Walter G. Hogan.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1991-1992, Robert E. Wallace.



(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1993-1994, George R. Cramer.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1994-1995, Allen "Gunner" Kent.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1995-1996, Paul Spera.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1996-1997, James Nier.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1997-1998, John Moon.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1998-1999, Tom Pouliot.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 1999-2000, John Smart.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2000-2001, John Gwizdak.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2003-2004, Ed Banas, Senior.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2004-2005, John Furgess.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2005-2006, Jim Mueller.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2009-2010, Tommy Tradewell.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2010-2011, Richard Eubank.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2012-2013, John Hamilton.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2013-2014, Bill Thien.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2014-2015, John Stroud.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: 2017-2018, Keith Harman.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Folks, let's give them a round of applause for being the outstanding leaders and the mentors to several of you in this

room. Thank you, gentlemen.

(Standing ovation)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Before I introduce the next, I would like all newly-elected council members please to report to the front row on my left here. Also, all newly-appointed officers, please make your way to the stage: Chief of Staff, Paul Phillips, and Mark Newman, please. Would all 2018-2019 commanders please come forward and assemble.

#### NOMINEES FOR NATIONAL HOME BOARD OF TRUSTEES

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: I will now read the nominations for the National Home Board of Trustees. There are two nominations for District 1 for the 2019 to 2025 term:

Representing Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont, Keith Jackson has been a VFW National Home member since August, 2016. He is endorsed by the VFW Department of Massachusetts.

Lynn Dunton has been a VFW National Home Life member since May 20-- excuse me -- 2004. She is endorsed by the VFW Department of Maine Auxiliary.

There are two nominations for District 2 for the 2019-2025 term representing Europe, New Jersey, and New York:

Art Schueneman has been a VFW National Home life member since May, 2012. He is endorsed by the VFW Department of New York.

Eloise Eith has been a VFW National Home life member since May, 1995 She is endorsed by the VFW Department of New Jersey Auxiliary.

#### PRESENTATION OF LEGION OF HONOR BRONZE MEDAL TO COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF B.J. LAWRENCE BY PAST NATIONAL CHAPLAIN PETER HOOK

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: At this time, we have a presentation by Past National Chaplain Peter Hook to the Commander-in-Chief.

PAST NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HOOK: The Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is pleased to present the Legion of Honor Bronze

Medallion to Vincent "B.J." Lawrence in recognition, B.J., of your exceptional lifetime service to all people, especially veterans.

This award is given in honor of the Four Chaplains and their selfless, heroic acts aboard the U.S.A.T. Dorchester on February 3rd, 1943.

Commander-in-Chief Lawrence, your leadership and your numerous acts of volunteerism and selfless service have been a model and inspiration for those of us in this great organization. Congratulations on this award.

(Applause)

PRESENTATION FROM 2018-2019 DEPARTMENT COMMANDERS TO  
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF B.J. LAWRENCE

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: At this time I would ask -- the class of 2018-2019 are now gathering here on stage to present a special presentation to our Commander-in-Chief. Past Department of Louisiana Commander Matt West will be their representative.

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER JACKSON: Good morning, Comrades. I'm Keith Jackson from the Department of Massachusetts, and I will actually be talking today. So first of all, I'd like to say these past three years, Chief, have been great years working with you. Over the past three years, we -- all the state commanders of the 2018-2019 class, we all learned and we all grew a lot due to your leadership.

Throughout the three years, we communicated effectively. We communicated receiving phone calls from the Chief, emails, and even posts on Facebook. And over these three years, we were able to take the message "Make It Happen," back to our departments.

And we were very successful in getting the information down to our post and district levels where they executed the membership program and actually was able to get the national organization to 100 percent for the first time in 27 years through your leadership. And we thank you for that, Chief.

(Applause)

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER JACKSON: But it all didn't just end with membership because our programs were strong and relevant to our organization mission. And we also were able to make sure that all of our programs were alive and well, and we executed them all in an outstanding manner. And, again, it's because of your leadership, Chief.

So on behalf of the class of the 2018-2019 State Commanders, we would like to present you with this gift.

(Applause)

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER JACKSON: And, once again, thank you, Chief, for your service.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: I call on the Chief of Staff and the Inspector General to also present a gift to our Commander-in-Chief.

CHIEF OF STAFF HERKER: Chief, first off, I want to say thank you for the appointment as your Chief of Staff. It's been a pleasure. It's been an outstanding year.

And along with the other gift that the Commanders bought -- would you please put on the screen the other gift that the Chief is getting. And with that from -- from myself, Charley Shoemaker, and Tim Peters, we have a gift that goes along with the gift that they're giving you. I understand you have an issue with sight, and this should help you see as far as you want to see, Chief.

(Applause)

CHIEF OF STAFF HERKER: It's a .45 and a Weatherby .30-06.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I hope he don't have no bullets.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Commanders, you must really trust me giving me firearms. I love you-all. You rock. You made it happen. Thank you.

(Applause)

PRESENTATION FROM JUDY BROWN, IRAQ VETERAN, INDIANA, TO  
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF B.J. LAWRENCE

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Our next guest earned her VFW membership eligibility while serving in Iraq. After returning home, she wanted to make a difference and has been advocating for veterans all the way from the Indiana state house to Washington, DC.

Sometimes it can be difficult for us veterans to tell our story. However, Judy Brown has developed a unique way of sharing her stories, and that's through one quilt at a time.

Here to present the Commander-in-Chief Lawrence with a special gift, I'm pleased to welcome to the stage VFW member Judy Brown.

(Applause)

COMRADE BROWN: Good morning. I served in the Army two different times. And like they said, I earned my right to join the VFW by serving in Iraq in 2009.

When I returned back to Fort Dix, New Jersey, I met a group from the Pennsylvania National Guard, and they had lost 12 guys that night -- that time. And that was the first big state deployment since Vietnam. They would sit out in the hallway at night and they would cry. And I'd go out there and give them a brother-sister hug.

One day a lady came out and asked me would I please give these guys a quilt. And then later, she presented me a quilt. I said, "I don't deserve this quilt. I didn't kill anyone. I didn't kick down any doors" -- "doors like these guys did."

Later when I returned home, I took and found out about a young guy coming home to our county, Parke County, Indiana, and his name was Matt Kinsey. He was a below-the-knee amputee. I put out that I was looking for a red, white, and blue quilt. And my friend, Madonna Babbiock (ph) had one. So on that October evening in 2010, we presented him with a quilt. The joy and honor I felt was overwhelming.

Since that time, we started a group called "Old Glory Quilters," and we have been presenting quilts from sea to shining sea with all the people that I have met. We have presented somewhere between 1,441 quilts, honoring our soldiers one quilt at a time.

Back in April of this year, it was pretty unique. We did a Facebook Live at an NRA show, and that was in Indianapolis. And I had the great honor of meeting two guys that I refer to as Rick and Rick, and I got to present to them two quilts.

When I came home, I was a mess. It was like a merry-go-round. It just kept going and kept going and kept going like everybody's life here in the United States. You know, they just kept on doing their own thing. But when I was deployed, it was like when I came home, like, I was trying to get on that

merry-go-round, but I couldn't get on it because it was going too fast, and it wouldn't ever stop for me.

So the only way that I could find my help was through the VA and through quilting. So I could give back, by using my voice, one quilt at a time. I found that voice by working with some Vietnam veterans and presenting quilts to some Vietnam veterans.

And so today, Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence, I was told by a couple of folks, "It would be pretty cool to present B.J. a quilt." So today, would you please accept this quilt for your service. And I have also been selected to be on a small segment of "Returning the Favor." And I would like to present to you this quilt for your service to this grateful Nation. And thank you, B.J.

(Applause)

PRESENTATION FROM JIM CHANCELLOR TO  
SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WILLIAM "DOC" SCHMITZ

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: His experience as a door gunner during Vietnam helped establish our next guest's belief that all veterans are only separated by time and location served, that otherwise we're all the same.

Jim Chancellor, President, Chief Executive Officer of American Veterans Collection, Incorporated, has designed a unique collection of military service rings which communicate a familiarity with other combat veterans on sight. With a mantra "I know, I understand, and I care," the rings represent the camaraderie of an elite group of individuals with a shared experience.

Here with us today, please join me in welcoming Mr. Jim Chancellor as he presents a special ring to the VFW's National Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, William "Doc" Schmitz. Jim?

(Applause)

MR. CHANCELLOR: Good morning, Comrades. Thank you, Chief. Thank you, friends. I'm glad to be back here with you again today. When I first sat down and started to write about what I wanted to talk to you about today, my visions went back to Chicago and Billy Ray.

At that time, I talked about unity, about taking the hurdles down and inviting our Vietnam veterans in. And I know you've all experienced the problems with bringing in the Vietnam veteran. We've kind of stayed away for a long time. But we eventually came in. We eventually knew the power of the VFW. And I'm going to share with you a couple things we're doing in northwest Indiana that seemed to have helped us just a little bit.

First, we're trying to change the image of our veterans, not just our -- the great generation, not just the World War II veterans, but the Vietnam veterans and the Korean veterans and our young patriots serving now. We want them to be held in the same regard as we do our flag.

We'd like -- we'd like our veterans to represent America as our flag does. Our flag is our way of life. It represents our liberties and our freedoms. And that's exactly what our veterans do too. We are America.

Secondly, we're working very diligently and very hard with our veterans that might be struggling with the war. Now, we need for them to know that their fight is an honorable fight, and they need to fight on.

Now, some of us had a two-year gig or a four-year gig or perhaps a



commitment, a lifetime commitment. But once that uniform came off, once your ETS date came and you left the service, for the vast majority of us that uniform meant the war was over.

But for some of us, taking that uniform off didn't mean that. For some of us we still fight the demons. And we need to know that we stand behind our young veterans or our struggling Vietnam veterans, like myself. They need to know that we walk lockstep with them, shoulder to shoulder, ready to catch them if they stumbled. And, lastly, what we try to do is we try to bring our veterans out into our functions, into the VFWs and in different service organizations. And I can hear you now say, "Jim, how can you do that? We've tried that. We've tried just about everything we can to get our young veterans to come out."

And they probably won't for a while because they're busy raising families and working. But they will. They will need the VFW. We can't wait on them. We have to go get them. And the first thing we have to do is we have to gain their trust. Gaining their trust is easy. Keeping it is a bit different.

I work with the homeless and the less fortunate in northwest Indiana for many, many years, and that's the issue that comes up the most. Whether it's justified or not, it's that trust that we need to -- we need to earn their trust before they come into our fold. We can't teach them if we can't get to them. And they need to trust us.

Some of the things that our young veterans have told me that really kind of bothers them is things like answering machines after 5:00 o'clock or sentences like, "Oh, I'll get back to you in a couple days." Or, "Have you tried this," or, "Have you tried that?"

All of these come from people who just have a job. And the answering machine at 7:00 o'clock means just what it means: That there is nobody available.

We were at a housing meeting in east Chicago, a homeless housing meeting, and the chairperson asked if there was any questions, and I raised my hand. And she said, "Yes, Mr. Chancellor, what is it?"

And I said, "Who answers the phone after 5:00 o'clock?" She said, "Well, our hours are 9:00 to 5:00. And the veteran will" -- "will leave a recording, and then we'll get back to them the next day."

And I said, "That really doesn't work. Problems don't just come from 9:00 to 5:00." I said, "If we're going to work together, I'd like to have my cell phone on all printed material and all voice mails as emergency contact for after hours." She said, "Mr. Chancellor, you sure you want to do that?"

And I said, "Of course I do. We need to show them that we care. We can't just tell them that we care. We need to show them." Now, let's think out of the box just for a minute. Wouldn't it be great if a VFW post out there would put up a basketball hoop or a basketball -- use a gymnasium somewhere and call it the "Veterans Court"? That would be a newsworthy story. We could get it in the paper that the VFWs are reaching out to our younger veterans.

And then we'll throw in a free-throw contest between our veterans and their children. Again, newsworthy. Again, offering them to come in.

And then after the day is done, we take them into our post and we feed them lunch and give them a little presentation. And who knows? One of them might be looking around and see a brochure. See a brochure that tells you the difference between PTSD and moral injuries.

Who knows? They might be back to play basketball again. Who knows? The next time we see them that they might be at our next meeting. We have to continue to try. We need to continue to reach out to them.

I was asked one time by a reporter, during an interview, she said, "Mr. Chancellor, what is it that America can do for our veterans?" And I said, "Just respect us for what we have given you."

And she looked at me with a puzzled face and said, "Mr. Chancellor, what is it that you've given me?"

And I responded, I said, "I've given you part of my soul. I've given you part of my peace of mind so that you can keep yours. Respect. That's all we ask for."

Now, let's talk about a Navy corpsman, our Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, William "Doc" Schmitz. Doc served in the Navy from 1966 to '70. He was assigned to the United States Marine Corps Infantry Artillery serving in the northern section of South Vietnam.

I have often said that those that care for our battle-wounded have a tremendous responsibility and a terrible job. And I still believe that today. And so from one combat to the other, I want to thank you, Doc, for all you did for our veterans and what you do for them today.

Doc received the National Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

Our Commander joined the VFW in 1971. He served as Department Commander, Post Commander, Southern Tier County Council Commander and District 5 Commander. He was editor of the New York overseas publications for nine years.

In 2007, he was elected Department surgeon from the Department of

New York, where he served five consecutive terms. He served as National Surgeon General from 2010 to 2011 and Inspector General from 2015 to 2016.

Doc continued to serve for the Department of Corrections as a registered nurse and an acting nurse administrator for 30 years.

Now, it was said in my introduction that the mantra of the ring is "I know, I understand, and I care." I know about war because I've been there. I understand what you might be going through. And I really care.

And, Doc -- Doc, those words are almost the mantra for him. He's been to war and he cares. And he wants everyone to tries to understand.

This ring is requested by General actually requested by the late great Bob Hope. It was worn by Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Sammy L. Davis; Jan Scruggs, the founder of the know that he cares. And he worn internationally. It was William Westmoreland. It was Vietnam Wall in Washington. And it's been presented to many of our Commanders-in-Chief in the past.

Now it's time to add another name to this list. It's with honor and respect that I present this ring from the American Veterans Collection to our incoming -- the new incoming Commander-in-Chief of the greatest veterans organizations on the planet, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Comrades, our Commander-in-Chief, William J. Schmitz.

(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: You've got to see this.

MR. CHANCELLOR: (Inaudible).

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: Whoa. Thank you very much.

MR. CHANCELLOR: Thank you.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: Yeah. Wow. Let's give this guy a hand.

(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: I'm wired so don't say anything weird here. Okay?

PROCEEDINGS MOTION BY ADJUTANT GENERAL KEVIN JONES

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: I move that the proceedings of the

Veterans of Foreign Wars 120th 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 2nd, 1968, and entitled as Title 44, United States Code, Section 1332.

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL ANDERSON: Debra Anderson, Quartermaster General, Delegate, Post 7356. I second that motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, we have a motion on the floor that's been duly seconded. Any discussion?

Hearing and seeing none, all in favor of the motion vote by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, nay. The motion carries.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: All those making nominations and seconds for all elected officers, if you'll please make your way to the stage. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Having no further responsibility, it is now my pleasure to dismiss the Committee on General Resolutions.

As always a job well done by you, Chairman Ed Banas, Vice Chairmen Keith Harman, Bill Thien, and John Gwizdak, and the good members of your committee. And my thanks to all the chairmen, vice chairmen, and to all of the members of each committee for your time and dedicated efforts.

Comrades, our committee chairmen put time in all year to conduct and review the business of our great organization. Without their deliberations and their professionalism and their caring, it would not be possible for us to be where we are today.

Other than the nomination, election, and installation of officers, is there any business to come before this convention? Any other business?

Hearing none, I will now call on the Adjutant General for any announcements he may have.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: As you may recall, a few years ago we changed the structure of the individual ceremonial parades. This year we will have the same procedure. The Commander-in-Chief, the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief will maintain the traditional parade following the presentations and placement of their caps, pins, and badges.

The Quartermaster General, Chaplain, Judge Advocate General and Surgeon General will share in one collective ceremonial parade at the conclusion of the presentation and placement of the cap, pin, and badge of the Surgeon General and his remarks.

In accordance with our convention rules and Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, if only one person is nominated after ensuring that, in fact, no members present wish to make further nominations, I, acting as Chair, will simply declare that the nominee is elected, thus effecting the election by unanimous consent or acclamation.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: You-all ready? Love you guys.

## NOMINATION OF OFFICERS

### NOMINATIONS FOR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We will now proceed with the nomination and election of the 2019-2020 National Officers. I will open the nomination for the office of Commander-in-Chief. Is there any nomination for Commander-in-Chief?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SPERA: Thank you very much, Comrade Commander-in-Chief. Comrades and delegates to this convention, two years ago I stood before the convention to place a nomination for the name of an individual for the office of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Whenever we do that, at whatever level, we think we know, with certainty, how that person will behave as a leader. But we never always know for sure.

Well, I am here to say that on behalf of the -- of Doc's post, his county, his district, his state, and the Eastern States Conference, Doc has displayed the leadership ability far beyond what we even expected of him.

We all know his background. We all know that his love for veterans comes from his love for his Marines. Because you cannot be a combat corpsman attached to Marines without loving every single one of them and caring for every single one of them. And that's what Doc did when he went to war.

When he returned, he continued that service in his community and in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. His accomplishments are many, far too many for me to repeat. He culminated those accomplishments as the State Commander for the great Department of New York. He served our organization as the Surgeon General.

And the one thing that we all know in this room -- all of us here and around the country who have met and had the opportunity to speak to Doc Schmitz -- is what he will tell you himself. He feels more comfortable sitting out there with you than he does up here. He believes that he is one of us. Someone who was fortunate enough to become a leader in our organization, but one who believes that his place, as it was in Vietnam, is in the trench with the troops.

So it is with great pride and with a feeling of privilege that I stand before you here today to place into nomination for the high office of Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2019-2020 year the name of William "Doc" Schmitz for Commander-in-Chief. Thank you.

(Cheering and applause)

COMRADE BURKE: Comrades, Harold Burke, Delegate, VFW Post 1895, Schenectady, New York.

Commander-in-Chief Lawrence, National Chaplain Charlene, National Officers, distinguished guests of the dias, Past Commanders-in-Chiefs of the 21st [sic] National Convention, family and friends, it is an honor for me to stand before you on behalf of the great Department of New York and second the nomination of William "Doc" Schmitz for the high office of Commander-in-Chief.

Doc has completed many accomplishments during his long and distinguished service to our great organization. Doc joined his post in 1971 in Corning, New York, Post 524, where he maintains his Gold Legacy membership.

Doc served as Department Commander and has held many other state and national positions since joining our organization.

We are very -- the Department of New York is very proud of Doc. And on behalf of the members of the Department of New York and its auxiliary, it's a personal privilege and honor to second the nomination of William "Doc" Schmitz to the -- for the high office of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Commander-in-Chief.

(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Are there any other nominations for Commander-in-Chief? Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Commander-in-Chief closed.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Jones, Adjutant General. Pursuant to the power and authority vested in me, I declare William J. "Doc" Schmitz elected Commander-in-Chief for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2019-'20 year.

(Standing ovation)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, I present to you the Commander-in-Chief-elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars: William "Doc" Schmitz.

(Cheering and applause)

(Placement of cap and badge by Bob Barnhart.)

#### REMARKS BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT WILLIAM "DOC" SCHMITZ

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: You got my mic turned on or not? Yeah, it's on. Will you please turn it down a little bit or what? Yeah. Well, I don't have a volume control.

Please excuse my voice. Somebody asked me this morning and the last couple of days --

Move a little closer? I'm wired. I'm wired, Boss. I've got a mic, yeah.

They asked me, you know, "How do you feel?" I says, "Actually, to be honest with you, this is kind of" -- "kind of embarrassing and it's extremely humbling."

What I'm doing right now is there's a guy that our department knows, Past Commander of the State of New York, Ron Bush. He gave me this thing, which is the Shield and the Caduceus of a Corpsman. Is that better?

(Laughter)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SCHMITZ: I'm going to shut up right now because I've got a little bit more to say after we do a little walking

around. And hopefully my voice will be okay.

Chaplain, you've got to start praying for this. Okay? So I guess we're going to do a walk-around, and we'll be back for the acceptance speech.

That's part of the deal. Right? Thank you.

(Applause)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief-elect, it is with an extreme honor that the National Sergeants of the Veterans of Foreign Wars escort you around the hall as the newly-elected Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: That's good because (inaudible).

(Laughter)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Mr. Maestro, the music, the United States Marine Corps.

(Whereupon, a ceremonial parade was held.)

#### NOMINATIONS FOR SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Hal, I think they really wanted you to wait till the last minute. I will now open the nomination for the office of Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Is there any nomination for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GWIZDAK: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, officers elected and appointed, and to you the delegates of this convention, last year we came around to your conferences and brought to you the Southern Conference nominee. We asked for your consideration at that time and your support of our captain. You gave us the privilege of having the Junior Vice Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Today I stand here not to give a long speech -since I'm not known for that.

(Laughter)



PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GWIZDAK: But however with this, when we look for leaders, you don't have to look far because they always will rise to the top. The individual that we presented to you we asked you to consider him for Junior Vice.

Not only has he exceeded in doing his job as Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, but he has taken on additional responsibilities. He has proven that leaders are like eagles. They do not flock. You find them one at a time.

His leadership has been shown to you. He has proven to you that your selection last year was proper. So I ask you again this year as we present Hal Roesch for the high office of Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief. He has earned the right. He has shown that he can do it. So now all we ask is that you approve it.

And I place in nomination the name of Hal Roesch for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief. And I am a delegate from Post 5080, Lake City, Georgia, and also a Past Commander-in-Chief. Hal Roesch for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

(Cheering and applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SMART: Thank you, Comrades and Delegates of the 120th National Convention. And let me commend you, Commander-in-Chief and all your staff, for an outstanding convention this year. Ten years ago, I was sitting with my Virginia delegation, there was a young man sitting beside me by the name of Hal Roesch. And he leaned over that time and said -- he said, "John, my dream" -- "my dream is some day to be on this stage, to be a Commander-in-Chief of this organization."

And as I talk to you tonight, I can't help but think of Hal sitting there looking at each and every one of you that know that dream is possible. As you look to your right and you look to your left, someone you're sitting with today will be a future Commander-in-Chief of this organization.

And I foresee in the very near future, to all our female veterans of today, that we will have our first female Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States on this stage.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SMART: You know, knowing Hal the way I knew Hal in Virginia is, you know, he proves his leadership by what he does in

his department as an All-American Department Post Commander, District Commander, and as Department Commander, he's a triple award recipient of the All-American program.

He went on to serve on the National Council of Administration to -- once again, to prove his desire to serve and to care for his veterans.

Last year at this convention, Hal honored me with the honor of seconding his nomination for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. During the course of the year, as he traveled around the world and throughout the country, you saw what we saw in him in Virginia: His desire to serve; his desire to care and work and do whatever it takes to make sure that veterans are cared for and our men and women in the military get what they need to do their job.

Once again, I am indeed honored to have the opportunity to second the nomination of a great comrade, a good friend, and one I know will serve and represent us well.

Hal Roesch, I second you for the nomination of the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief. And I ask you for your considerations and thank you for your service to our country and to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Are there any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Hearing none -- that was quick. Right Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief closed. Adjutant General.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Jones, Adjutant General. Pursuant to the power and authority vested in me, I declare Harold J. "Hal" Roesch elected Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2019-'20 year.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, you have elected Harold "Hal" Roesch as the second -- as Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

(Placement of cap and badge by Beth Roesch.)

REMARKS BY SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT  
HAROLD J. "HAL" ROESCH

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT ROESCH: Thank you. I can't believe it's been a year. It seems like just yesterday that I was up here accepting the nomination for Junior Vice. What a year it's been. I've been to a lot of places. I plan to go to a lot more places and do the work we are put here to do: Helping veterans and their families.

I want to keep this pretty quick. We've got a lot of things to do. There's a few people I want to thank. One, Department of Virginia.

(Cheering and applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT ROESCH: Helped me along this ride. Commander, Doc, what a team we made. We will continue that. I also want to thank my family. My mom, who's watching from Puyallup, Washington; my sister; my daughter, Sara; her husband, Jason. The best son-in-law ever. Two greatest grandsons, Owen and Max. Without family, I couldn't do it.

VFW Post 3219, you helped me along the way. Most important, I want to thank my wife, Beth.

(Cheering and applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT ROESCH: Without her, I could not do this. My wife and my best friend. I will do the best job I possibly can. If there's anything I or we can do for you, please reach out and let us know. Thank you.

(Applause)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Senior Vice Commander-Elect, it is an honor to escort you and your lovely bride around the hall as the next Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, sir. Mr. Maestro -- I'm going to like this -- the United States Air Force.

(Whereupon, a ceremonial parade was held.)

## NOMINATIONS FOR JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now open the nomination for the office of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Is there any nomination for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: Fritz served in the United States Air Force National Guard -- International Guard from 1989 to 1999 with the 131st Tactical Fighter Wing. Activated for federal service, he served in Desert Shield/Desert Storm from 1990 to 1991 as a security policeman.

In recognition of his service, he received the Air Force Achievement Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with a "V" Device, Southwest Asia Service Medal with two devices, and the Kuwait Liberation Medal both from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Additionally, he received numerous state and federal awards and decorations.

He joined the VFW in 1991 and currently maintains his Gold Legacy Life membership at Post 2698 in Sparta, Illinois. He served as Judge Advocate for the Department of Illinois from 1999 to 2011; for the Department of Illinois's Commander -- Illinois Commander from 2013-2014 in which he achieved All-American status. Multiple terms as National Parliamentarian. And he served four separate terms as National Judge Advocate General.

He is also admitted to practice law in several states and federal jurisdictions. Fritz received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Illinois in 1982. He graduated from the St. Louis University School of Law in 1985. He retired as a senior information law attorney with the United States Transportation Command at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois.

He's also a member of the Military Order of the Cootie, the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Society of American Magicians.

(Laughter)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: That's what it says.

(Laughter)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF THIEN: And the Professional Association of Diving Instructors. Fritz and his wife, Megan, reside in Columbia, Illinois, along with a service dog, Mamakas. It's a special treat for me to be here and a

privilege and an honor as Fritz will be the first "Bill's Brigade" member to become Commander-in-Chief of this great organization. And I guarantee you he's going to do you a good job or he'll answer to me. Thank you.

(Applause)

COMRADE DAVIN: John Davin, Department of Illinois, Bolingbrook Post 5917, Past National Commander, a Delegate to this convention, seconds that motion.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Are there any other nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief closed.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Jones, Adjutant General. Pursuant to the power and authority vested in me, I declare Matthew M. "Fritz" Mihelcic elected Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States 2019-2020.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, you have elected Matt "Fritz" Mihelcic as Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the ensuing year.

(Cheering and applause)

(Placement of cap and badge by Megan Mihelcic.)

(Applause)

REMARKS BY JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT  
MATTHEW "FRITZ" MIHELICIC

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT MIHELICIC: Thank you VFW. And as Bill said, I'm very honored to have him nominate me. I was an All-

American State Commander when he was your Commander-in-Chief and in all of -- if you've ever heard him talk, he used to talk about that Joe Ten Peg in the audience who could some day be up here. I'm that Joe Ten Peg today. So thank you, Bill.

(Applause)

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT MIHELIC: I have to keep it brief. So to my Department of Illinois, I appreciate all the support you've given me over the years. To the Big Ten, likewise, and all of you who I will get to know over the next few years, thank you for your support. I will not let you down. And it's very fitting that today is "National Hire a Veteran's Day." So thank you for hiring me.

(Laughter and applause)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Junior Vice Commander-Elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, it's an honor to escort you and your lovely wife around this hall and the National Sergeants take pride in that, sir. Let's play it again, the United States Air Force.

(Whereupon, a ceremonial parade was held.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, before we begin the official pinning ceremony of the national chair officers, I'd like to take just a brief minute to thank you-all for your support over the last three years.

For me it's been one heck of a ride. But most of all, it's allowed me to instead of being part of the problem to be in a position to be part of the solution. It has truly been an honor and a privilege to stand before you as a national officer for the last three years, and it will be one I can never forget.

There'll be a lot I'll miss about serving in these positions. But I think one of the greatest things I'll miss is the team effort, the camaraderie, and the friendship between myself and our National Officers and staff.

To Doc, Hal, and Fritz, over the last three years we've had a lot of fun, made a lot of changes. It's something I will truly always remember. But to each of you, I've watched you -- had an opportunity to watch you grow and learn. And there's no doubt in my mind that we will turn this organization over to a

new round of leaders who will keep us going forward for years to come.

Adjutant General Kevin Jones, Quartermaster General Debra Anderson, thank you for all your support of the chair officers and all that you do to make sure we look good in what we do. Thank you for all your hard work and efforts.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: At this time, I will ask that the newly-elected Commander-in-Chief, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief please take their positions in center stage. We will now do the ceremonial pinning of the national chair officers.

(Whereupon, ceremonial pinning takes place.)

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: Is my mic on? Yep. They're wired tight. This is a special thing. Hal, where are you? Come on up here, Buddy. Our Commander-in-Chief has done an extraordinary amount of work. You can't imagine. So I think he's paid by the hour. Is that correct, ma'am? He's paid by the hour? B.J. Oh, that was a no. Okay. We'd like to present B.J. real nice things. Commander-in-Chief, would please? This is for you, Buddy. Give this guy one hell of an applause, would you?

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: And we a Life membership card. This is not lead. Is -- we could melt this down and go on a trip with a couple of you come up here, Hal, photo op. You do know that, don't you?

(Laughter)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: This is for you, Commander. Chief, there you go, my friend. Give him his.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: We -- all of you, all of us, have had a tremendous year. Savor it and repeat it. And with that, I'm clear. Chief. Good man, Brother.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Yeah, I won't lose it. I promise.

#### NOMINATIONS FOR QUARTERMASTER GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now open the nomination for the office of Quartermaster General. Is there any nomination for Quartermaster General?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF NIER: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. Fellow Delegates, Comrades, Friends, I am Jim Nier, Past Commander-in-Chief, Delegate, Post 8919, Texas. This morning I have the honor and privilege to place a nomination for the position of Quartermaster General, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the name of the comrade currently serving in the position.

Comrade Debra E. Anderson was elected to her position in July, 2016, at the national convention in Charlotte, and reelected in both 2017 and '18 at the national conventions.

As the Quartermaster General, she is responsible for the areas of finance, insurance, properties, and emblem and supply. She has served with distinction and has exhibited the confidence and expertise necessary to accomplish the myriad of duties of the Quartermaster General and deserves to be reelected.

Most importantly, she has earned the respect and trust of her fellow employees and the general membership.

Debra attended the University of Missouri-Columbia, on an ROTC scholarship. She was an Army ROTC cadet battalion commander and graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics in 1980.

In November, 2017, Debra was inducted into the ROTC Hall of Fame at the University of Missouri. Upon graduation, she was commissioned as an AG Human Resources Second Lieutenant. Her military assignments included Nuremberg/Furth, Germany; Fort Ben Harrison, Indiana; Fort Riley, Kansas; Fort



Leavenworth, Kansas; and Fort McPherson, Georgia. She served as a maintenance company commander, 1st Armored Division and is a Garrison Inspector General.

She earned her eligibility for the VFW during Desert Storm/Desert Shield, having been deployed with the 1st Infantry Division to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait in 1990.

She is a graduate of the Army's Combined Armed Services Staff School and the Command and General Staff College. While on active duty, she earned a Master's of Science Degree in Systems Management from the University of Southern California.

Her awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, two Meritorious Service Medals, four Army Commendation Medals, two Army Achievement Medals, the Southeast Asia Service Medal, Kuwait Liberation Medal, and Parachutist Badge.

She left the Army as a major in 1993 and held a variety of business positions from 1993 to 2007. She joined Post 7356 in Parkville, Missouri, in 2006, where she is a Gold Legacy Life member. She was an All-American Post Commander there in 2010. She is also a Life member of the VFW Auxiliary and VFW National Home for Children, where she also serves on the board.

She currently serves as a commissioner on the World War I Centennial Commission representing the VFW.

I think that we would all agree that we continue to face challenges in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. It is imperative that we continue to have a Quartermaster General that takes on those challenges, turns them into opportunities, and makes sure that, as an organization, we continue on a progressive path in our future.

We have that person in Debra Anderson. Her passion for the success of our organization, her vision for the future, her personal attributes of loyalty and impeccable integrity, along with her professional on-the-job expertise and exceptional public speaking ability continue to make her uniquely qualified for this position.

On a personal note, as the Commander-in-Chief's Budget Chairman for 2016 and 2017, I had the honor of working very closely with Debra and her staff during the budget approval process. The necessary meetings and presentations always reflected her in-depth preparations and attention to detail. Her knowledge of sound fiscal responsibility were indicative of her outstanding organizational skills.

Comrades, it is with much personal pride that I proudly place the

nomination the name of Comrade Debra Anderson, Post 7356, Parkville, Missouri, for the position of Quartermaster General, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, for VFW year 2019-2020. Thank you.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF MUELLER: National Officers, my fellow comrades, my name is Jim Mueller, Past Commander-in-Chief, Delegate, Post 5077 from Missouri.

I am pleased and honored to second the nomination of Debra Anderson, an individual who has served not only her country in Southwest Asia in the United States Army, but has served this great organization of ours, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, for the past 12 years.

Debra has a strong work ethic, is honest, trustworthy. She has the necessary skills and experience to fulfill the duties of Quartermaster General. And I trust her to help guide our great organization.

It is my honor and pleasure to second the nomination of Debra Anderson for the high office of Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the ensuing year 2019-2020. Thank you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Are there any other nominations for Quartermaster General? Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Quartermaster General closed.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: ·Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Jones, Adjutant General. Pursuant to the power and authority vested in me, I declare Debra Anderson elected Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2019-2020 year.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, you have elected Debra Anderson as Quartermaster General for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

(Applause)

(Placement of cap and badge by Jim Nier.)

## REMARKS BY QUARTERMASTER GENERAL DEBRA ANDERSON

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL ANDERSON: Thank you. Thank you so very much. It is truly an honor and a privilege to serve as your Quartermaster General. I'll be beginning my fourth year in that role, and it's -- it's been an amazing journey. And I truly enjoy what I do and I work hard for you and appreciate -- appreciate so many people.

Let me begin by thanking Commander B.J. Lawrence for his leadership this year and congratulate you on an extremely successful year.

I want to congratulate Doc and Hal and Fritz for their election. I look forward to working with you in the coming year.

I want to thank our national headquarters employees. They come to work every day and work really hard for our veterans in Kansas City, in Washington, DC, and on our BDD sites around the country.

We couldn't do this, obviously, without them. And they are a tremendous group of people that work really hard every day and take our ideas and make them real and make it happen. They're amazing.  
(Applause)

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL ANDERSON: I want to thank my family, and particularly my husband, Steve, who's not here with us today but has been a big supporter of me and of the VFW and of all that we do.

And, finally, I want to thank you, my comrades in the VFW, for your inspiration, for your generosity, for what you do every day. It's incredible to be part of this organization and part of what you're doing and part of what we're doing together. And I thank you so much for this privilege. Thank you.  
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Who started that group hug thing? Was that you?

## NOMINATIONS FOR NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now open the nomination for the office of Chaplain. Is there any nomination for Chaplain?

PAST NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HOLLAND: Good morning. I am John Holland, Delegate, Post No. 1, Denver, Colorado, Past National Chaplain and Post Chaplain.

Comrades, I come before you to nominate my colleague, my teacher,

my mentor, my friend, the Reverend Jim Jenkins, candidate for the position of National Chaplain 2019-2020.

He has a long history of tending to the work of the church, the VFW, and the Military Order of the Cootie. This Army veteran holds the CIB, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and Air Medal.

When the chips are down, Jim is there ready to help. This has been a lifetime characteristic that just seems to come naturally to him. Look around and he's quietly there to help. Comrades, we have an outstanding candidate for National Chaplain, Reverend Jim Jenkins. I proudly place his name in nomination. Thank you.

(Applause)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF POULIOT: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

I'm Tom Pouliot, Delegate, Post 1116, Helena, Montana. I want to further tell you about Jim Jenkins. He's an ordained minister. He received his Master of Ministry Degree from Bethany Theological Seminary and was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1981. He's experienced.

He has a -- he's been a youth pastor, a church pastor, and has ministered to us in the Western Conference over this last year.

It is my honor and privilege to second the nomination of Jim Jenkins for the office of National Chaplain for the ensuing year. Thank you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Are there any other nominations for Chaplain? Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Chaplain closed.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Jones, Adjutant General. Pursuant to the power and authority vested in me, I declare James Gilbert Jenkins elected Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2019-2020 year.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, you have elected James Gilbert Jenkins as National Chaplain for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of

the United States.

(Placement of cap and pin by Mrs. Jenkins.)

(Applause)

#### REMARKS BY NATIONAL CHAPLAIN-ELECT JAMES JENKINS

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN-ELECT JENKINS: Comrades, I'm really humbled to be up here today. I have enjoyed working with the West -- comrades in the Western Conference this past year. And for the State of Kansas Department for several years.

And, you know, who would have thought a challenge from a World War II vet in San Antonio in 2003 would lead to this day?

You know, it's an amazing journey, and I look forward to -- to serving you, working with your state chaplains, helping them to be able to reach out to their post chaplains. Because, you know, your post chaplains, they can be an effective testimony within your community. They can put a bright spot there and make you look good.

I know that there's some great post chaplains out there, and I want to help the rest of them to be great as well. So thank you, Comrades. It's a privilege and an honor to be here before you today.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: See what happened? You gave Hal one job and he forgot to call me into the center. One job.

#### NOMINATIONS FOR JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now open the nomination for the office of Judge Advocate General. Is there any nomination for Judge Advocate General?

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER SMITH: Commander-in-Chief, Joe Smith, Department of Nebraska Commander, Post 2280, Bellevue, Nebraska, registered Delegate.

I rise to nominate Doug Whitaker, Post 9675, Sarpy County, Nebraska, for the high office of National Judge Advocate.

Doug first earned his VFW eligibility in 1991 serving as a military police officer during Operation Desert Storm. He went on to earn VFW eligibility two more times while serving in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Doug has a Bachelor's Degree in Public Administration from Northwest Missouri State, a law degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, and is a graduate of the U.S. Army Judge Advocate Officer school. He has been a practicing attorney for 19 years. He is currently a staff Judge Advocate in the Texas Army National Guard.

Doug has held numerous VFW offices to include Post Commander and Department Commander of the great state of Nebraska. At the national level, he has served as co-chair of the OIF/OEF Veterans Committee and is a member of the By-Laws Study Group.

Doug lives in Papillion, Nebraska, with his wife, Jenny, and their two sons, Jimmy and Jack. And they fully support him seeking this office. Thank you.

(Applause)

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER SMITH: Sharon Cooper, Delegate from Post 2503, Omaha, Nebraska, and I second the nomination for James Douglas Whitaker for Judge Advocate General.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Are there any other nominations for Judge Advocate General?

Hearing and seeing none, I now declare the nominations for Judge Advocate General closed.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Jones, Adjutant General. Pursuant to the power and authority vested in me, I declare Douglas Whitaker elected Judge Advocate General for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2019-2020 year.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, you have elected Douglas Whitaker as Judge Advocate General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the ensuing year.

(Applause)

(Placement of cap and pin by Joe Smith.)

REMARKS BY JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL-ELECT  
JAMES DOUGLAS WHITAKER

JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL WHITAKER: Comrades, Joe told me to keep it short; so he gave me one piece of paper.

Commander-in-Chief, Comrades, I wish to thank the Department of Nebraska, the Big Ten Conference, and all of the great comrades from across the globe for supporting me and electing me for the high office of National Judge Advocate.

I am truly honored to earn your vote. And I promise you, Doc, that in the ensuing year I will provide candid and sage advice to you as we conduct the business of this great organization.

Finally and most of all, I wish to thank my wife and my boys, Jimmy and Jack, who were not able to make the trip to Orlando this week, for supporting me in all my VFW adventures and my travel. They have been a tremendous pillar behind me, and I could not do it without their support. Thank you-all.

(Applause)

NOMINATIONS FOR SURGEON GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now open the nomination for the office of Surgeon General. Is there any nomination for Surgeon General?

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF NIER: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. Fellow delegates, Comrades, Friends, Jim Nier, Past Commander-in-Chief, Delegate, Post 8919, Texas. Comrades, I'm honored today to place in nomination the name of Comrade Curtis O. "Doc" Bohlman, MD, Post 1335, Department of Oklahoma for the position of Surgeon General. He is a Southern Conference designee and is no stranger to our organization. Having previously served as Surgeon General seven times, which makes him imminently qualified to serve again.

Dr. Bohlman joined the United States Navy Reserve in 1966 and later volunteered for duty with the United States Marine Corps. He served in

Vietnam as a flight surgeon for VMO-2, a Huey gunship squadron of the 1st Marine Air Wing near Da Nang in 1967, 1968. In recognition of his service, he received the Air Medal, the Presidential Unit Citation, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with Fleet Marine Force Combat Operations insignia, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

He joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1975 at Post 2270 in Enid, Oklahoma, later transferring to Post 1335 in Woodward, Oklahoma, where he achieved All-American Post Commander status and where he maintains his Gold Legacy Life membership.

He also served as District Commander and was Department Voice of Democracy chairman for 15 years. He has served as chairman of the National Voice of Democracy Committee and the National Programs Committee twice. He was vice chairman of the National Youth Development Scholarship and Recognition Committee, the National Committee on General Resolutions, and the National Veterans Service committee.

He served on the VFW National Home for Children Board of Trustees and the Oklahoma War Veterans Commission. Currently, he serves as chairman of the Department Credentials Committee and is Vice President And Founding Director of the Oklahoma VFW Foundation.

Dr. Bohlman received his Doctorate of Medicine degree from the University of Oklahoma school of medicine in 1965 and earned Naval Flight Surgeon Wings from the Navel Aerospace Institute in 1967. He practiced general medicine for over 38 1/2 years, retiring in 2004.

He is a Life member of the VFW National Home for Children and a member of the U.S. Marine Corps Combat Helicopter Association. He and his wife, Juanita, a Past National Auxiliary Soloist, reside in Woodward, Oklahoma. Comrades, it is with much pleasure that I proudly place the nomination the name of a longtime friend, Comrade Curtis O. "Doc" Bohlman, Post 1335, Woodward, Oklahoma, for the position of Surgeon General, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, for VFW year 2019-2020. Thank you.

(Applause)

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER MABRY: Comrades, I'm Darryl Mabry. I'm from Lawton, Oklahoma, Post 1193, Department Commander for Oklahoma. I want to make sure that as I say thank you for all of the National staff as well as to you, Comrades, as well as to the guests that are here, that you have the right candidate from Oklahoma.



You heard all the accolades and all the presentations. But what you don't know is Doc Bohlman, he was the one that convinced me to run through the seats and be a leader for Oklahoma. Not only that he did that, what they didn't tell you was that he mentors all of the department staff as they go through the seats.

There's one other thing -- well, two before I get off the stage. As you walk -- as you see Doc walking through the aisles, you'll see that he walks very slowly. But for whatever reason, you're going to always see that he's going to be in front of you. That's how he thinks.

The other thing that you're going to notice -- and you'll get to note about Doc -- that he is a very soft talker. Softer than me. But what you also get to notice, that even though he talks soft, his words speaks volumes. So with that, Commander, I'd like to indulge my time of four minutes. I want his friend and a very personal colleague to come here and talk.

(Applause)

COMRADE CLARK: Well, Commander, Past Commanders-in-Chief, Honored Guests, and Delegates, I am Robbie Clark, the National Council Member out of Oklahoma and a Delegate from VFW Post 4876.

I have the unique privilege of doing a second second for Dr. Curtis O. Bohlman for the prestigious position of the VFW National Surgeon General. Doc has made immeasurable impacts over the past 50 years as a passionate advocate for all those afflicted with a myriad of medical issues. And you have previously heard of the many VFW volunteers attributes and his dedicated military history, but let me present another side of Dr. Bohlman.

Not only is he a skilled medical doctor using his talents to save lives and cure illnesses, his volunteer medical activities are varied as his technical medical skills. And they include working with new patients to help them understand and overcome the fear of diagnoses, and assisting new patients with understanding the administrative nuances of the medical system, and simply acting as a friend for somebody who needs a friend. Having had five major cancer surgeries myself, I know firsthand of his personal caring and devotion to friends, as he was at my wife's side during my first 12-hour cancer operation, at which time he talked to the attending physician and was determined my chances were almost zero.

He guided me through an intense period of unknowns and always offered a positive attitude to help in my recovery. It would have been incredibly

more difficult if Doc Bohlman was not there. He's a visionary pioneer whose selfless performance truly makes him special.

It is achievements and effects of this kind and scale, in addition to what you have previously heard from Past Commander-in-Chief James Nier and State Commander Darryl Mabry that make Dr. Curtis O. Bohlman deserving of the honor of selection as our next VFW National Surgeon General. Comrades, I thank you very much.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Are there any other nominations for Surgeon General? Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Surgeon General closed.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Commander-in-Chief, Kevin Jones, Adjutant General. Pursuant to the power and authority vested in me, I declare Curtis O. "Doc" Bohlman, MD, elected Surgeon General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the 2019-2020 year.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Yes, Comrades, you have elected Curtis "Doc" Bohlman, MD, as Surgeon General for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the ensuing year.

(Placement of cap and pin by Juanita Bohlman.)

(Applause)

REMARKS BY SURGEON GENERAL-ELECT  
CURTIS O. "DOC" BOHLMAN, MD

SURGEON GENERAL-ELECT BOHLMAN: Well, thank you, Comrades. I really appreciate the opportunity to serve as your Surgeon General once again. I want to thank Commander-in-Chief Jim Nier for the nominating speech, for Commander Darryl, and for Councilman Robbie for their seconding speeches. I want to thank my comrades back from my post, 1335, in Woodward, Oklahoma, my comrades from the Department of Oklahoma and from the Southern Conference for backing me and endorsing me.

Mainly, I want to thank the comrades who made me eligible when I served with them in Vietnam with the 1st Marine Air Wing Huey gunship squadron VMO-2 1967-'68 (inaudible) in Vietnam.

I promise to do my best to augment and to enhance the activities and the success of the team of Doc and Hal and Fritz this year. So thank you again for this honor.

(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: We will now have the ceremonial parade for the Quartermaster General, the Chaplain, Judge Advocate General, and the Surgeon General.

Sergeant-at-Arms, will you please escort them for their parade.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: National Officers-elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for 2019-2020, it's an honor for the National Sergeants to escort you around this hall. Mr. Maestro, a medley of all the military hymns.

(Whereupon, a ceremonial parade was held.)

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEWLY-ELECTED COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATION  
MEMBERS AND  
PRESENTATION OF CAPS AND BADGES BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT  
WILLIAM "DOC" SCHMITZ

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I will now call upon the Adjutant General to announce the newly-elected National Council of Administration members.

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: All newly-elected Council members, will you please rise.

The Commander-in-Chief will now present caps, badges to the newly-elected Council members. They are: Philip Maughan, Illinois.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Johnny Capps, Indiana.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Carol Whitmore, Iowa.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Jerry Gorski, Michigan.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Tommy Hanson, Minnesota.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Jesse Jones, Missouri.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Larry Gerlt, Nebraska.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Chris Haynes, Ohio.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Rick Williamson, South Dakota.

(Cheering and applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Gundel Metz, Wisconsin.

(Cheering and applause)

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF APPOINTMENTS BY  
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT DOC SCHMITZ

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I now call upon Commander-in-Chief-elect Doc Schmitz for his announcement of appointed officers for the

ensuing year.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: Let me see if I can let up here on the mic. Again, please excuse my voice. Adjutant General, Kevin Jones, Missouri.

(Applause)

(Placement of cap and badge by Kelly Jones.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: Outstanding job, sir.

#### REMARKS BY ADJUTANT GENERAL KEVIN JONES

ADJUTANT GENERAL JONES: Doc, thank you for having the trust and faith in me to guide the business of the organization. And let me make this promise that our talented team of staff will do exactly that, with honor and integrity, as we proceed through the years with your line officers of the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Hal, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

I, again, thank you. There will be times where we will have to be firm, fair, and flexible when needed to be. And I give you that solemn promise that we will do just that, sir. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: Just a caveat to that, from being on the inside with the other officers and staff, Kevin is always there for you 24/7, and he takes calls around the clock. And I really truly do appreciate all the support and mentoring that you've given myself and the other line officers. Thank you very much, Kevin. Chief of Staff, Paul R. Phillips, Junior, of the great state of Delaware. And a Marine.

(Cheering and applause)

(Placement of cap and badge by Mark Newman.)

#### REMARKS BY CHIEF OF STAFF PAUL R. PHILLIPS

JUNIOR CHIEF OF STAFF PHILLIPS: Doc, I'm truly humbled by this

appointment. And I pledge to you in the ensuing year you have all of my support and I'll do everything I can to help you.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: That guy right there is the backbone of Delaware. He mentors a lot of people. He's a good dude. Inspector General, Duane Sarmiento from the great state of New Jersey.

(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: Ooh, he's got a fan club.

(Placement of cap and badge by Doc Schmitz.)

(Applause)

#### REMARKS BY INSPECTOR GENERAL DUANE SARMIENTO

INSPECTOR GENERAL SARMIENTO: Commander-in-Chief-elect Doc Schmitz, Doc, thank you for your confidence in this appointment. I'd be remiss if I didn't say, Chief Lawrence, it was a pleasure to serve you as one of your All-American Department Commanders.

(Applause)

INSPECTOR GENERAL SARMIENTO: To all the line officers, again to you, Doc, as the Chief, to the 1.6 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Auxiliary, I pledge to you, with all my body and spirit that I will give you my undying support for the love of this organization and our tagline that "No One Does More for Veterans."

Thank you. I look forward to working with all of you and the Auxiliary. Doc, thanks again.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: And he's a retired cop too.

That's handy. For Sergeant-at-Arms, Bryan O'Brien. He used to be from Massachusetts but now resides in Florida. Bryan?

(Applause)

(Placement of cap and badge by Patricia O'Brien.)

#### REMARKS BY SERGEANT-AT-ARMS BRIAN O'BRIEN

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: He's a glutton for punishment. Puts me in my 15th year. I want to thank Doc for this great appointment, but more importantly for giving me the individuals that work with me. They are wonderful. And, most of all, I want to thank my wife for putting up for the many years that I've been doing this. This will be going into my 21st year. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: He is there with his crew a lot of times, a lot of times when we need them. And they are extremely supportive and a great group of guys and gals.

#### INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: 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. Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: 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 LAWRENCE: They have.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: Have the books of the Adjutant General and the Quartermaster General been examined and approved by the Council of Administration?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: They have.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: Does the Adjutant General have on file proof of eligibility for all officers to be installed during this installation?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: He does.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: Are the funds in the hands of the Quartermaster General and ready to be turned over to her successor when duly installed?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: They are.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: Have you the charter in your possession?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I have.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: You will now surrender the gavel to me. Commander-in-Chief, Vincent "B.J." Lawrence, you have now been relieved of your duties as Commander-in-Chief of this 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 assist/counsel your successor through the experiences you have gained during your term of office. You will now station yourself to my right. Sergeant-at-Arms.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Sir.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: You will now present the Officers-elect at the altar as the Assistant Adjutant General reads the list of officers to be installed.

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

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL DESHANO: Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief: Hal Roesch. Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief: Fritz Mihelcic. Adjutant General: Kevin Jones. Quartermaster General: Debra Anderson. Chaplain: Jim Jenkins. Judge Advocate General: Doug Whitaker. Surgeon General: Doc Bohlman. Chief of Staff: Paul Phillips. Inspector General: Duane Sarmiento. Sergeant-at-Arms: Bryan O'Brien.

#### NEWLY-ELECTED COUNCIL MEMBERS

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL DESHANO: Newly-elected Council members:

Philip Maughan, Illinois

Johnny Capps, Indiana

Carol Whitmore, Iowa

Gerald Gorski, Michigan

Thomas Hanson, Minnesota

Jessie Jones, Missouri



Larry Gerlt, Nebraska  
Christopher Haynes, Ohio  
Rick Williamson, South Dakota  
Gundel Metz, Wisconsin  
The Commander-in-Chief: Doc Schmitz

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Past Commander-in-Chief, the officers are ready to be installed.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: National Officers-elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of United States, I will administer to you the Officers' Obligation. You will raise your right hand. You will touch the flag of our Nation with your left hand or the shoulder of the individual in front of you, and you will repeat after me.

(Whereupon, the Officers' Obligation was administered at this time.)

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: As you were. Parade, rest. Comrade Chaplain.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Uncover.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Almighty God, our guide 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.

(Amen)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Cover.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: National Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now escort the officers to their respective stations.

(Applause)

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: 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-elect to the roster.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Sir, Commander-in-Chief is present.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: Comrade Commander-in-Chief-elect William J. "Doc" Schmitz, 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 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 of your efforts and accomplishments bring credit to your administration and to our organization.

Comrade William J. "Doc" Schmitz, are you willing and ready to assume your solemn obligation?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: I am.

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: You will raise your right hand, you will touch the flag of our country with your left, and you will give your name as I touch your hand.

(Whereupon, Installing Officer Spera administered the obligation to Commander-in-Chief-elect Doc Schmitz at this time.)

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: As you were. Come up here with me. 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.

(Whereupon, pledge of sincere allegiance to Commander-in-Chief Schmitz was administered at this time.)

INSTALLING OFFICER SPERA: Thank you. Be seated, please. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Officers, and Delegates to 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. Congratulations, Chief.

(Cheering and applause)

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT  
WILLIAM J. "DOC" SCHMITZ

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: I hope you-all get the significance of this. Sometimes we're going to lighten it up a little bit on the wardrobe. You-all heard one of the -- it's very difficult to stay up here with all these folks. I'd rather take all of us down with you. You heard the -- you heard the tune "Respect." That's a foundation of what we need to do with each other in our interactions. I was told, "Don't leave the stage." I was told, "Have the professionals write your speech."

I can't go that way. I wrote this 15-page speech. You got a problem with that? I hope not. To all elected and appointed officers, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you, especially Past Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence who I had the distinct pleasure to serve with. Not under, but with. Hal Roesch and the other officers who I served with, not for. We serve for you.

And I just added that in. I didn't write it. That just popped in my head. Thank you. I'm bound to miss somebody, and that I truly do apologize for. But I'm going to hit the note on a few of them. And if it rings your bell, that's what it's supposed to do.

I'd like to thank the great Eastern States, the "Beast from the East." Thank you for your support. Thank you for your confidence in me. My department in New York, it's about time we got somebody up here, guys and

gals.

(Cheering and applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: There you go. It makes me happy. The Fifth District, my district, Post 524, Corning, New York. The Past Chiefs of the Eastern States, especially Paul Spera -- who I can't wait to see in blue jeans -- and Past Chief Olson, who have been very supportive and taken me aside on several occasions and let me know what the real deal is. That's why I'm still up here.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my homecoming team and the hospitality room team, especially Bob Barnhart, Hal Burke, Bruce Terwilliger. Sometimes we ask ourselves why are we here, why are we still alive. I'd like to thank United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps for all of the training. And a lot of it was a pain in the butt, but it was highly effective.

I'd like to thank my Marines -- and you might know a few of them -- for keeping my big rear end alive through a lot of stuff, and they were always there for me. I wish they could do something about this voice. Yeah. Especially I'd like to thank Staff Sergeant Robert Choquette. He was a DI, but he was also a BST, basic engineer training sergeant, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. He was a mentor. I took care of his family when they were sick and him.

He decided he'd teach me how to be a Marine Corps engineer. And I received a Marine Corps engineering degree 1371 from Colonel Reed in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and a Meritorious Mast. Those skills probably helped me and some of my jarheads stay alive. I identified his body and grave registration on the 6th of July, 1970, the last month of my tour of duty of 13 months in Vietnam. He resides on the wall and in my heart. I'll take that Kleenex back. Sometimes you need to ask yourself what drives your wagon? You know, it's very bright up here. Very bright. It's kind of blinding. But you know what's brighter than up here? You there. And you there.

You people inspire me equal to some of the not-so-nice memories I have. You motivate me to go further and further doing good stuff. And at this point in time I'd like to tell you this job really sucks, but it's real. I want you to keep doing the good stuff you do out there. I flipped a page. Oh, yeah. You might ask yourself, "What stories, Doc, inspires you that came from here?" I can tell you one. Where's Maryland? Department of Maryland, where you at?

(Shouts)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: Okay. I went to the Department of Maryland, and I'll share with you the best question I ever received from anybody. I called him "too tall." You remember that? This big guy comes up to me in Maryland when I'm down there and he said -- introduces himself, he said, "Hi, Doc."

I says, "Hi, how are you doing?" He said, "How do I get your job?" That's when I was Surgeon General. I said to him, I said, "You said what?" He said, "How do I get your job?" I said, "Why would you want my job?" I got the best answer I ever got. He says, "With what I have right now, I can do good stuff. But if I got your job, I think I could do more good stuff. Do you think so?"

I went, "Holy mackerel." I brought that young man up to the dais -- they might remember -- and introduced him and said, "You've got potential here. This guy is motivated. He's focused. Are you, as a department, going to cultivate him?"

Turns out he was the incoming district commander, and he kicked butt and did a damn good job. And the next time I brought him up to the podium -- first time he was like, "Uh. Right." The second time I got him up there, I had to pry the mic out of his hand. He's a great guy and he's still moving and grooving down in the Department of Maryland. Sadness pushes you. Bad memories pushes you. Happiness pushes you. Camaraderie pushes you. These are all things of energy. What you do with your energy -- I'll throw into the plant. It's biodegradable. What you do with energy is up to you. This is nothing. This is your power. This is your power in control. If you get a -- can get ahold of your energies, those beasts, those happy things that drive you forward, if you can get a grip on them, you are like a point of a hunting arrow.

You're the most volatile person on the face of the earth if you can control that and focus it in on whatever your goals, your achievements, your aspirations can be.

You can do that just like with the leadership of B.J. Lawrence this year and the other leaders that you have elected out there. You people, you veterans of the largest combat group on the face of the earth, made it happen. Give yourself an applause.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: This year the motto is -- hey,

it came back. Thank you. This year's motto is "Dare to Care." Sometimes you come up and you face adversaries. Sometimes you come up with difficulties, challenges you kind of don't like. Sometimes you have to step out in front of something as a leader and say, "Excuse me. Hold up. We got to talk about this." If you don't care, it does not matter. If you do care, it matters. Make things matter to you that you care about. Don't let anybody discourage you for any reason whatsoever.

We, as combat people, are brothers and sisters in the blood. And you can ask any medical corpsman. You get hit, you-all cry the same. You pray to a deity, and your medical -- medical guy or gal or corpsman and beg that they can save your life. And you-all bleed red regardless of your skin or what God you choose to call and pray to, you-all do. And ask any medical corpsman that's been in the stuff. We are all the same down under. And you know what the good part is? We're here as the strongest organization on the face of the earth, and we're focused. This year and years to come, we are going to continue the legacy of our organization and get 100-plus percent and do programs because we choose to. And I want to see you at the party tonight. And with that, I'm clear.

(Standing ovation.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF-ELECT SCHMITZ: Oh, B.J., come on up here. You're not done yet, Brother.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: At this time, we will entertain a motion to adjourn the convention. Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE DUNCAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Jonathan Duncan, Post 1829, Department of Missouri, Delegate of this convention.

There being no further business to come before this convention -- there being no further business to come before this convention and the Officers having been duly elected and installed, I move the 120th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States be closed.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: We have a motion. Do we have a second? Microphone No. 1.

COMRADE ARTEAGA: Tara Fajardo Arteaga, Delegate, Post 7356, Department of Missouri. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Comrades, you have before you a motion, properly seconded, to close the 120th VFW National Convention.

Is there a question on the motion? Seeing or hearing none, all those in

favor will please signify by the usual sign of aye.

(Aye)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: All opposed, no. The ayes have it.  
Motion carries.

#### CLOSING CEREMONIES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Sergeant-at-Arms, you will proceed with the closing ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Yes, sir, Past Commander-in-Chief. I got to say that. I'm sorry.

(Laughter)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade National Chaplain, the closing prayer. National Sergeants, parade rest. Uncover.

#### CLOSING PRAYER - NATIONAL CHAPLAIN CHARLENE COBB

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN COBB: Guide us, O' Lord. We are weak, but You are mighty. Lead us with Your guiding hand. Heavenly Father, this is our prayer today, a prayer of guidance for these newly-elected officers.

We thank You for the year we have completed in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and Your many blessings and guidance to us. Thank you for the leadership we had this year and all their successes. Now we seek Your blessings for Commander-in-Chief Doc Schmitz and his team as they lead us forward. Bestow Your special blessings upon all our leaders for the ensuing year so that we may continue to serve our great organization for the betterment of our veterans and their families.

As we face this new year together, give us wisdom in our decisions and Your aid in ensuring no one does more for veterans than the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. As we leave this place, walk with each of us in heart and mind day by day so that we may continue to serve God and country. Give us safe travels and inspire us with a renewed passion to share the information we have received with our posts for the continuance of our great organization. All these things we ask in Your holy name. Amen.

(Amen)

PREPARE AND RETIRE THE COLORS

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Cover. National Sergeants, attention. Captain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Honor Guard, advance and retire the flag of the United States of America.

NATIONAL HONOR GUARD: On your command, sir.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Sir.

NATIONAL HONOR GUARD: The colors have been retired.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS O'BRIEN: Comrade Past Commander-in-Chief, the close of the 120th National Convention has been completed, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms.

This afternoon's Council of Administration meeting will begin exactly one hour from now in room WF, as in Frank, 1. WF1 in one hour. Also, don't forget to pick up your tickets on the way out for this afternoon's reception.

ADJOURNMENT

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LAWRENCE: I now declare the 120th National Convention closed. We are adjourned.

(Whereupon, the Convention was duly adjourned at 11:57 a.m.)



**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO NATIONAL BYLAWS, MANUAL OF PROCEDURE  
& RITUAL,  
120<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL CONVENTION, JULY 20-24, 2019  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO NATIONAL BY-LAWS**

**B-1**

Proposed by Department of Pennsylvania

**ARTICLE I – MEMBERS**

**Sec. 104 – Member Dues.**

Amend Sec. 104 – Member Dues., National Bylaws, in the first sentence, by adding “a single expiration date for” before “annual dues”.

**B-2**

Proposed by Department of Pennsylvania

**ARTICLE I – MEMBERS**

**Sec. 105 – Members in Good Standing.**

Amend Sec. 105 – Members in Good Standing., National Bylaws, by replacing the first paragraph with the following:

“A member whose current dues are paid to December 31 is in good standing and is entitled to all membership rights, unless suspended or terminated, in accordance with the National Bylaws.”

**B-3**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

**ARTICLE II – POSTS**

**Sec. 201 – Formation, Institution and Chartering.**

Amend Sec. 201 – Formation, Institution and Chartering., National Bylaws, under **Formation.**, by replacing “thirty-five (35)” with “twenty-five (25)”.

**B-4**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

**ARTICLE II – POSTS**

**Sec. 212 – Defunct Posts.**

Amend Sec. 212 – Defunct Posts., National Bylaws, in the first paragraph, by removing “automatically”.

**B-5**

Proposed by Department of Virginia

**ARTICLE II – POSTS**

**Sec. 218 – Officers and Chairmen, Duties and Obligations.**

Amend Sec. 218 – Officers and Chairmen, Duties and Obligations., National Bylaws, by adding “and Ritual” at the end of the paragraph.

**B-6**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

**ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS**

**Sec. 509 – Consolidation of Departments.**

Amend Sec. 509 – Consolidation of Departments., National Bylaws, by replacing the entire section with the following:

“Two or more Departments may consolidate upon recommendation of the Department Conventions and approval of the Commander-in-Chief as prescribed in Section 509 of the Manual of Procedure.”

**B-7**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

**ARTICLE VI – NATIONAL**

**Sec. 604 – Governing Body; Composition.**

Amend Sec. 604 – Governing Body; Composition., National Bylaws., by adding the following:

“5. Committee members appointed by the Commander-in-Chief, not otherwise a delegate.”

**B-8**

Proposed by Department of Virginia

**ARTICLE VII – MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS**

**Sec. 720 – Definitions.**

Amend Sec. 720 – Definitions., National Bylaws, by adding the following paragraph at the end of the section:

“With the exception where registered or certified mail is required, “written” or “in writing” cited throughout these Bylaws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual, shall, as well as referring to physical documents, include the use of electronic media; providing said media are preserved for legal and due process

considerations, where appropriate.”

### **B-9**

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., National Bylaws, by adding the following as a third paragraph at the beginning of the section:

“Any action taken must be in writing and delivered by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested to the last known address of the accused member. Such action shall include notification of appellate rights. A copy thereof must also be forwarded to the next higher authority.”

Under **Hearing Requested.**, add the following as a third sentence:

“In the event a hearing is requested and the accused fails to appear, the action shall continue as though no hearing was requested.”

Under **No Hearing Requested.**, replace the last paragraph with the following:

“Notification of penalty (Form DA-7) shall be mailed to the accused’s last known address by registered or certified mail return receipt requested.”

### **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE MANUAL OF PROCEDURE**

### **M-1**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

#### **ARTICLE II – POSTS**

##### **Sec. 201 – Formation, Institution and Chartering.**

Amend Sec. 201 – Formation, Institution and Chartering., Manual of Procedure, under **Institution.**, in the first paragraph, last sentence, by replacing “twenty-five (25)” with “ten (10)”.

### **M-2**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

#### **ARTICLE II – POSTS**

##### **Sec. 211 – Suspension and Revocation of Charter.**

Amend Sec. 211 – Suspension and Revocation of Charter., Manual of Procedure, by replacing the last paragraph with the following:

“Notwithstanding the provisions above, the Commander-in-Chief shall declare a Post defunct in accordance with Section 212 of the National Bylaws.”

**M-3**

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, under **Challenging Election Results.**, by replacing the paragraph with the following:

“If irregularities are claimed with respect to the election to any office, such challenge must be made prior to the close of the meeting.”

**M-4**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

**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)(1)f., by adding “by use of voucher or payment order.” at the end of the sentence.

**M-5**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

**ARTICLE II – POSTS**

**Sec. 222 – Delegates, District Convention & Meetings, Department and National Conventions.**

Amend Sec. 222 – Delegates, District Convention & Meetings, Department and National Conventions., Manual of Procedure, by adding the following as a second paragraph:

“Delegates and alternates of each Post shall serve as delegates throughout the year provided they remain members in good standing in the respective Post within the District.”

**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, under **Challenging Election Results**:, by replacing the paragraph with the following:

“If irregularities are claimed with respect to the election to any office, such challenge must be made prior to the close of the meeting.”

**M-7**

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)(1) g., by adding “by use of a voucher or payment order.” at the end of the sentence.

Under (a)(1) add “o. Serve as a member of the Department Council of Administration.” at the end of the section.

**M-8**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

**ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS**

**Sec. 509 – Consolidation of Departments.**

Amend Sec. 509 – Consolidation of Departments., Manual of Procedure, under no. 1, by replacing “Councils of Administration” with “Convention”.

**M-9**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

**ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS**

**Sec. 517 – Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office.**

Amend Sec. 517 – Nomination, Election, Installation and Term of Office., Manual of Procedure, under **Challenging Election Results**:, at the end of the sentence, by adding “the meeting.” after “close of” and removing the remainder words.

### **M-10**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

#### **ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS**

##### **Sec. 518 – Officers: Duties and Obligations.**

Amend Sec. 518 – Officers: Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under (a)(1)f., by adding “by use of a voucher or payment order.” at the end of the sentence.

### **M-11**

Recommended by National By-Laws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

#### **ARTICLE IX – DISCIPLINE**

##### **Sec. 901 – Discipline of Members.**

Amend Sec. 901 – Discipline of Members., Manual of Procedure, in the last paragraph, by removing “and” before “Request for Hearing (DA-6)” and adding “; and Notification of Penalty No Hearing Requested (DA-7).” after “Request for Hearing (DA-6)”.

### **M-12**

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 (h)1 b. **Prosecutor**., by replacing, the second sentence with the following:

“The initiating officer shall appoint the Prosecutor; however, the Prosecutor shall not be a member of the panel.”

Under no. 3. **Recording Officer**., in the first paragraph, by adding the following as a second sentence:

“The initiating officer shall appoint the recording officer; however, the recording officer shall not be a member of the panel.”

### **M-13**

Proposed by Department of Kentucky

#### **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, under no. 25, by replacing “smoking” with “all tobacco”.

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND INTERNAL  
ORGANIZATION AT THE 120<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL CONVENTION,  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

**Resolution No. 201 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)  
PERIODIC REVALIDATION OF VFW NATIONAL RESOLUTIONS**

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) regularly adopts resolutions to announce the position of its membership on various issues of veterans' care, national security, et cetera, that, based upon national debate, are inherently fluid; and

WHEREAS, the VFW strives to ensure that the resolutions it adopts are germane to the national discussion and reflect its current policy on such issues; and

WHEREAS, the volatility of said issues may necessitate alteration of the VFW position as the organizational or societal values, or available options, change thereby rendering previously adopted resolutions successfully accomplished, no longer necessary, or potentially embarrassing to the VFW; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that any resolution adopted by the National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States shall be considered null and void if not readopted within five (5) years of its most recent adoption date; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution will take effect at the conclusion of the 121st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 202 (Submitted by Department of Pennsylvania)  
SUBSCRIPTION DUES**

WHEREAS, Posts, Districts and Departments of the VFW have and currently rely on the VFW Membership Reporting System to verify member dues records. These records have become excessively difficult to maintain due to the initiation of the dues process referred to as "**Subscription Dues.**" The process does provide 12 months of membership for a "continuous" paying member but also changes the member's dues expiration date one year from payment; and

WHEREAS, the changing of "continuous" member's dues expiration date on an individual basis has created problems across Posts, Districts and Departments.

Membership programs which use a percentage of "Paid" vs. "Unpaid" members for awards and goals has become impossible to track and confirm; and

WHEREAS, Section 105 of the 2018 Congressional Charter Bylaw states a member whose dues has been paid before their anniversary date, is a



“member in good standing” even though their dues have been paid, they can be listed as an “unpaid” member and the Membership Reporting System deducts that member from the list used to report percentage of paid members; therefore making the total members in good standing total not accurate for the current membership year; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that the national membership reporting system discontinue the process referred to as “subscription dues” and return to the year-end membership expiration date practice used before the change. This would allow the Posts, Districts and Departments to continue to track membership based on a one date expiration program. (Rejected)

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON  
GENERAL RESOLUTIONS AT THE 120<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL CONVENTION,  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

**Resolution No. 301 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)  
NATIONAL FLAG TO HONOR AND REMEMBER  
THOSE WHO DIED WHILE SERVING IN AMERICA’S MILITARY**

WHEREAS, Veterans of Foreign Wars honors the service and sacrifice of all military service members especially those who have lost their lives in service to the Republic; and

WHEREAS, since the Revolutionary War, more than 1.8 million members of the United States Armed Forces have paid the ultimate price during war, while serving in uniform, or as a result of serving; and

WHEREAS, there is no officially recognized symbol that acknowledges the ultimate sacrifice made by members of the Armed Forces who died in the line of duty; and

WHEREAS, an *Honor and Remember Flag* has been created by Honor and Remember, Inc., as a daily reminder for the American public to acknowledge the ultimate price of freedom; and

WHEREAS, twenty-four state legislatures across the nation have officially adopted the *Honor and Remember Flag* as a recognition of those who have given their lives in the line of duty; and

WHEREAS, this flag serves as a symbol of national gratitude that values each American life given for our freedom and gives comfort and a measure of healing to the families who lost loved ones during military service; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we call upon Congress to amend title 36, United States Code, and designate the *Honor and Remember Flag* created by Honor and Remember, Inc., as an official symbol of the services and sacrifices by the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces who have given their lives in the line of duty. (Rejected)

**Resolution No. 302 (Submitted by Department of Illinois)**  
**THE EAGLE STAFF**

WHEREAS, the Eagle Staff considered the first flag of Americas, represents the stature and honor of a particular Native American tribe or tribes; it commonly looks like a shepherd's staff, wrapped in either otter skin or buffalo skin, and featuring eagle feathers; pre-dating colonization, the Eagle Staff was the indicator of a tribe's accomplishments in battle and the integrity and honor of its people; today, it is used to represent tribal communities, Native American and First Nation organizations, or a member of an honor society or a service veteran; and

WHEREAS, the Eagle Staff represents tribal sovereignty, unity and tradition and reflects the honor bestowed upon an individual, tribal organization, or tribal elder, the Eagle Staff is typically carried by Native American veterans of the United States Armed Forces; native Americans have served in greater numbers per capita than any other ethnicity across all branches of the military; and

WHEREAS, the Eagle Staff is a proud legacy of the native American people, it is the embodiment of the warrior and of enduring fortitude which together have enabled the tribes to survive policies intended to extinguish their race and culture; and

WHEREAS, the Eagle Staff is adorned with eagle feathers symbolizing the remembrance of fallen warriors; because eagles and eagle features are highly revered and federally protected only a few federal agencies and enrolled native people may carry them; the eagle feather is the highest award that can be given by a tribe to its people; and

WHEREAS, the Eagle Staff is recognized by all native American tribes, First Nations and other Native American organizations; the Eagle Staff is welcomed into all communities, including Native American and First Nation communities with a flag song or victory song and is always presented ahead of any other flag; and

WHEREAS, the Eagle Staff is formally recognized by all branches of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Canadian Department of National Defense; and

WHEREAS, the Eagle Staff is recognized and honored by the national Congress of American Indians, the Illinois Secretary of Veterans' Advisory Council and the McCormick Foundation Veterans program; and

WHEREAS, the Eagle Staff is honored at Chicago Blackhawks games during the playing of the National Anthem; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Illinois recognizes the Eagle Staff as the first flag of the sovereign Native American tribal nations and the First Nations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is committed to cooperate with tribes, inter-governmental tribes, and Native American organizations including Native American Veterans

organizations to encourage programs promoting cultural education of the significance of the Eagle Staff; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, is committed to inclusiveness for all native Americans, the traditions and symbolism of the Eagle Staff and that we encourage all units of the Veterans of Foreign Wars to incorporate these principles into their policies and practices. (Rejected)

**Resolution No. 303 (Submitted by Department of Europe)  
PASSPORT RENEWAL VIA POSTAL MAIL**

WHEREAS, in the past US Citizens residing abroad could renew their passports via mail and use a credit card to pay for the renewal; and

WHEREAS, this is no longer available for US Citizens to do a renewal in this manner and some Citizens abroad do not have the ability to utilize a military facility to get a postal money order in the amount required and/or are unable to travel to a Consulate in order to transact the business in person in which they can use a credit card; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, at the 120<sup>th</sup> National Convention in Orlando, Florida that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, request that the United States Department of State reinstate the use of credit card transactions for the purpose of mail in passport renewals which would alleviate the hardships of traveling to a Consulate or attempting to get a Postal Money order through other means. (Rejected)

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL  
SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT THE 120<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL CONVENTION,  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

**Resolution No. 401 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
END SEQUESTRATION**

WHEREAS, sequestration is the result of a failed budget agreement from the Budget Control Act of 2011, which raised the federal debt ceiling on an agreement to offset the increase with a corresponding decrease in federal discretionary spending over a 10-year period. A bipartisan Congressional committee was created to identify which federal accounts to reduce, and as a penalty, an automatic 10 percent across-the-board sequester would kick in should the committee fail to reach an agreement, which it did; and

WHEREAS, sequestration began in the second half of FY 2013, and its impact on the military — which accounts for half of the government's total discretionary budget — was immediate. In order to meet mandatory spending cuts without impacting combat operations in Afghanistan, the four services had to slash training, as well as furlough its civilian workforce; and

WHEREAS, occurring simultaneously was a planned \$487 billion reduction in Pentagon spending over a 10-year period; and

WHEREAS, three Bipartisan Budget Agreements have since been signed to temporarily suspend the sequester; and

WHEREAS, meanwhile, the world has become far more dangerous and unpredictable in the seven years since sequestration was created; and

WHEREAS, the cuts have not only reduced and degraded quality of life programs for military personnel and their families, but have negatively impacted readiness and modernization programs, to the point of jeopardizing the military's ability to respond when and where needed. Sequestration also impacts other federal agencies, most notably the Department of Homeland Security and its many subsidiary units, plus sequester limits budgets requests and subsequent appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS, sequestration cripples the government's ability to operate effectively, to secure our country and her citizens, and it threatens to dismantle every quality of life program the VFW has helped to create for veterans, service members and their families everywhere; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we demand that the United States Congress eliminate sequestration.  
(Approved)

**Resolution No. 402 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**OPPOSE TRICARE FEE CHANGES**

WHEREAS, the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) made significant changes to the TRICARE military health benefit program by eliminating Tricare Standard and Extra, creating the new TRICARE Select Plan, adding enrollment fees for individuals joining the service after Jan.1, 2018 and for military retirees starting in 2021; and

WHEREAS, the changes mandated by the NDAA were further compounded by a change in costs instituted by the Defense Health Agency (DHA) for both the Select and the Prime plans. The changes included a complete change in the cost-share methodology for the new Tricare Select plan, which changed the beneficiary costs from a percentage of individual-services-used to an averaged, flat-rate co-payment and increased Tricare Prime fees; and

WHEREAS, the FY18 NDAA added additional costs by raising mail order and retail pharmacy fees for all Tricare beneficiaries, including Tricare For Life members. The additional costs included raising the costs of a 90-day mail order supply of generic medications from a \$0 co-pay to a \$7 per prescription co-pay, adding significant out-of-pocket costs to beneficiaries on maintenance medications for chronic conditions; and

WHEREAS, military health coverage is expensive, yet so is the upfront personal investment someone makes to voluntarily commit to a full military career. Any real or perceived erosion of benefits for career-minded personnel will undermine long-term retention; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we oppose all Tricare fee increases as well as any additional fee increases or attempts to erode the earned benefit of military healthcare. DOD should reform its healthcare programs by eliminating institutional inefficiencies before promising military retirees that better service will ensue after their participation fees are increased. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 403 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**KEEP DEFENSE BUDGET RELEVANT**

WHEREAS, America's Number #1 priority is to defend itself, its citizens and its interests, yet efforts by Congress continue to jeopardize the Defense Department's ability to properly train, equip and field a military that can defeat all enemies, as well as protect vital U.S. interests around the globe; and

WHEREAS, the fact the U.S. spends more on defense than the next 8 or 10 countries combined is a false narrative. With the exception of China and Russia, all the other countries are focused on homeland and/or shared theater defense alliances, whereas the U.S. has a worldwide commitment to project power, reliability and leadership; and

WHEREAS, defense spending for fiscal year 2018 was approximately 17 percent of the total federal budget, but accounts for nearly half of all discretionary spending, which makes DOD a consistent target for lawmakers trying to reduce overall federal spending, at the risk of making America less safe; and

WHEREAS, the military shrinks in terms of installations, manpower and material at the end of every war, but bringing the troops home has yet to make the world any less dangerous, our enemies any more predictable, or reduce the world's reliance on the United States to lead every contingency or humanitarian operation. Nor has our nation's war against international terrorism ended; and

WHEREAS, it is crucial that any proposed reduction not jeopardize America's security or break faith with those who serve or have served our nation 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 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. 404 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**PRESERVE THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE**

WHEREAS, America's All-Volunteer Force engaged in an 18-year, two-front war, that nobody prior to 9/11 would have thought possible without reinstating the draft. It has done so despite multiple combat tours and

significant military recruiting and retention challenges, and it continues to operate in an extremely dangerous and unpredictable world; and

WHEREAS, the troops are concerned. They are concerned that elected and appointed officials don't understand what it's like to serve in an All-Volunteer Force that has been tasked to do so much for so long. The troops are concerned whether there will be a place for them should they want to make the military a career. They are concerned about quality of life programs, their families, and the future of the GI Bill. And their leaders are very concerned about potential burnout in a military that is continually tasked to do more with less human and fiscal resources; and

WHEREAS, worldwide commitments and challenges have increased, to include keeping more than 14,000 American troops in Afghanistan, conducting thousands of airstrikes against radical forces aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, increasing rotations to Eastern Europe, heightened engagement in Africa, and maintaining almost 5,200 service members in Iraq and Syria; and

WHEREAS, substandard military housing, insufficient emphasis placed on training, pilot and maintenance shortages, outdated equipment, the inability to fund new programs, the use of authorities to activate Reserve component members without providing traditional benefits, and cuts to morale and welfare programs are the direct result of a military struggling to survive a budget crisis that will only continue to grow the longer Congress is unable to end the sequester and provide a stable, consistent defense budget. The cumulative impact of lower pay and a higher operations tempo has a direct influence on morale, which in combination with a better civilian economy, has impacted both recruiting and retention, and threatens the continued existence and 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 permanent financial stability to a military that will continue to operate in a very dangerous and unpredictable world. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 405 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**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). The Administration's military pay raise request, however, can be more or less than the ECI, with Congress having the final approval; and

WHEREAS, Congress erased the double-digit pay gap of the 1990s by directing military pay raises from fiscal years 2000-2006 to be a half-percent above private-sector wage increases, and raises from FY 2007-forward to match the ECI, although more could be authorized; and

WHEREAS, the 1.7 percent military pay raise for FY 2013 matched the ECI, but the Department of Defense — in its continuing campaign to slow the

growth of military compensation due to budget constraints and the sequester — recommended that future pay increases be limited; and

WHEREAS, over the objections of the VFW but with the approval of Congress, the “slow the growth” initiative resulted in military pay raises of 1 percent in FY 2014 and 2015, and 1.3 percent in FY 2016, with the cumulative result being less than the ECI; and

WHEREAS, the 2.4 percent raise in FY 2018 and 2.6 percent raise in FY 2019 were improvements and the proposed FY 2020 3.1 percent pay raise would be the largest pay raise in ten years; and

WHEREAS, changes to military pay and benefits is the top concern of military service members and their families. Continued efforts to slow the growth of military compensation, combined with a better civilian job market, and a sustained intense operational tempo have already impacted recruiting and retention, which jeopardizes the continued existence and viability of the All-Volunteer Force; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense is already facing a shortage in key fields, such as pilots and maintenance personnel, and must develop competitive pay and benefit scales to recruit emerging talent in high-tech fields, such as cyber; 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 ensuring annual military pay raise percentages match or exceed annual ECI increases. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 406 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
INCREASE AND EXTEND TSP MATCH**

WHEREAS, the new military retirement system will benefit all for their service, not just the 17 percent of service members who currently stay 20 years or longer. This recruiting initiative is needed to attract new generations of qualified service members who might otherwise not consider military service because it provides no match to portable 401k-style plans that virtually all civilian employers offer; and

WHEREAS, beginning in January 1, 2018, the government began automatically contributing 1 percent of base pay to a new service member’s Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) account beginning the third month of service, then up to 4 percent more through a government match beginning in Year 3 through 26 years of service, for a total of 5 percent. However, the Military Compensation and Military Retirement Commission recommended a total government contribution of 6 percent — the 1 percent automatic and up to a 5-percent match — without the arbitrary 26-year sunset clause; and

WHEREAS, the Pentagon’s FY 2017 budget submission proposed increasing the government’s contribution to the full 6 percent, and carry the match through retirement, but would delay starting the match until Year 5; and

WHEREAS, those serving prior to January 1, 2018 with less than 12 years' service will have a one-time opportunity in 2018 to opt into the new system or remain in the legacy system, based on their own individual circumstances; and

WHEREAS, for those who join after January 1, 2018, and who stay the requisite 20 years, the new retirement program will reduce future retiree pay from 50 to 40 percent of base pay, but overall net worth could be considerably higher due to a one-time, mid-career continuation bonus, and compound interest on increased TSP accounts, which can be rolled over into other investment plans and bequeathed entirely to heirs, whereas just a maximum 55 percent of retiree pay can go to surviving spouses; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we will work with Congress to increase the government's TSP contribution to a total of 6 percent beginning in Year 3 of service, and extend the match throughout an individual's military career. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 407 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**SEXUAL ASSAULT INCIDENT REPORTING AND TREATMENT**

WHEREAS, the Defense Department's annual report on Sexual Assault in the Military Services indicated that 6,172 service members reported being sexually assaulted in fiscal year 2016. The Department of Veterans Affairs also reports that 25 percent of female veterans and one percent of male veterans respond "yes," that they experienced a Military Sexual Trauma (MST), defined as sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment experienced during military service, when screened by their VA provider; and

WHEREAS, it is widely held that a far greater number of sexual assault survivors 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 real or 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 effects 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 sexual assault survivors are not aware of such services, which could help alleviate mental health issues commonly associated with sexual assault; and

WHEREAS, although VA 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, particularly in efforts of prevention, by encouraging all sexual assault and harassment survivors to report their attacks, to provide victims with proper medical and mental health care, and to aggressively investigate every reported incident and punish attackers as appropriate. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 408 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**ENSURE DOD COMPLIANCE WITH TAP MANDATE**

WHEREAS, Congress has mandated Transition Assistance Program (TAP) pre-separation counseling for all service members in order to ease the difficult transition from service into civilian life by offering job-search assistance, advice on available educational and healthcare programs, and other earned benefits; and

WHEREAS, a recent GAO report indicated the Department of Defense (DOD) reporting on TAP performance did not account for 48 percent of National Guard and Reserve members and 12 percent of active duty service members, significantly reducing the actual percentage of force participation from the publicly reported 94 percent to as low as 47 percent; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense has implemented a new TAP curriculum for separating service members, but does not require them to participate in classroom instruction for the individual tracks for Career Vocational Training, Accessing Higher Education, or Entrepreneurship; and

WHEREAS, recent VFW survey data shows that over half of all veterans who receive assistance through our Benefits Delivery at Discharge program reported that they did not have an opportunity to participate in any of the voluntary transition tracks; and

WHEREAS, former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel issued guidance to installation commanders to accommodate nationally-accredited Veterans’ Service Organizations to provide pre-separation services to transitioning service members, but local transition program staff do not consistently afford VSOs with the opportunity to actively engage service members during scheduled TAP classes; and

WHEREAS, Department of Defense has worked with its partner agencies to make TAP resources available in public-facing environments; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Department of Defense to include the additional curriculum tracks in its mandatory pre-separation classroom counseling, and to ensure nationally-accredited Veterans’ Service Organizations are afforded consistent access to transitioning service members; 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 expand access to TAP resources for veterans after separating from the military. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 409 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
ESTABLISH THE ARMED FORCES UNIVERSITY**

WHEREAS, approximately 77 percent of the Active Duty force and 76 percent of the Reserve component have not obtained a bachelor's degree or higher; and

WHEREAS, research conducted by the VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship demonstrated the persistent problems in obtaining comparable compensation for veterans who enter the civilian workforce without easily-transferrable skills; and

WHEREAS, the American Council on Education recommends, but cannot require, equivalent college credit be awarded for military training. And where there is considerable discrepancy amongst institutions on the awarding of these credits to service members and veterans, with some schools awarding as little as 1 credit; and

WHEREAS, the lack of coordination between the existing military educational and training programs results in inconsistent awarding of credits, certificates, and licenses across the services, even among individuals in comparable career fields who complete the same training; and

WHEREAS, since 2009, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has spent more than \$55 billion in Post-9/11 GI Bill funds alone for the educational needs of approximately 1.5 million Veterans and their dependents, and VA has requested an additional \$11 billion for education benefits for FY 19, demonstrating a clear need for education services; and

WHEREAS, since 1972, the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) has conferred college degrees accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to better prepare Airmen to compete in the civilian workforce; and

WHEREAS, the Air University Associate to Baccalaureate Cooperative program, begun in 2007, partners CCAF with 59 universities, articulating the transferability of credits for persistence purposes; and

WHEREAS, the Congressional Research Service showed that extending the CCAF model across all armed services could be a cost-effective method in improving the preparedness of today's military to enter the workforce; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to establish the Armed Forces University for the purpose of conferring accredited college degrees on military-trained personnel to improve preparedness for the civilian workforce. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 410 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
SUPPORT STABILITY AND RELIEF FOR MILITARY FAMILIES**

WHEREAS, approximately half of the total force is married--with approximately 5.1% of active duty marriages being dual-military--and 41% have children; and

WHEREAS, family stability and resiliency is a key aspect of service member readiness and retention; and

WHEREAS, the operations tempo, compounded by the impacts of sequestration on everything from quality of life programs to permanent change of station timelines, have created unsustainable stress levels for service members and their families; and

WHEREAS, persistent issues, such as military spouse employment challenges, gaps in support for relocating and transitioning service members with children in the Exceptional Family Member Program, substandard military housing, and reliable childcare continue to degrade morale and retention; and

WHEREAS, military policies are often out-of-date and do not address the needs of the current force with regards to work-life balance; now, therefore  
BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we call upon the Department of Defense and Congress to review and strengthen programs and policies that support military family readiness and meet our nation's obligations to those who serve and those who serve alongside them. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 411 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**PROVIDE FULL CONCURRENT RECEIPT OF MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY**  
**AND VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION**

WHEREAS, the fiscal year 2004 National Defense Authorization Act allowed for the gradual phase-in of full concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation for service-connected wounds, illnesses or injuries; and

WHEREAS, the 10-year phase-in period ended in 2014, which means military retirees with 20 or more years of service and 50 percent or higher VA disability ratings no longer have their military retirement pay offset by the amount of their VA disability compensation; and

WHEREAS, the law, however, did not provide the same equity to service-connected disabled military retirees with VA ratings of 40 percent or below, or to 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. 412 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**REVISE UNFAVORABLE DISCHARGE REVIEW PROCEDURES**

WHEREAS, approximately 30,000 veterans have been administratively discharged from the military for adjustment or personality disorders since September 11, 2001, and according to the Army Human Resources Command, the number of misconduct discharges continues to increase; and

WHEREAS, discharges under other-than-honorable conditions often disqualifies veterans from Department of Veterans Affairs health, compensation and education benefits, and could render them undesirable to potential employers; and

WHEREAS, many veterans who received unfavorable discharges could have been suffering from the effects of undiagnosed and untreated Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injuries and mental health conditions resulting from sexual trauma as the result of their military service; and

WHEREAS, a 2014 Department of Defense decision opened an avenue for Vietnam veterans and those from other wars, conflicts and eras to request upgrades to their other-than-honorable military discharge due to an extenuating factor not known at the time of their separation: PTSD. The decision is not a blanket approval for every upgrade request, but it does allow veterans who may have been diagnosed with PTSD years after separation to submit new evidence and hopefully correct a past injustice; and

WHEREAS, discharge review boards can now consider medical evidence from VA and civilian providers and are to review cases with liberal consideration of whether a veteran's mental health condition contributed to the circumstances resulting in the veterans' discharge; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to establish a process by which Military Department Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records will presume administrative irregularity and place the burden of proof on DOD to show that the discharge was just for those cases where the veteran claims service-related PTSD, TBI or sexual trauma as a mitigating factor in requesting an upgrade to his or her military discharge. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 413 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**REPEAL SBP/DIC OFFSET**

WHEREAS, surviving spouses of retired military members who die from service-connected wounds, illnesses or injuries are entitled to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. However, if a 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, similar to life insurance, SBP is purchased by a military retiree and is intended to provide up to 55 percent of his/her retirement pay to a surviving spouse. DIC is a modest indemnity compensation benefit of \$1,283 per month that the VA pays to surviving spouses whose loved ones died from a service-connected wound, illness or injury. Despite the two payments being paid for two different reasons from two different federal departments, all monthly SBP retirement payments are first offset by the \$1,283 DIC payment; and

WHEREAS, with few exceptions, the surviving spouses of other federal program retirees have no offset penalty, whereas approximately 63,000 surviving military spouses are affected by this aptly termed "Widow's Tax." Congress recognized the offset as unfair and in the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDA) created a Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) to partially reduce some of the offset via a graduated monthly payment of up to \$310, but funding was only authorized through FY 2017. The FY 2018 NDA made the SSIA permanent, but did so by raising co-pays for military healthcare beneficiary prescriptions and without resolving the complete offset issue; and

WHEREAS, military retiree SBP payments currently range between 2.5 and 6.5 percent of the selected base amount. A recommendation by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission would offer a new SBP program with substantially higher (11.25 percent) monthly premiums in order to receive full DIC without offset; and

WHEREAS, while the VFW concurs with the Commission's goal to eliminate the offset, we disagree with its funding method. The VFW's position is for the full repeal of the SBP-DIC offset, not to subsidize it out of the pockets of military retirees, who on the top end already sacrifice 6.5 percent of their monthly pay—for 360 consecutive months and reached the age of 70—just to ensure their surviving spouses will receive 55 percent of their retirement pay; 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. 414 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**PROVIDE EQUITY IN BENEFITS TO ALL RESERVE COMPONENT MEMBERS**

WHEREAS, America's reliance on its Reserve Component (RC) has been unprecedented in our nation's history. According to the Defense Department, more than 900,000 RC members have served on active duty since 9/11, contributing a quarter of all ground forces deployed into Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 17 years, and half of all Air Force airlift, and with a third of them serving multiple tours; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense's new "total force" concept, relies on the intentional integration of RC forces across the full spectrum of conflict, including all current and future homeland defense, domestic disaster, and overseas steady state and contingency operations, as an operational reserve, as opposed to the traditional strategic reserve; and

WHEREAS, Reserve Component members have been and are currently being activated under authorities, such as 12304b and 12301h, which do not provide them with the benefits comparable to their active duty counterparts or other reserve members activated under different authorities, although they may be deployed to the same location, with the same mission; and

WHEREAS, eligibility for 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, RC retirees are normally eligible to receive military retirement pay at age 60, but a 2008 National Defense Authorization Clause, lowered their retirement pay eligibility age by three months for every 90 days served on active duty in an eligible status after Jan. 29, 2008. And the FY 2015 NDAA amended the earlier language by including a carryover clause for RC members activated after Sept. 30, 2014. But the new law did not extend the carryover provision back to Jan. 29, 2008, or grandfather any early retirement credits back to 9/11; and

WHEREAS, there exist other significant discrepancies in the policies, available programs, and eligibility for benefits between the Active and Reserve Components; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to eliminate the discrepancies that discount the dedication and sacrifice of our Reserve Component members serving at home and abroad. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 415 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**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 provide the President of Taiwan the same respect and privileges due other visiting Heads of State. **(Approved)**

**Resolution No. 416 (Submitted ny Commander-in-Chief)**  
**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, South Korea's immediate 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 maintains the ability to launch nuclear-capable missiles, including a missile capable of reaching the United States, and has conducted six underground nuclear explosions since 2006, and is a known exporter of ballistic missiles and its technology to countries adversarial to the United States, most notably Iran; and

WHEREAS, the continued unpredictability of North Korea makes the presence of U.S. ground and air forces inside South 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 U.S. Government to maintain a substantial military presence in the Republic of Korea, and to increase military aid and assistance though modern weaponry and technology to help promote peace and stability in the region. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 417 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**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 has been a beacon of stability and the foundation of Middle Eastern regional security for the past 60 years, despite the repeated targeting by hostile actors wishing to infringe upon its sovereignty; and

WHEREAS, peace between Israelis and Palestinians remains of strategic interest to the United States and other partners within the region; and

WHEREAS, Israel has been one of our nation's regional strongest partners in the ongoing fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS); 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 both diplomatically and militarily, and continue to work with them to ensure and promote regional stability in the Middle-East, and elsewhere.

(Approved)

**Resolution No. 418 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
CALL FOR MORE UNILATERAL POW/MIA ACTIONS BY VIETNAM**

WHEREAS, 2,646 Americans were listed as missing and unaccounted-for at the end of the Vietnam War. As of June 2019, the number of missing is 1,588 due to a combination of increased U.S. Government emphasis, better research and identification technology, stronger diplomatic ties with host governments, and access to aircraft crash and ground battlefield sites; 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 that are 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, as well as any reports of live American servicemen. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 419 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
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 more than 82,000 missing Americans that include approximately 72,000 from World War II, 7,600 from the Korean War, 1,500 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, public-private partnerships are expanding the overall mission's ability to be at more sites, including previously unreachable sites, as is increasing the number of DPAA field offices into areas closer to major battlefields; and

WHEREAS, DPAA has strong bipartisan support on Capitol Hill, which has provided for additional funding required to support pending recovery operations in North Korea, which have been interrupted since 2005 due to U.S. safety and security concerns; and

WHEREAS, it is critical that DPAA remain fully funded. Recovering fallen Americans from long-ago battlefields is demanding and often dangerous work for investigation and recovery teams, but it is the most sacred of missions. It is our government's fulfillment of a soldier's pledge to never leave a fallen comrade on the battlefield, which is a promise that spans all generations; and

WHEREAS, without full and reliable funding, DPAA has been forced to postpone, restrict, or cancel recovery missions and delay recovery of difficult sites in favor of more productive locations, such as mass burials or multi-crewman aircraft crashes, in order to meet their legally required number of annual recoveries. Full funding enables DPAA 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; and

WHEREAS, Congress has adopted nine Continuing Resolutions in the last ten years and caused three shutdowns since 2013, which hinder operational planning and slow recoveries; 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 the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency and all supporting organizations involved in the Full Accounting Mission.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress must pass advanced appropriations to prevent a slowdown in recoveries and allow for budget carry-over allowing DPAA to plan multi-year operations. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 420 (Submitted by Department of New Jersey)  
RECOGNITION for AFGHAN and IRAQI COMBAT TRANSLATORS**

WHEREAS, Afghan and Iraqi wartime allies were bridges to the Afghan and Iraqi people during U.S. operations against terrorism in those countries; and

WHEREAS, Mission success was directly dependent on close working relations between local nationals and U.S. agents; and

WHEREAS, Our wartime allies often served consecutive tours with several different units to provide continuity; and

WHEREAS, Our wartime allies' lives and the lives of their family members were threatened for working with the Americans; and

WHEREAS, Our wartime allies saved countless American lives and directly contributed to every level of tactical, operational, and strategic success during the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, Special Immigrant Visa recipients and Priority 2 Refugee Admissions Program recipients go through the strictest vetting and approval process of any category of person coming to the U.S.; and

WHEREAS, This initiative is supported by all post 9/11 former secretaries of defense as well as key national security leaders in the military, Department of State, and the intelligence community; and

WHEREAS, The former chairmen of the 9/11 Commission have stated, "As former chairman and vice chairman of the 9/11 Commission, we encourage Congress to do everything in its power to keep the nation's promise to Afghan and Iraqi combat translators and to ensure these intrepid partners can achieve the American Dream. Special Immigrant Visas recipients from Afghanistan and Iraq loyally protected our men and women in uniform. Many directly saved American lives. Their future success will help to prevent the continued growth of Islamist terrorism – the third goal identified by the 9/11 Commission. A great nation keeps its promises"; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the President of the United States and the U.S. Congress to recognize the contributions of Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa recipients and Priority 2 Refugee Admissions Program recipients who stood shoulder to shoulder with, assisted and protected U.S. military service members, U.S. diplomats and government agents, non-governmental organizations and media organizations during U.S. involvement in those countries. (Rejected)

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON  
VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS AT THE 120<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL CONVENTION,  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

**Resolution No. 601 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
ADEQUATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BUDGET**

WHEREAS, there are about 20 million living veterans; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs anticipates that enrollment in the Veterans Health Administration will grow to nearly 9.5 million veterans and more than 8.76 million of those veterans will be seen by VA for health care service; and

WHEREAS, veterans use VA for numerous other benefit programs including nearly 1 million veterans in education programs, over 125,000 veterans enrolled in Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, nearly 3 million home loan participants, and over 6 million insurance policies worth more than \$1 trillion dollars; and

WHEREAS, the complexity of conditions that veterans which receive VA health for care will add demands to the system for years to come; and

WHEREAS, even though appropriations for VA continue to increase, they have not kept pace with demand and the rate of inflation; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Congress of the United States to 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 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**VA PHARMACEUTICAL CO-PAYMENTS**

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 nonservice-connected pension threshold, must pay a co-payment for each 30-day supply of medications obtained through the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS, there have been repeated proposals to change VA pharmaceutical co-payments, placing an undue hardship on many veterans; and

WHEREAS, the increase in costs of the benefit would likely place an undue burden on veterans, limit access to earned benefits, and serve to inequitably balance the federal budget on the backs of veterans; and

WHEREAS, pharmaceuticals are part of the VA's standard health benefits package and must be provided to all eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, VA is required by current law to charge veterans for life saving preventive medicines which are cost-free under private sector insurance and other public health care options; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we oppose increases in Department of Veterans Affairs pharmaceutical co-payments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress must exempt preventive medicines from VA pharmaceutical co-payment requirements. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 603 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**

**COMPETITIVE REIMBURSEMENT RATES FOR  
VA AND DOD HEALTH CARE PROGRAMS**

WHEREAS, the reimbursement private sector health care providers receive from Department of Veterans Affairs CHAMPVA health care program is less than the reimbursements paid by private health insurance; and

WHEREAS, the reimbursement private sector health care providers receive from the VA Community Care Program is tied by law to Medicare's allowable charges; and

WHEREAS, the reimbursement private sector health care providers receive from TRICARE is tied by law to Medicare's allowable charges; and

WHEREAS, private medical providers have elected not to participate in CHAMPVA, the VA Community Care Program, and TRICARE networks because of the limited reimbursement rates; and

WHEREAS, 100 percent disabled veterans and retired military personnel rely on VA and Department of Defense health care programs for their health care needs, and limited reimbursement rates limit health care options for veterans and their dependents; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support legislation and regulations authorizing reimbursement rates for Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense health care programs and other programs, which provide medical care for retired and disabled veterans to be competitive with private health insurance. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 604 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
VA MEDICARE AND TRICARE REIMBURSEMENT**

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States views it as essential that the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system provide qualifying veterans with timely and accessible care; and

WHEREAS, VA collects third party payment for treatment, but current law prevents VA from collecting from the Medicare Trust Fund and TRICARE in certain circumstances; and

WHEREAS, a large number of VA's patients are eligible for Medicare and TRICARE; and

WHEREAS, VA medical care collections are used to supplement the appropriations VA receives from Congress to deliver efficient and effective health care at a lower cost than private sector health care providers; and

WHEREAS, with the increased demand on its health care system, 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 Department of Veterans Affairs to receive reimbursement for the cost of non-service

connected care that is provided to veterans who are enrolled in Medicare or TRICARE. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 605 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**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 Department of Veterans Affairs 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 or the Department of Defense for a condition or disease recognized, as presumptively service connected will serve as the effective date for service connected compensation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to enact legislation requiring VA to notify veterans, upon receiving treatment for a presumptive disability, that said disability is a claimable presumptive service connected disability. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 606 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**EXTENDING GULF WAR PRESUMPTIONS AND HEALTH CARE BEYOND 2021**  
**AND TO AFGHANISTAN THEATER VETERANS**

WHEREAS, many service members have served and continue to serve in the Afghanistan theater of operations since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom; and

WHEREAS, these veterans have served under circumstances similar to those served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations; and

WHEREAS, Afghanistan is not considered part of the Southwest Asia theater of operations during; and

WHEREAS, veterans of Afghanistan are suffering from similar undiagnosed conditions as those who have served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations; and

WHEREAS, the authority to extend presumptive service connected conditions for Southwest Asia theater veterans is set to expire on December 31, 2021; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress and Department of Veterans Affairs to 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 VA must permanently extend presumptive disability compensation benefits for Gulf War veterans to ensure all service members who serve in Southwest Asia theater of military operations are afforded this protection. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 607(Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**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 Department of Veterans Affairs 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 Department of Veterans Affairs nursing home entitlement for all veterans enrolled in the VA health care system. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 608 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY HEALTH CARE**

WHEREAS, since 2000, nearly 400,000 service members have sustained Traumatic Brain Injury including those who served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; 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 patients with mild TBI may have long-term health consequences; and

WHEREAS, veterans with severe TBI require a lifetime of intensive services to care for their injuries, yet many Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities are neither properly staffed nor equipped to provide the necessary screening and comprehensive health care services veterans suffering from TBI require; 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 conditions associated with Traumatic Brain Injuries caused by blast injuries, blunt trauma, motor vehicle accidents, and falls; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to improve research pertaining to screening methods, diagnostic tools, and treatment of conditions associated with TBIs caused by blast injuries, blunt trauma, motor vehicle accidents, and falls to ensure veterans who have experienced a TBI receive effective health care. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 609 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
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 death by suicide among a host of other negative consequences; and

WHEREAS, studies conducted by VA through the National Center for PTSD found an average of 23 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD; and

WHEREAS, VA expects an increase in PTSD conditions as veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan after multiple tours of duty; 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, or other mental health conditions, and adequate research into the brain's response to internal and external influences that could result in mental illness has yet to be undertaken; 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; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to dedicate adequate resources to address the alarming rate at which Veterans commit suicide.

(Approved)

**Resolution No. 610 (submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
VA HEALTH CARE FOR WOMEN VETERANS**

WHEREAS, the total number of women veterans has grown by approximately eight percent, while the number of women veterans using Department of Veterans Affairs benefits has grown by over 45 percent since 2007; and

WHEREAS, VA estimated that women veterans as a percentage of veterans using VA health care will continue to grow, making it essential that VA continue to staff and equip its medical facilities to meet their specific health care needs; and

WHEREAS, women veterans have reported that VA staff continue to confuse them for spouses or caregivers and even challenge their veteran status; and

WHEREAS, women veterans also reported concerns regarding the gender specific competencies of VA health care professionals; and

WHEREAS, VA reported in 2015 that 66 percent of women veterans are assigned to a Designated Women's Health Provider (DWHP), who have experience and training in women's health care; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we acknowledge that the Department of Veterans Affairs has improved the care and services it provides women veterans, but we urge VA to continue to monitor and enhance health care services available to women veterans at all VA medical facilities and expand its designated women's health program to mental health care to ensure veterans have access to mental health care providers who understand women-specific mental health conditions; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to improve outreach to women veterans, allow women to choose the gender of their VA health care providers and properly train VA's workforce to treat women veterans with the respect and dignity they have earned and deserve. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 611 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
EXPAND VA CAREGIVER BENEFITS**

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program provides a monthly stipend, respite care, mental and medical health care, and necessary training and certifications



for caregivers of veterans who were severely injured on or after September 11, 2001; and

WHEREAS, the comprehensive program is expected to begin expanding for the caregivers of veterans of other eras; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States believes severely wounded, injured, and ill veterans of all conflicts have made incredible sacrifices, and all family members who care for them are equally deserving of our recognition and support; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense provides support to family caregivers of members of the armed forces who are catastrophically disabled through its Special Compensation for Assistance with Activities of Daily Living program, which includes disability caused by illnesses in its eligibility criteria; and

WHEREAS, the VA Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program excludes veterans who require home caregiver services as a result of serious illnesses; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to provide the accurate resources to VA for the expansion of the Department of Veterans Affairs Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program to veterans of all eras; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to fully align the VA's Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program with the Department of Defense Special Compensation for Assistance with Activities of Daily Living program by including in its eligibility criteria veterans who require caregiver services as a result of serious illnesses incurred in the line of duty. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 612 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY CARE OPTIONS FOR VETERANS**

WHEREAS, members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States are generally satisfied with the health care they receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs and believe the VA health care system must be improved to ensure all veterans have timely access to high quality care; and

WHEREAS, the VFW has collected and evaluated direct feedback from veterans regarding their options, preferences and expectation when receiving health care; and

WHEREAS, the VFW has consistently worked with Congress and VA to improve the health care VA provides our nation's veterans through innovative VA and community care programs to ensure veterans have a seamless experience receiving health care from VA, whether it is at VA medical facilities or, when necessary, supplemented through private sector health care providers partnered with VA; and

WHEREAS, the veteran population is a shifting demographic with evolving health care needs, which necessitates that VA identify new and

innovative ways to deliver timely access to high quality, comprehensive, and veteran-centric health care; and

WHEREAS, the VA has proposed regulations to charge veterans for services they receive for their service connected disabilities; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress must provide Department of Veterans Affairs with the oversight, appropriations and assets necessary to properly implement the VA MISSION Act as intended by Congress; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA comply with federal prompt payment requirements and incentivize private sector health care providers to participate in its community care program, while ensuring veterans are not held financially liable for services furnished through such program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA must remain the guarantor and coordinator of care for enrolled veterans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW opposes privatizing VA or eroding VA's ability to provide direct care to veterans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW opposes any out of pocket costs for care coordinated by VA for service connected disabilities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress and VA must furnish and conduct proper outreach to ensure veterans are fully aware of their health care options. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 613 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
RESEARCH ON MEDICAL CANNABIS TREATMENTS**

WHEREAS, over the past several years, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury have been thrust into the forefront of the medical community and general public in large part due to suicides and over medication of veterans; and

WHEREAS, medical cannabis is legal in more than 33 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and Mariana Islands, with more states pending legalization legislation; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs cannot legally prescribe cannabis products as long as the federal government continues to categorize it as a Schedule 1 drug; and

WHEREAS, states that have legalized medical cannabis have seen a 15-35 percent decrease in opioid overdose and abuse; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have recently introduced legislation which would allow VA doctors to discuss the use of medical cannabis with veteran patients to treat service-connected disabilities; and

WHEREAS, there is substantial evidence from a comprehensive study by the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academic Press that concludes cannabinoids are effective for treating chronic pain, chemotherapy

induced nausea and vomiting, sleep disturbances related to obstructive sleep apnea, multiple sclerosis spasticity symptoms, and fibromyalgia; and

WHEREAS, multiple states that have legalized marijuana have used state funding to research the effective use of medicinal marijuana for PTSD and other health care issues; and

WHEREAS, in April 2016, the Drug Enforcement Agency gave its approval to a study on the effect of medical marijuana on post-traumatic stress disorder, the first federally funded, randomized, controlled research in the U.S. for PTSD; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States that we support federally funded research of Medical Cannabis for veterans being treated by Department of Veterans Affairs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, veterans who use state approved marijuana programs should not forfeit their Second Amendment rights. (Approved as Amended)

**Resolution No. 614 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**EXTEND SERVICE CONNECTION PRESUMPTION**  
**TO BLAST SURVIVORS**

WHEREAS, the Global War on Terrorism has exposed more than 330,000 service members to diagnosable blast injuries, with thousands more going undiagnosed and untreated; and

WHEREAS, the nature of the conflict these service members face is frequently guerrilla-style combat where the enemy is widely known to use improvised explosive devices; 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 service members can suffer from these disabilities for many years after the blast; and

WHEREAS, a large number of veterans have been identified as having been diagnosed at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers with conditions possibly related to blast exposures since the start of the Global War on Terrorism; 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 conditions associated with blast exposure. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 615 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**TINNITUS AND HEARING LOSS**  
**PRESUMPTIVE COMPENSABLE 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, veterans, from earlier, were not afforded a comprehensive audiological examination upon entrance and discharge from the military services, but instead were subject to highly inaccurate test methods; and

WHEREAS, in recent years the second leading disability granted service connection by Department of Veterans Affairs was for hearing loss or tinnitus; and

WHEREAS, the VA 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, in 2005 the Institutes of Medicine (IOM) (now referred to as the National Academy of Sciences) 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.

BE IT FURTHER 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. 616 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**VA CLAIMS WORKLOAD**

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made significant progress in reducing the backlog of claims for compensation, pension, education benefits and appeals, yet submissions and appeals continues to grow; and

WHEREAS, nearly, twenty five (25) percent of rating cases that have been pending for more than 125 days has remained constant for the last two years, more than 180,000 appeals are pending between the Board of Veterans Appeals and Regional Office and it still takes more than 1,700 days to receive a BVA decision after filing a substantive appeal; and

WHEREAS, VA continues to order redundant and often unnecessary examinations when the evidence of record is sufficient to make a determination, or claimants submit adequate medical records and doctors opinions; and

WHEREAS, Congress has provided increased funding for staffing at VA and improved its 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 dozens of Congressional hearings, numerous studies, changes of VA leadership, altered workflow, amended work processes, erratic IT development, as well as fruitless pilot programs and experimental initiatives, it is clear that there are no easy, simple or quick solutions that lead to the speedy reduction of the backlog; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress require Department of Veterans Affairs to accept private medical evidence and opinions in lieu of VA examinations whenever they are sufficient for rating purposes; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we continue to advise that Congress exercise its oversight authority and provide the vital resources necessary to sustain a sufficient workforce capable of effectively managing the workload and provide quality and timely service to those claiming benefits or appealing decisions from VA; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress bolsters its oversight and funding of VA technology initiatives to ensure that they are constructive, relevant and effective in streamlining claims processing and improving quality of entitlement decisions. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 617 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**IMPROVE EDUCATION BENEFITS FOR SURVIVORS**

WHEREAS, the Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance Program 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 consistently more than twice the rate of reimbursement for DEA; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States worked with Congress to successfully expand the Gunnery Sgt. John David Fry Scholarship to offer Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to eligible surviving children, and spouses; and

WHEREAS, Congress recently increased the monthly allowance for DEA while also decreasing the amount of months to utilize the benefit; 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 Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance Program 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. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 618 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**BURIAL PLOT ALLOWANCE**

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs 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 annually and the current VA benefit is \$2,000 for a service connected death, and \$300 burial and up to \$780 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 VFW urges Congress to provide the resources required to meet the burial needs of all veterans who have served their country so honorably and faithfully. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 619 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**TOXIC EXPOSURES**

WHEREAS, veterans who served along the Korean demilitarized zone after the dates of presumptive exposure to Agent Orange suffer from conditions associated with such exposure and are often denied service connection by the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS, those who served on bases in Thailand during the Vietnam War era who suffer from conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure are arbitrarily and unjustly denied service connection; and

WHEREAS, veterans of the Persian Gulf War suffer from an array of conditions and diseases, collectively known as Gulf War Illness, which remain unexplained and VA ignores Congress and continues a burdensome claims process; and

WHEREAS, veterans of current conflicts were exposed to numerous environmental hazards, including open air burn pits and the anti-malaria drug mefloquine; and

WHEREAS, veterans stationed at Woomera Air Station in South Australia, were exposed to radiation during nuclear weapons testing during the 1950's and 1960's and subsequent closure and cleanup; and

WHEREAS, veterans and dependents stationed at Fort McClellan, Alabama were exposed to Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCB), and now suffer from associated conditions; and

WHEREAS, veterans and family members stationed at Camp Lejeune consumed contaminated water and now suffer from associated conditions. While VA acknowledged this fact, there are differences in what conditions are compensable and those which only receive reimbursement for medical care. Additionally, the requirement to be stationed on the base for 30 days is arbitrary and ignores thousands who graduated from training in less time; and

WHEREAS, the United States military has conducted testing, monitoring, and clean-up operations related to various chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons resulting in exposure; and

WHEREAS, military firefighters and fire truck mechanics were immersed in firefighting foam almost daily as a circumstance of military service. The foam has now been banned due to extreme diseases and illnesses from its exposure, yet the government has no plans to study the effects of such chemicals on troops; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to invest adequate resources to study, diagnose, and treat conditions and illnesses associated with toxic exposures; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Congress ensures that the Department of Defense expedites declassification efforts related to exposure events and that the Department of Veterans Affairs extends presumptive service connection to veterans suffering from conditions or illnesses found to be associated with exposure to toxic substances. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 620 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**DIGITAL CLAIMS PROCESS**

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs now processes nearly all its workload in a digital environment; this includes claims for compensation, pension, survivor benefits and appeals, and;

WHEREAS, VSOs have had to request VA's Office of General Counsel intervention in executing the same principal functions in a digital environment which VSOs previously performed with paper claims; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Department of Veterans Affairs to update all regulations authorizing VSOs the same advocacy rights in the digital environment as were allowed in the paper-based claims process; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs improve existing regulations mandating VA accept dates of claim actions when files are electronically transmitted to VA. In the event of technical or other systemic failures that current regulations governing acceptance of non-electronic submissions are consistently applied across VA Regional Offices; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs implements regulations mandating VSOs are granted 48 hours to review rating decisions. During this review period, VA shall not finalize decisions without the VSO electronically certifying that a rating review has been conducted and if there are discrepancies that require communication with VA decision makers that the clock is temporarily suspended until those questions are resolved. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 621 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**NATIONAL SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE**

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs has established life insurance designed to support veterans whom might otherwise be uninsurable due to service connected disabilities; and

WHEREAS, by statute premium rates are based on the American Experience Table of Mortality which was created in the 1860s to set insurance rates accordingly with mortality rates at the time; and



WHEREAS, private health insurance companies more commonly use the Commissioners Standard Ordinary Table which has been adjusted for current mortality rates; and

WHEREAS, VA life insurance rates are now no longer competitive with private insurance company rates; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to pass legislation authorizing Department of Veterans Affairs to use the most commonly used life mortality table in order to make VA National Service Life Insurance competitive with private health insurance policies. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 622 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**VA AUTOMOTIVE ALLOWANCE**

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs will issue only one certificate of eligibility for financial assistance in the purchase of a new or used automobile or other conveyance; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs will provide or assist in providing eligible veterans with a second automobile or other conveyance when the first vehicle purchased with VA financial assistance is destroyed as a result of any natural catastrophe, the destruction was not the veterans fault or the veteran does not receive compensation for the loss from a property insurer; and

WHEREAS, current technology, design and safety advances have reached such a level that automobiles and conveyances are superior to every model produced in the last 50 years; and

WHEREAS, it is impractical to assume veterans who require such assistance would not benefit from better design and equipment changes to make it easier to accomplish daily tasks, attend medical or other appointments and experience an overall better quality of life; and

WHEREAS, veterans who require such assistance are unduly penalized by the narrow scope of this program by virtue of the nature of its being a “one time” benefit; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to remove the unreasonable restrictions of a once in a lifetime grant; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs authorize veterans, or their duly authorized representatives who are already in receipt of the automotive allowance, those with applications pending, and any future qualified applicant be allowed to reapply for this essential benefit at the end of the sales or lease contract or every five years, whichever is greater, so as to maintain a practical quality of life and benefit from current safety and technology standards. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 623 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**

## **DOMICILIARY PROGRAMS AND TEMPORARY TOTAL RATINGS**

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs provides free medical treatment for service connected disabilities; and

WHEREAS, VA grants temporary total ratings for veterans hospitalized in excess of 21 days due to service connected disabilities; and

WHEREAS, veterans are not able to work while participating in VA domiciliary and day programs; and

WHEREAS, VA has misinterpreted the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims decision *Mangham v. Shinseki* and now no longer considers domiciliary and day programs as “hospital care” for temporary 100percent disability ratings; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress restore eligibility for temporary 100 percent ratings to include medical treatment provided by all domiciliary and day programs provided the program is treating a service connected disability. (Approved)

### **Resolution No. 624 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief) HOMELESS VETERANS PRIORITIES**

WHEREAS, homelessness among veterans has significantly decreased due to coordinated efforts across multiple agencies of government and the ambitious goal of the Department of Veterans Affairs to eliminate homelessness among veterans; and

WHEREAS, a growing number of female veterans experience homelessness, many of whom have dependents in their care; and

WHEREAS, local and state homeless veteran agencies and programs are federally funded by the Department of Veteran Affairs Grant and Per Diem program and the Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration program; and

WHEREAS, programs such as VA’s Supportive Services for Veteran Families and the joint Housing and Urban Development and VA’s Supportive Housing program are showing signs of success in reducing 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 to address veterans’ homelessness by increasing the availability of affordable housing, expanding educational and employment opportunities and training and providing gender-specific services; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Department of Veterans Affairs should periodically adjust Grant and Per Diem program rates for inflation to ensure sufficient operation of homeless veteran assistance programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA compensation and non-service connected pension should not be considered countable income by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in determining program eligibility. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 625 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**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 has worked to secure and preserve quality education benefits for all generations of veterans; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs enrolled nearly one million veterans across all G.I. Bill programs in the past academic year; and

WHEREAS, despite significant improvements to consumer resources for student veterans, inconsistent access to quality consumer information and financial hardships continue to drive perceptions in Washington that student-veterans are not succeeding in higher education; and

WHEREAS, many combat veterans do not fully qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit; and

WHEREAS, certain schools and programs seek to circumvent benefit guidelines in order to reap significant financial benefit; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to ensure proper oversight of Department of Veterans Affairs educational benefit programs by developing quality metrics with which to demonstrate student veteran success in higher education, and close financial loopholes through which certain academic programs can exploit GI Bill reimbursement models; 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; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we work to extend full GI Bill benefits for all combat veterans and preserve quality GI Bill benefits for all current conflict veterans and future conflict veterans to ensure they have access to quality education assistance programs. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 626 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY**

WHEREAS, the period of eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment 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 Department of Veterans Affairs 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. 627 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)**  
**SUPPORT VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS**

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars recognizes that it is in the best interest of our nation to have a strong and viable veterans employment and training system; and

WHEREAS, Congress has recognized that veterans of all eras, especially recently separated service members and veterans with service connected disabilities find it difficult to obtain meaningful employment and careers; and

WHEREAS, while there are certain employment and educational programs in place for veterans such programs must have a proactive, long-term career 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 the Jobs for Veterans State Grant program and other Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service programs; 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. 628 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)  
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; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, 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; 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; but such programs should never come at the expense of other earned veterans' benefits; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Congress hold Department of Veterans Affairs accountable for its duty to properly verify veteran entrepreneurs to help achieve the federal government's three-percent veterans contracting goal. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 629 (Submitted by Department of California)  
SUPPORT THE TRANSFER OF THE MARE ISLAND CEMETERY TO  
THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

WHEREAS, the Mare Island Naval Cemetery, located in Vallejo, California, was established on February 12, 1856 and has been identified as the

oldest military cemetery on the West Coast and the final resting place for more than 800 of our country's heroes, some who served as far back as the War of 1812; and

WHEREAS, three Medal of Honor recipients and Anna Arnold Key Turner, the daughter of Francis Scott Key, composer of "The Star-Spangled Banner" are among those buried at the Mare Island Naval Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, the City of Vallejo, which inherited the cemetery when the base closed, has failed to properly care for the cemetery and does not have the funds to restore the cemetery or maintain it to an appropriate level, commensurate with its historical importance; and

WHEREAS, the VA's National Cemetery Administration's mission is to provide veterans with "final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to our nation;" and

WHEREAS, S. 127 and H.R. 578 have been introduced in the 116th United States Congress by Senator Feinstein and Congressman Thompson, respectively, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into an agreement with the city of Vallejo, CA, for the transfer of Mare Island Naval Cemetery, to be maintained as a national shire; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support transferring the control of the Mare Island Naval Cemetery in Vallejo, CA, to the Department of Veterans Affairs. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 630 (Submitted by Department of Michigan)**  
**ANTIDEPRESSANT HARMS ANALYSIS &**  
**ANTIDEPRESSANT ROLE IN VETERAN SUICIDES**

WHEREAS, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) an average of 20 Veterans died by suicide each day in 2018<sup>1</sup>, and veterans accounted for 18 percent of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults<sup>2</sup>; and

1 VA Press Release: "VA Releases National Suicide Data Report"

2 VA Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet

3 2016 National Suicide Data Report Appendix

4 VA Suicide Prevention Program Fact Sheet - September 2018 - Page 7

5 FDA Black Box Warning

6 Antidepressants Agents and Suicide Death Valenstein - Table 1

7 Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Message Points 2018-2019

WHEREAS, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the average suicide rate for veterans who used Veterans Health Administration (VHA) services between 2005 and 2016, were on average, 32% higher than for Veterans who did not use VHA services<sup>3</sup>; and

WHEREAS, Veterans who have access to VHA services have greater access to psychiatric care than veterans who do not have access to VHA services; and

WHEREAS, Veterans who have been diagnosed with a mental health condition and have access to psychiatric care are more likely to be prescribed antidepressant drugs than veterans who do not have access to psychiatric care or VHA services; and

WHEREAS, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, in 2015, the suicide rate for male Veterans between the ages of 18-34 was 45/100,000<sup>4</sup>, and it is this Veteran population at the greatest risk to die by suicide; and

WHEREAS, antidepressant drug makers are required by the FDA to include a "BLACK BOX WARNING" that antidepressants can increase the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors in young adults<sup>5</sup>; and

WHEREAS, a study comparing suicide rates between seven different types of antidepressants, found that the suicide rate for the first 90 days of treatment for six of those seven drugs had suicide rates greater than 450/100,000, nearly 10 times that of even the most at risk

Veterans population, male Veterans between the ages of 18-34<sup>6</sup>; and

WHEREAS, according to the Congressional Research Service, there have been over 128,000 deployed veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) between 2000-2014<sup>7</sup>; and

WHEREAS, according to a study by the Department of Defense, antidepressants were prescribed to 70-80% of service members that had been diagnosed with depression or Post

Traumatic Stress Disorder<sup>8</sup>; and

8 Quality of Care for PTSD and Depression in the Military Health System - Rand

9 2013 - DoDSER Annual Report

10 2012 - DoDSER Annual Report

11 Many People Taking Antidepressants Discover They Cannot Quit

12 National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide 2018-2028

WHEREAS, in 2013, the Pentagon reported more soldiers were dying overseas by committing suicide than from combat wounds, about one a day<sup>9</sup>; and

WHEREAS, in 2012, there was one suicide every 17 hours among all active duty, reserve and National Guard members, according to figures gathered from each branch<sup>10</sup>; and

WHEREAS, Veterans and service members have been prescribed antidepressant drugs that could take months and years to safely withdraw from, but may not have provided informed consent related to those withdrawal risks<sup>11</sup>; and

WHEREAS, In spite of the BLACK BOX WARNINGS and other indicators listed above that identify the use of antidepressants could be causing Veteran suicides and other physiological and psychological harms, the word "antidepressant" is not mentioned one time in the United States Department of

Veterans Affairs 42 page “National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide, 2018-2028”<sup>12</sup>; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we investigate the role antidepressants have in Veteran suicides, homicides, violent crimes, job loss, relationship failures, homelessness, and permanent disabilities that may be the side effects or withdrawal effects of antidepressant drugs exacerbating existing depression or PTSD; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we work with the 116th Congress to require the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to conduct a comprehensive Antidepressant Harms Analysis as it relates to the role of antidepressants in Veteran and service member suicides, homicides, violent crimes, job loss, relationship failures, homelessness, and lifelong disabilities that may be the side effects or withdrawal effects of antidepressant drugs exacerbating pre-existing depression or PTSD; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we work with the 116th Congress to require the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to investigate the harms caused to Veterans, service members and members of the National Guard and Reserves who were prescribed antidepressant drugs, but did not provide informed consent for the need to taper off of these drugs over the course of many months and years, once they have begun treatment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Antidepressant Harms Analysis, which will be conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense, shall be provided in two stages to the President of the United States, the United States Congress and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the first shall be completed and delivered within six months of the request from Congress and will show the total number of acts of suicide, homicide and violent crimes that Veterans and service members committed while they were actively taking or had recently withdrawn from an antidepressant drug, and should also show the number of VHA using Veterans and service members who have open prescriptions for antidepressants and have not seen a psychologist or counselor within the previous 90 days; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the second stage of the report related to job loss, relationship failures, homelessness and disabilities that may be related to antidepressant drugs, shall be provided to the President of the United States, the United States Congress and the Veterans of Foreign Wars within twelve months of the request from Congress for this Antidepressant Harms Analysis; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that every veteran who has an open prescription for an antidepressant and has not been seen by a psychologist or counselor within the previous 90 days, shall receive a wellness check from the VHA to ensure the Veteran patient’s health and safety, and to be re-enrolled in counseling services at the patients’ request. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 631 (Submitted by Department of Pacific Areas)**



## **EQUITABLE EDUCATION BENEFITS FOR DEPENDENTS**

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, currently, Title 38 U.S. Code 3532 and Department of Veterans

Affairs regulations dictate that eligible dependents receiving training in the Philippines receive one half of the DEA rate. The Philippines is the only foreign country with a reduction in DEA benefits; and

WHEREAS, while veterans studying in the Philippines received the full amount of the G.I. Bill, dependents who qualify for the Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance Program and pursue a program of education at an institution in the Republic of Philippines, are penalized with a 50% reduction in benefits; and

WHEREAS, we believe this injustice to our Nation's veterans families living and studying in the Philippines and must be corrected; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to amend Title 38 U.S. Code 3532, to allow dependents that attend institutions of higher learning in the Philippines, to receive the equitable education assistance rate; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress ensure eligible dependents who are studying in the Philippines receive equitable treatment under the Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance Program. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 632 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)  
IMPROVE DISABILITY COMPENSATION ACCURACY FOR  
POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) INCIDENT TO  
MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)**

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense (DoD) reported that more than 5,200 service members were victims of sexual assault in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 – a ten percent (10%) increase from the previous FY; and

WHEREAS, victims of these assaults – characterized as Military Sexual Trauma (MST) – often exhibit degraded performance, inability to concentrate, increased anxiety and agitation, sleeplessness, intrusive thoughts, and other symptoms classically associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); and

WHEREAS, many victims of MST do not report their assaults, even to medical providers, most commonly for fear of retaliation by a superior officer, or sexual aggressor; concerns about negative implications in performance evaluations, worries about punishment for collateral misconduct, and perception of an unresponsive military chain of command; and

WHEREAS, over the last three years, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has processed approximately 12,000 MST-related PTSD claims per year, but, due to reluctance to report MST, many claims lack specific PTSD stressors often demanded for combat-related PTSD claims – such as date, location, and witnesses; and

WHEREAS, despite the VA having taken the steps to identify behavioral markers of MST-related PTSD and implementing, in 2011, a “liberal approach” towards adjudicating evidence of MST; the VA Inspector General (IG) reported in August 2018 that nearly fifty percent (50%) of PTSD-related MST are improperly adjudicated due to inadequate development and therefore denied without mandatory second-level review; and

WHEREAS, not all VA IG’s recommendations have been closed; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we enjoin the VA to accelerate efforts to expand specialized training for MST-related PTSD evaluators through “regionalized claims processing” that can conduct necessary training across the VA enterprise; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we encourage the VA to regularly report on the accuracy of PTSD-related MST adjudication, it has claimed in its Semi-Annual Reports to Congress. (Approved as Amended)

**Resolution No. 633 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)  
WARTIME VA BENEFITS FOR EARLY VIETNAM VETERANS**

WHEREAS, section 101(29) of title 38, United States Code, officially recognizes the Vietnam era period of war as "beginning on February 28, 1961, and ending on May 7, 1975, in the case of a veteran who served in the Republic of Vietnam;" and

WHEREAS, the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG)-Vietnam was officially established on November 1, 1955 following the defeat of the French and the establishment of the 1954 Geneva accords; and

WHEREAS, between 5,000 and 10,000 United States (US) Military personnel were estimated to have served with MAAG-Vietnam and other US military groups in Vietnam between November 1, 1955 and February 27, 1961; and

WHEREAS, veterans who served in Vietnam from November 1, 1955 to February 27, 1961 are not considered wartime veterans and are considered ineligible for wartime VA benefits such as low-income wartime veterans pensions; and

WHEREAS, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (AFEM) was established per Executive Order 10977 dated December 4, 1961 for military campaigns that started on or after July 1, 1958. US Military personnel who served in Vietnam from July 1, 1958 to July 3, 1965 may receive either the AFEM or the Vietnam Service Medal but not both. Veterans who served in Vietnam prior to July 1, 1958 are not eligible for any campaign medals; and

WHEREAS, at least twelve US military personnel were awarded the Purple Heart by being wounded in Vietnam prior to February 28, 1961; and ten US military personnel were killed in Vietnam between November 1, 1955 and February 27, 1961 and are listed on the Vietnam Wall; and

WHEREAS, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 authorized the Secretary of Defense to conduct a program to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vietnam War; and such program declares November 1, 1955 to be the official start of the Vietnam War; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans-of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we petition Congress to change the present laws so that any US military personnel who served in Vietnam from November 1, 1955 to February 27, 1961 be eligible for all VA wartime benefits. (Approved)

**Resolution No. 634 (Submitted by Department of West Virginia)  
DISABLED VETERAN LEAVE**

WHEREAS, as of November 5, 2016 all new federal employees with a service connected disability rating of 30% or greater will receive 104 hours of “Disabled Veteran Leave” to attend appointments related to their disability; no such leave has been granted to Veterans who were employed before the date of November 5, 2016; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we petition Congress to enact legislation and policy which would retroactively qualify federal employees to receive “Disabled Veteran Leave”.  
(Approved)

**Resolution No. 635 (Submitted by Department of Colorado)  
IMPROPER MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS**

WHEREAS, more than 30 States and the District of Columbia have approved medical cannabis for use in treating many physical and mental conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); and

WHEREAS, those states that allow cannabis treatment are required to have a medical marijuana card signed by a medical doctor; and

WHEREAS, many veterans who have a diagnosis of PTSD and other physical and mental conditions are authorized by their doctors to participate in a state-approved medical cannabis program and chose to use medical cannabis as treatment as opposed to opioids and benzodiazepines; and

WHEREAS, veterans who participate in a state medical cannabis program are often labeled as having a substance use disorder by VA because VA doctors do not properly track state-approved medical cannabis use in accordance with VHA Directive 1315; and

WHEREAS, such veterans are required to overcome the stigma of being wrongfully labeled as drug abusers; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that the Veterans Health Administration must address misdiagnosis of substance use disorder for veterans who participate in state-approved medical cannabis programs. (Approved as Amended)

**Resolution No. 636 (Submitted by Department of Colorado)  
HOMELESS VETERANS PRIORITIES**

WHEREAS, homelessness among veterans has significantly decreased due to coordinated efforts across multiple agencies of government and the ambitious goal of the Department of Veterans Affairs to eliminate homelessness among veterans; and

WHEREAS, a growing number of female veterans experience homelessness, many of whom have dependents in their care; and

WHEREAS, local and state homeless veteran agencies and programs are federally funded by the Department of Veteran Affairs Grant and Per Diem program and the Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration program; and

WHEREAS, programs such as VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families and the joint Housing and Urban Development and VA's Supportive Housing program are showing signs of success in reducing 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 to address veterans' homelessness by increasing the availability of affordable housing, expanding educational and employment opportunities and training and providing gender-specific services by making it a Priority.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Department of Veterans Affairs should periodically adjust Grant and Per Diem program rates for inflation to ensure sufficient operation of homeless veteran assistance programs; and  
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA compensation and non-service connected pension should not be considered countable income by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in determining program eligibility. (Rejected)

**Resolution No. 637 (Submitted by Department of South Dakota)  
 ENDORSE A NATIONAL CHARTER FOR THE  
 NATIONAL AMERICAN INDIAN VETERANS INC.**

WHEREAS, Native Americans have fought for the United States of America in every American War which American Soldiers participated; and

WHEREAS, Native Americans have the highest rate of Military service of any ethnic group in America; and

WHEREAS, Native Americans were the famous Code Talkers of World War I and World War II, the people who manned the radio communications in native languages that no code-breaker or cipher specialist could decode, because language has no breakable code; and

WHEREAS, Native American Veterans are not receiving the full range of VA health care, VA benefits, and assistance to which they are entitled; and

WHEREAS, A Federal Charter does not grant the National American Indian Veterans Inc. any special legal status or favors; and

WHEREAS, It will simply enable the Native American Veterans from all tribes to speak with one voice; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the US, that we endorse the National Charter for the National American Indian Veterans Inc. in its efforts to be chartered by the United States Congress. (Rejected)

**COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL BY-LAWS, MANUAL OF PROCEDURE AND RITUAL**

Chairman: Allen F. Kent, Past Commander-in-Chief, Arizona

Vice Chairman: Thomas A. Pouliot., Past Commander-in-Chief, Montana

(Room W224ABCD, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida)

<u>Department</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Post No.</u>
<b>Alabama</b>	Randall Watts	6837
<b>Alaska</b>	Troy Eck	10029
<b>Arizona</b>	Mark Short	9400
<b>Arizona</b>	Tammie Welter	1796
<b>Arkansas</b>	Justin Farrar	4548
<b>California</b>	William Buck	2655
<b>California</b>	Robert Magner	2266
<b>Colorado</b>	Alexandria Faulkner	501
<b>Colorado</b>	Steve Kjonaas	3917
<b>Connecticut</b>	James Delancy	1672
<b>Connecticut</b>	Ronald Rusakiewicz	9460
<b>Delaware</b>	Mark Newman	3238
<b>Europe</b>	Scott Ehnes	12139

<b>Florida</b>	Danette Hernandez	7909
<b>Florida</b>	Thomas Randall	1966
<b>Georgia</b>	Michael O`Steen	5976
<b>Georgia</b>	Lewyn Poage	5408
<b>Hawaii</b>	Kimberly Blaum	3855
<b>Idaho</b>	Kendrick Anderson	889
<b>Illinois</b>	Jeffrey Hastings	805
<b>Illinois</b>	Christopher Hatcher	2606
<b>Illinois</b>	Matthew Mihelcic	2698
<b>Indiana</b>	Johnny Capps	972
<b>Iowa</b>	Scott McDonald	2208
<b>Iowa</b>	Marielyn Reisdorf	8174
<b>Kansas</b>	John Muckelbauer	3712
<b>Kentucky</b>	Carl Kaelin	1170
<b>Kentucky</b>	Merlin Sesco	3769
<b>Maine</b>	Amy Meuchel	6859
<b>Maryland</b>	Kurt Surber	304
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Robert Hardy	529
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Christine Tron	545
<b>Michigan</b>	Kevin Conklin	6248
<b>Michigan</b>	Matthew David	423
<b>Michigan</b>	Ramiro Lopez	1136
<b>Michigan</b>	David Prohaska	4434
<b>Minnesota</b>	Gary Anderson	6587
<b>Minnesota</b>	Scott Bill	3915
<b>Minnesota</b>	Thomas Hanson	1639
<b>Missouri</b>	Debra Anderson	7356
<b>Missouri</b>	Richard Depontee	4238
<b>Missouri</b>	Johnathan Duncan	1829
<b>Missouri</b>	Shristopher Johnston	1014
<b>Missouri</b>	Jessie Jones	2657
<b>Missouri</b>	Kevin Jones	7356
<b>Missouri</b>	Zach Schwenk	5606
<b>Montana</b>	Fred Hamilton	276
<b>Montana</b>	Timothy Peters	10010
<b>Nebraska</b>	Dan Petersen	131
<b>New Hampshire</b>	Travis Bill	9552
<b>New Hampshire</b>	Susan Cuddy	8214

<b>New Jersey</b>	Thomas Farrell	3020
<b>New Jersey</b>	Carey Pritchett	6590
<b>New Mexico</b>	Kathie Schiebel	401
<b>New York</b>	Harold Burke	1895
<b>New York</b>	Michael Hoag	2475
<b>New York</b>	James Mc Govern	1666
<b>New York</b>	Brenda Serena	7967
<b>North Carolina</b>	Timothy Woods	2423
<b>North Dakota</b>	Corey Moen	12169
<b>Ohio</b>	Christopher Hayes	7596
<b>Ohio</b>	Colleen Wiley	3035
<b>Oregon</b>	Cheryl Campos	10626
<b>Pacific Areas</b>	Warren Maxson	8180
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Glenn Umberger	7155
<b>Rhode Island</b>	Stephen Stewart	916
<b>Rhode Island</b>	Allen Wagonblott	5392
<b>South Carolina</b>	Margo Sheridan	10804
<b>South Dakota</b>	Rick Nase	2118
<b>Texas</b>	Melvin Parker	6284
<b>Utah</b>	Amber Torres	3586
<b>Vermont</b>	Jeffrey Young	798
<b>Virginia</b>	Douglas Hoffman	3160
<b>Virginia</b>	Kim DeShano	2216
<b>Washington</b>	Joseph Jimenez	969
<b>West Virginia</b>	Kami Elliott	7048
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Wilfred Johnson	10544
<b>Wyoming</b>	Jayson Zimmerman	2673

#### **COMMITTEE ON FINANCE & INTERNAL ORGANIZATION**

Chairman: Richard L. Eubank, Past Commander-in-Chief, Oregon

Vice Chairman: John E. Moon, Past Commander-in-Chief, Ohio

(Room W230, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida)

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Post No.</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	Alvin Morrow	4758
<b>Alabama</b>	Pedro Munoz	6683
<b>Alaska</b>	Betty Gail Keao	10252



<b>Alaska</b>	Walter Watts	3629
<b>Arizona</b>	Raymond Gerving	549
<b>Arizona</b>	Michael Kemery	12043
<b>Arkansas</b>	Ashley Little	4548
<b>Arkansas</b>	Christine Oldham	4548
<b>California</b>	Everett Martin	1732
<b>California</b>	Daniel Schmaltz	9557
<b>Connecticut</b>	Robert Bailey	10153
<b>Europe</b>	Blane Gish	10506
<b>Europe</b>	David Mc mahon	10436
<b>Georgia</b>	Prentiss Baker	6449
<b>Georgia</b>	Dean Rakoskie	10825
<b>Hawaii</b>	Faamanu Teofilo	3830
<b>Idaho</b>	Rick Johnson	4902
<b>Illinois</b>	Clarence Caraker	8891
<b>Illinois</b>	George Cramer	3873
<b>Illinois</b>	Carl Sorensen	2245
<b>Indiana</b>	Laura Mckee	1587
<b>Iowa</b>	David Carlson	8879
<b>Kansas</b>	Gerald Mc Atee	7830
<b>Kansas</b>	John Muckelbauer	3712
<b>Kansas</b>	James Ratcliff	6240
<b>Kentucky</b>	Timothy Hack	12175
<b>Latin America</b>	Carlos Cortes	12094
<b>Latin America</b>	Jose Zayas	12064
<b>Louisiana</b>	Philip Gallet	9210
<b>Maine</b>	David Williams	1641
<b>Maryland</b>	R Brian Sturgis	5118
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Eric Segundo	3236
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Joseph Stavolta	7423
<b>Michigan</b>	William Ogden	6464
<b>Michigan</b>	Lynn Patterson	6695
<b>Minnesota</b>	Jerrold Brletich	9625
<b>Mississippi</b>	Steven Organ	5395
<b>Mississippi</b>	Danny Williams	3685
<b>Missouri</b>	Debra Anderson	7356
<b>Missouri</b>	Nathan Howard	5608
<b>Missouri</b>	Kevin Jones	7356
<b>Montana</b>	Jeffery Schepp	10010

<b>Nebraska</b>	Larry Gerlt	2704
<b>Nebraska</b>	Kenneth yount	5820
<b>New Jersey</b>	Rhonda Gipson	12165
<b>New Jersey</b>	John Kirwin	8867
<b>New Jersey</b>	George Lisicki	2314
<b>New Jersey</b>	Robert Pinto	3020
<b>New Jersey</b>	James Wisor	2290
<b>New Mexico</b>	Jason Lee	7686
<b>New York</b>	Patrick Iuliucci	3350
<b>New York</b>	Daniel Kell	53
<b>New York</b>	Randy Staats	1314
<b>North Carolina</b>	Helen Nelson	6018
<b>North Dakota</b>	Dennis Heap	1874
<b>Ohio</b>	Ronald Smith	7340
<b>Oklahoma</b>	John Fischer	3608
<b>Oregon</b>	Albert Little	10580
<b>Oregon</b>	Stephen Morris	3973
<b>Pacific Areas</b>	Peter Callaghan	3457
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Allen Jones	21
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Amy MacKenzie	3376
<b>Rhode Island</b>	Ernest Frappier	6342
<b>Rhode Island</b>	Guyde Lombardi	2812
<b>South Carolina</b>	James Fox	11079
<b>South Dakota</b>	Davin Johnson	17
<b>South Dakota</b>	Colin Reisner	791
<b>Tennessee</b>	Antonio Banchs	2166
<b>Utah</b>	James Sheppard	7442
<b>Vermont</b>	Rhett Bessey	798
<b>Vermont</b>	Allston Gilmond	782
<b>Vermont</b>	Charles Magnant	778
<b>Virginia</b>	Gary Adams	1115
<b>Washington</b>	Richard Moore	2289
<b>Washington</b>	Donald Wischmann	2100
<b>West Virginia</b>	John Newbrough	1212
<b>West Virginia</b>	Joseph Reneman	3081
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Jason Deab	5470
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Gundel Metz	1318
<b>Wyoming</b>	Danielle Smith	9439

## COMMITTEE ON GENERAL RESOLUTIONS

Chairman: Edward S. Banas, Past Commander-in-Chief, Connecticut

Vice Chairman: John F. Gwizdak, Past Commander-in-Chief, Georgia

Vice Chairman: Keith E. Harman, Past Commander-in-Chief, Ohio

Vice Chairman: William A. Thein, Past Commander-in-Chief, Indiana

(Room W224EFGH, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida)

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Post No.</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	Melissa Adams	1349
<b>Alabama</b>	Doreen Kiewel	12185
<b>Alaska</b>	Lorraine Roehl	10029
<b>Alaska</b>	John Walker	10046
<b>Arkansas</b>	Jeffrey Todd Byrd	2330
<b>Arkansas</b>	Mary Erdman	10483
<b>Arizona</b>	Timothy Borland	9972
<b>Arizona</b>	Joan McDermott	9401
<b>Arizona</b>	Rexana Torres	9972
<b>California</b>	Alexander Brown	1512
<b>California</b>	Raquel Mangone	1487
<b>California</b>	Robert McMahan	8151
<b>Connecticut</b>	Robert Priest	1265
<b>Connecticut</b>	John Schmidt	9929
<b>Colorado</b>	Bruce Dolan	7945
<b>Colorado</b>	Ronald Lattin	5061
<b>Colorado</b>	Kirk Rosa	12009
<b>Delaware</b>	Donald Dufresne	3238
<b>Delaware</b>	Gary Frederick	2863
<b>Delaware</b>	William Rickards	6984
<b>Europe</b>	Joel Driscoll	12159
<b>Europe</b>	Brian Flick	10692
<b>Florida</b>	Daniel Anderson	9226
<b>Florida</b>	Anthony Gardner	10140
<b>Georgia</b>	Veda Brooks	2667
<b>Georgia</b>	Harold Roberts	8433
<b>Georgia</b>	R D Smith	4346
<b>Hawaii</b>	George Barlett	10154
<b>Hawaii</b>	Richard Haake	3850
<b>Hawaii</b>	James Kahalehoe	10154

<b>Idaho</b>	Tammy Clement	4000
<b>Idaho</b>	Francis Fabbi	63
<b>Idaho</b>	Robert Jones	3012
<b>Illinois</b>	Robert McLeod	5788
<b>Illinois</b>	Jim Michel	1571
<b>Illinois</b>	Joseph Scanlon	1337
<b>Indiana</b>	David Fradenburg	1108
<b>Indiana</b>	Richard Leirer	10003
<b>Iowa</b>	Jake Beaver	3519
<b>Iowa</b>	Bradley Whitmore	9127
<b>Iowa</b>	Carol Whitmore	9127
<b>Kansas</b>	Vance Hill	6957
<b>Kansas</b>	James Langley	3166
<b>Kansas</b>	Richard McKenna	7397
<b>Kansas</b>	John Muckelbauer	3712
<b>Kansas</b>	Charles Shoemaker	12003
<b>Kentucky</b>	Rick Johnson	1834
<b>Kentucky</b>	Glenn Skaggs	1298
<b>Latin America</b>	Francis Cordero Medina	12057
<b>Latin America</b>	Carmen Hernandez	12094
<b>Latin America</b>	Miguel Toledo	12057
<b>Louisiana</b>	Ed Horton	4588
<b>Louisiana</b>	John Doug Thomas	8973
<b>Maine</b>	John Bouchard	9389
<b>Maine</b>	Jennifer Lane	1603
<b>Maryland</b>	Christine Sandoval	160
<b>Maryland</b>	Phoebe Thurman	3065
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Christine Bassett	3236
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Keith Gopsill	29
<b>Michigan</b>	Stacey Roberts	3701
<b>Minnesota</b>	Dale Hoogeveen	1791
<b>Minnesota</b>	Donald Nix	5518
<b>Mississippi</b>	John Floyd	9573
<b>Mississippi</b>	Dennis Jewell	4272
<b>Mississippi</b>	David Mason	5393
<b>Missouri</b>	Debra Anderson	7356
<b>Missouri</b>	Rick Butler	7356
<b>Missouri</b>	Kevin Jones	7356
<b>Missouri</b>	Quincy Myrick	1831

<b>Missouri</b>	<b>Teresa Shaw</b>	<b>2513</b>
<b>Montana</b>	Laureen Hawley	1087
<b>Montana</b>	James Layton	4067
<b>Nebraska</b>	Roger Broecker	1504
<b>Nebraska</b>	Sharon Cooper	2503
<b>Nevada</b>	Katherine Cassell	12101
<b>Nevada</b>	Edward Sturges	3547
<b>New Hampshire</b>	Paul Chevalier	168
<b>New Hampshire</b>	John McIntear	8401
<b>New Jersey</b>	Kevin Andrews	8838
<b>New Jersey</b>	Carmine Czapl	6063
<b>New Jersey</b>	Albert Veltri	8867
<b>New Mexico</b>	Cathy Brock	3274
<b>New Mexico</b>	Donald Frias	401
<b>New Mexico</b>	Rogelio Maldonado	384
<b>New York</b>	Marlene Roll	7967
<b>New York</b>	Marcello Rotunda	53
<b>New York</b>	Dennis Sullivan	4927
<b>New York</b>	John Wenig	8645
<b>New York</b>	Walter Zincio	9593
<b>North Carolina</b>	Mickey Joe Biggs	8969
<b>North Carolina</b>	Allen Payne	7288
<b>North Carolina</b>	Gregory Stafford	6060
<b>North Dakota</b>	James Hapala	7564
<b>North Dakota</b>	Wayne Paulson	753
<b>North Dakota</b>	William Tuff	7564
<b>Ohio</b>	Jon Greene	6428
<b>Ohio</b>	Ralph Reynolds	9289
<b>Oklahoma</b>	David Price	4578
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Curtis Watts	2027
<b>Oregon</b>	Dennis Guthrie	4108
<b>Oregon</b>	Robert O`Brien	3970
<b>Pacific Areas</b>	Donald Kelley	10223
<b>Pacific Areas</b>	Jessica Martinez	8180
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Ruth Fairchild	315
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	William Roland	914
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Gary Smith	1446
<b>Rhode Island</b>	Joe Patrick	916

<b>Rhode Island</b>	Leo Swider	2929
<b>South Carolina</b>	Richard Bell	4262
<b>South Carolina</b>	Wilton Fowler	9273
<b>South Carolina</b>	Mary Smith	6830
<b>South Dakota</b>	Keith Blume	3442
<b>South Dakota</b>	Barbara McKean	3298
<b>South Dakota</b>	Kenneth Moss	1273
<b>South Dakota</b>	Rick Williamson	3164
<b>Tennessee</b>	James Haney	5146
<b>Tennessee</b>	David Moomy	9851
<b>Texas</b>	Frank Andrada	2527
<b>Texas</b>	Andrew Camplen	688
<b>Texas</b>	Phillip Contella	5619
<b>Utah</b>	Heath Silcox	12087
<b>Utah</b>	James Theriault	4918
<b>Utah</b>	Danny Zacharias	409
<b>Vermont</b>	John Boardman	6689
<b>Vermont</b>	Robert Colby	782
<b>Virginia</b>	Eugene Chavis	10826
<b>Virginia</b>	Beth Ford	3160
<b>Virginia</b>	Kathleen Goodall	4809
<b>Washington</b>	Daniel Bujok	2669
<b>Washington</b>	Frederick Green	2669
<b>Washington</b>	Trina Parrish	992
<b>Washington</b>	Otis Wolfe	921
<b>West Virginia</b>	Corrina Boggess	8363
<b>West Virginia</b>	Jeffrey Elkins	6669
<b>Wisconsin</b>	John Giese	6375
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Walter Hogan	6498
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Leroy Jansky	1038
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Timothy Neary	6498
<b>Wyoming</b>	Dennis Miller	7756

## COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY & FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Chairman: Paul A. Spera, Past Commander-in-Chief, Massachusetts

Vice Chairman: James E. Nier, Past Commander-in-Chief, Texas

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### SUBCOMMITTEE ON POW/MIA

Chairman: James R. Mueller, Past Commander-in-Chief, Missouri

Vice Chairman: Thomas J. Tradewell, Past Commander-in-Chief, Wisconsin

(Room W222, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida)

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Post No.</b>
Alabama	Scott Gedling	6226
Alaska	William Yudiskas	9785
Arizona	James McCormick	9972
Arkansas	Terry Callahan	9095
California	Beborah Johnson	10859
Colorado	Donald Alberts	4051
Connecticut	John Larensen	5095
Europe	Dwight Johnson	9342
Florida	Daniel Duffy	1966
Florida	Kurt Schuh	5277
Hawaii	Joseph Davis	3391
Hawaii	Sean Mattimoe	970
Idaho	Lee Hartwig	10043
Illinois	Philip Maughan	3873
Indiana	Cory Mahan	2714
Indiana	Richard Mrozinski	9423
Kansas	Steven Davis	56
Kansas	Terry Warner	3147
Latin America	Jose Ruiz Soto	11103
Louisiana	Gerald Dugas	3121
Maine	Steven SanPedro	6859
Maryland	Thomas Williams	2562
Massachusetts	Edgar Docherty	1526
Massachusetts	Robert Graser	1822
Massachusetts	Christopher Lizotte	6714
Massachusetts	Clifford Olson	144

<b>Michigan</b>	Jessica Wright	3701
<b>Minnesota</b>	Patrick Bohmer	246
<b>Mississippi</b>	Billy Lott	3036
<b>Mississippi</b>	Sammy Sullivan	4272
<b>Missouri</b>	Amy Donaldson	5293
<b>Montana</b>	Ronald Merwin	5652
<b>Nebraska</b>	Russell Horst	9481
<b>Nebraska</b>	James Lutz	759
<b>New Hampshire</b>	Frederick Harvey	1088
<b>New Hampshire</b>	Leon Rideout	3041
<b>New Jersey</b>	Warren George	6590
<b>New Jersey</b>	Harry Marks	9563
<b>New Jersey</b>	William Thomson	6192
<b>New Mexico</b>	Vernon Luce	3280
<b>New Mexico</b>	Seth Orell	5432
<b>New York</b>	Art Scheuneman	4823
<b>North Carolina</b>	Douglas Blevins	7034
<b>North Dakota</b>	John Hanson	1874
<b>Ohio</b>	James Hordinski	9871
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Robert Allan Clark	4876
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Gary Miles	1201
<b>Oregon</b>	Bert Key	4273
<b>Pacific Areas</b>	James Collins	2485
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	James Lewis	7599
<b>Rhode Island</b>	John Gallo	306
<b>South Carolina</b>	Augustus Singleton	4262
<b>South Dakota</b>	Darold Couch	3442
<b>South Dakota</b>	Ronald Krogman	17
<b>Tennessee</b>	Henry Hooper	11333
<b>Tennessee</b>	Lanny Sartor	4606
<b>Texas</b>	Robert Martinez	2059
<b>Texas</b>	Lupita Perez	12178
<b>Utah</b>	Nick Flake	12087
<b>Virginia</b>	Michael Chism	2582
<b>Virginia</b>	John Smart	1503
<b>Virginia</b>	Johnathon Towles	3150
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Phillip Allen	7308
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Charlene Cobb	10173



<b>Wyoming</b>	Rodney Birkle	3558
<b>Wyoming</b>	James Pedersen	2673

**NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS**

Chairman: John Furgess, Past Commander-in-Chief, Tennessee  
 Vice Chairman: John W. Stroud, Past Commander-in-Chief, Nevada

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**SUBCOMMITTEE I – HEALTH**

Chairman: Raymond Denisewich, Rhode Island  
 Vice Chairman: Christine Smith, Pennsylvania  
 Staff Advisors: James Moss, Assistant Director, Veterans Health Policy, NVS  
 Carlos Fuentes, Director, NLS,

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**SUBCOMMITTEE II – BENEFITS**

Chairman: Eric Drake, Ohio  
 Vice Chairman: Daniel Arnold, Montana  
 Staff Advisors: Brad Hazell, Assistant Director, Compensation & Pension, NVS  
 Gabriella Kubinyi, Legislative Associate, NLS

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**SUBCOMMITTEE III – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY/OTHER**

Chairman: Jason Smith, Florida  
 Vice Chairman: Lisa Robinson, Alaska  
 Staff Advisors: Chris Macinkowicz, Associate Director, Training & QA, NVS  
 Patrick Murray, Deputy Director, NLS

(Room W331B, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, Florida)

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Post No.</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	Martin Kiewel	12185
<b>Alaska</b>	Lisa Robinson	9365
<b>Arizona</b>	Michael Ferguson	3632
<b>Arizona</b>	Timothy Ogden	9400
<b>Arkansas</b>	Teddy Pipkin	2330

<b>Arkansas</b>	Terry Thurman	8109
<b>California</b>	Charles Anfuso	2111
<b>California</b>	Arthur Napiwocki	1614
<b>California</b>	Steven Williams	5867
<b>Colorado</b>	Edward Aitken	41
<b>Colorado</b>	Steven Drummond	4171
<b>Colorado</b>	Douglas Raymond	12174
<b>Connecticut</b>	Charles Pickett	12150
<b>Delaware</b>	Sue Linn Bostic	3238
<b>Delaware</b>	David Hilliard	475
<b>Delaware</b>	Robert Mac Lees	6984
<b>Europe</b>	Carroll Furnish	8862
<b>Europe</b>	James Vergott	27
<b>Florida</b>	Kenneth Corr	10097
<b>Florida</b>	Jason Smith	10094
<b>Georgia</b>	Belinda Boldoe	12180
<b>Georgia</b>	David Miles	7720
<b>Georgia</b>	James Rogers	2785
<b>Hawaii</b>	Stanley Fernandez	10276
<b>Idaho</b>	Denny Croner	3886
<b>Idaho</b>	Deborah Harmon	735
<b>Illinois</b>	Derek Giffin	2378
<b>Illinois</b>	Jules Spindler	4549
<b>Indiana</b>	Gregory Baker	6978
<b>Indiana</b>	David Hammons	908
<b>Indiana</b>	Steve Milbourn	5864
<b>Iowa</b>	Richard Davis	788
<b>Iowa</b>	Todd Jacobus	9127
<b>Iowa</b>	Larry Steele	9127
<b>Kansas</b>	James Boyle	7253
<b>Kansas</b>	Bobby Cox	2715
<b>Kansas</b>	David Kennedy	6957
<b>Kansas</b>	John Muckelbauer	3712
<b>Kentucky</b>	Joseph Livers	5910
<b>Kentucky</b>	Randall Webster	12175
<b>Latin America</b>	Nelson Perez	11103
<b>Latin America</b>	Hector Rivera Valladares	12064
<b>Louisiana</b>	Patrick Dempsey	8290
<b>Louisiana</b>	Harry White	3619

<b>Maine</b>	James Ewing	1605
<b>Maine</b>	Anthony Kimble	3108
<b>Maine</b>	Cornelius Ware	887
<b>Maryland</b>	Carlos Fuentes	5627
<b>Maryland</b>	Dawn Jirak	8810
<b>Maryland</b>	Clinton Townsend	341
<b>Maryland</b>	Mary Walters	10077
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Richard DeNoyer	1012
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Delray Dorsey	1399
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Michael Figlioli	2017
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Jody Freitas	523
<b>Massachusetts</b>	William Madera	8892
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Brian Martin	5737
<b>Michigan</b>	Gerald Gorski	2645
<b>Michigan</b>	Joseph Greene	1370
<b>Minnesota</b>	Richard Bugbee	1223
<b>Minnesota</b>	Jon Gohn	6208
<b>Minnesota</b>	David Staehlin	8752
<b>Mississippi</b>	Marjorie Wesley	4272
<b>Mississippi</b>	Raybon Windham	9122
<b>Missouri</b>	Debra Anderson	7356
<b>Missouri</b>	Donald Brockmeier	6603
<b>Missouri</b>	Dennis Flynn	2866
<b>Missouri</b>	Adam St. Pierre	4238
<b>Montana</b>	Daniel Arnold	1087
<b>Montana</b>	Melvin Kieninger	1448
<b>Nebraska</b>	Bernard Brosnihan	10727
<b>Nebraska</b>	James Pierce	5547
<b>Nebraska</b>	Charles Roberts	3755
<b>Nevada</b>	Denise Estes	10053
<b>Nevada</b>	Herman Hagen	10468
<b>Nevada</b>	Larry Hire	2350
<b>New Hampshire</b>	Glenn Della-Monica	5791
<b>New Hampshire</b>	Thomas St. Pierre	8497
<b>New Jersey</b>	John Grainger	335
<b>New Jersey</b>	Joshua Hansen	12173
<b>New Jersey</b>	Jonathan Hinker	6257
<b>New Mexico</b>	Cynthia Archuleta	5890
<b>New Mexico</b>	Warren Booker	7686

<b>New York</b>	Roland Abare	420
<b>New York</b>	John Brunato	53
<b>New York</b>	John Bartow	8690
<b>New York</b>	Leslie Crossett	7220
<b>New York</b>	Robert Mitchell	358
<b>New York</b>	Peter Pennelle	672
<b>New York</b>	Richard Tibbetts	7279
<b>North Carolina</b>	Alan Eden	9010
<b>North Carolina</b>	David Wagoner	7383
<b>North Dakota</b>	Nicholas Jalbert	7564
<b>Ohio</b>	Eric Drake	2595
<b>Ohio</b>	Chuck Keller	3761
<b>Ohio</b>	Clayton Uzell	7536
<b>Ohio</b>	John Wiley	3035
<b>Oklahoma</b>	James Dockemeyer	1317
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Harry Owens	6143
<b>Oregon</b>	George Carroll	3973
<b>Oregon</b>	Claude Miller	12123
<b>Pacific Areas</b>	Laurence Lyons	12147
<b>Pacific Areas</b>	Richard Martinez	8180
<b>Pacific Areas</b>	Michael Verville	11447
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Donald Christy	7599
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Cart Curtis	128
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Peter Hook	6393
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Christine Smith	1446
<b>Rhode Island</b>	David Ainsile	152
<b>Rhode Island</b>	Raymond Denisewich	2812
<b>South Carolina</b>	Martin Snowden	6500
<b>South Carolina</b>	Jimmy Wallace	11079
<b>South Dakota</b>	William Huffmon	1273
<b>South Dakota</b>	Troy Maroney	2118
<b>Tennessee</b>	Loyd Hollingsworth	4973
<b>Tennessee</b>	Michael McPherson	5015
<b>Texas</b>	Thomas Anderson	4008
<b>Texas</b>	James Clark	9078
<b>Texas</b>	Terry Eshenbaugh	4709
<b>Utah</b>	Wendy Griffin	6154
<b>Vermont</b>	Michael Choquette	792

<b>Vermont</b>	Samuel Haskins	1034
<b>Virginia</b>	Roy Davis	6975
<b>Virginia</b>	Ryan Gallucci	3150
<b>Virginia</b>	Bobbiejo Lazo	637
<b>Washington</b>	Wesley Anderson	51
<b>Washington</b>	William Brown	2669
<b>Washington</b>	Jerry Herker	3386
<b>Washington</b>	Michelle Love	6599
<b>Washington</b>	Joshua Schreck	1263
<b>West Virginia</b>	William Cusson	4469
<b>West Virginia</b>	Melvin Goddard	4469
<b>West Virginia</b>	Todd Kingsbury	3522
<b>West Virginia</b>	David Sisler	4442
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Norbert Lee	6352
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Kerry Mc Allen	7591
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Zachary Zdroik	8482
<b>Wyoming</b>	Cheryl Shannon	11453
<b>Wyoming</b>	Seth Wood	10056

#### **COMMITTEE ON CREDENTIALS**

Chairman: Bertha Gripp, Post 10188, Arizona

#### **COMMITTEE ON CONVENTION RULES**

Chairman: John E. Hamilton, Past Commander-in-Chief, Florida

Vice Chairman: Larry W. Rivers, Past Commander-in-Chief, Louisiana

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Post No.</b>
<b>Michigan</b>	David Prohaska	4434
<b>Missouri</b>	Johnathan Duncan	1829
<b>Missouri</b>	Zach Schwenk	5606