

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 104TH ANNUAL NATIONAL
CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

COMMUNICATION

FROM

THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE
DIVISION, THE AMERICAN LEGION

TRANSMITTING

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 104TH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF THE AMERICAN LEGION, HELD IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH
CAROLINA FROM AUGUST 29-31, 2023



MARCH 11, 2024.—Referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and
ordered to be printed

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

THE AMERICAN LEGION,
Washington, DC, February 21, 2024.

Hon. MIKE JOHNSON,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SPEAKER JOHNSON: In compliance with current public law, we herewith transmit for printing as House documents The American Legion's 103rd Annual Report, The American Legion's Proceedings of the 103rd Annual National Convention, and The American Legion's Proceedings of the 104th Annual National Convention.

JULIA MATHIS,
Legislative Director, Legislative Division.

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FOREWORD

This booklet has been prepared for the information of members of The American Legion. It has come to be known as the Summary of Proceedings of the National Convention for the current year. It is a comprehensive résumé of what took place at the One Hundred and Fourth Annual National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023.

The final report of the national organization for the period ending December 31, 2022, and balance sheet as of December 31, 2022, and surplus analysis, January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2022, are included in the Summary.

To make a quick distribution, speed has been necessary. Every precaution has been taken to avoid errors, but some may have occurred in the rush of Convention events and the haste of editing and printing.

Permission is hereby given to quote from this Summary without further consent. However, because of the nature of our resolution process, I urge that the full text of any *resolve clause(s)* be used when a quotation from a resolution is required for publication.

Daniel S. Wheeler
National Adjutant

Note: At various times, the national vice commanders, as follows, presided over the Convention sessions, when called upon by the presiding officer, in accordance with the Uniform Code of Procedure as shown in the verbatim proceedings: Kenneth C. Hylton, Indiana; Patricia A. Harris, North Carolina; Glenn L. Wahus, North Dakota; Paul M. Kennedy, Pennsylvania; Douglas R. Uhrig, Wyoming.

**NATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND NATIONAL OFFICERS
THE AMERICAN LEGION, 1919 to Date**

Note: In the following list it should be noted that the terms of each group of officers expire with that particular convention under which they are listed.

*indicates deceased

HONORARY COMMANDERS

General of the Armies of the United States John J. Pershing*

Marshall of France Ferdinand Foch*

PARIS CAUCUS

Paris, France, March 15 - 17, 1919

Temporary Chairman: Eric Fisher Wood*, Pennsylvania (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1955 and 1958 National Convention)

Permanent Chairman: Bennett C. Clark*, Missouri (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1926 National Convention)

Chairman Pro Tempore: Thomas W. Miller*, Delaware (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1968 National Convention)

Secretary: Eric Fisher Wood*, Pennsylvania (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1955 National Convention)

At the Paris Caucus an Executive Committee was elected to complete arrangements, the chairman and secretary of which were:

Chairman: Milton J. Foreman*, Illinois (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1921 National Convention)

Secretary: George A. White*, Oregon

ST. LOUIS CAUCUS

St. Louis, Mo., May 8 - 10, 1919

Temporary Chairman: Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. *, New York (Voted title of Past National Commander at 1949 National Convention)

Permanent Chairman: Henry D. Lindsley*, Texas (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1919 National Convention)

Vice Chairmen: John J. Sullivan*, Washington; Fred Humphrey*, New Mexico; P.C. Calhoun*, Connecticut (Voted titles of Past National Vice Commanders at 1933 National Convention)

Secretary: Eric Fisher Wood*, Pennsylvania (Voted title of Past National Commander at the 1955 National Convention)

Chaplain: Thomas H. Wiles*, Colorado

1st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Minneapolis, Minn., Nov. 10 - 12, 1919

Chairman: Henry D. Lindsley*, Texas, Past National Commander

Vice Chairman: Bennett C. Clark*, Missouri

Secretary: Eric Fisher Wood*, Pennsylvania

Treasurer: Gasper G. Bacon*, Massachusetts

Chaplain: Thomas H. Wiles*, Colorado

2nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Cleveland, Ohio, Sept. 27 - 29, 1920

Commander: Franklin D'Olier*,

Pennsylvania

Vice Commanders: James O'Brien*,

California; Allan A. Tukey*,

Nebraska; Joyce S. Lewis*, Minnesota;

Alden B. Chambers*, Massachusetts;

William Follett*, Oregon

Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington

Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana

Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts

Chaplain: Rev. Francis A. Kelly*, New York

Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

3rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Kansas City, Mo., Oct. 31 - Nov. 2, 1921

Commander: Frederic W. Galbraith, Jr. *,

(died June 9); Succeeded by John G.

Emery*, Michigan

Milton Foreman*, Illinois, Past National

Commander

Vice Commanders: John G. Emery*,

Michigan; Thomas Goldingay*, New Jersey;

Claudius G. Pendill*, Wisconsin; James G.

Scrugham*, Nevada; E. Jackson Winslett*,

Alabama

Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington

Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana

Chaplain: Rev. John W. Inzer*, Tennessee

Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts

Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

4th NATIONAL CONVENTION

New Orleans, La., Oct. 16 - 20, 1922

Commander: Hanford MacNider*, Iowa

Vice Commanders: H. Nelson Jackson*, Vermont; George L. Berry*, Tennessee; Raymond O. Brackett*, Massachusetts; Charles H. Kendrick*, California; John A. McCormack*, Colorado
Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Earl A. Blackman*, Kansas
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

5th NATIONAL CONVENTION

San Francisco, Calif., Oct. 16 - 19, 1923
Commander: Alvin M. Owsley*, Texas
Vice Commanders: Edward J. Barrett*, Wisconsin; Watson B. Miller*, District of Columbia; E. Erle Cocke, Sr.*, Georgia; Robert O. Blood*, New Hampshire; Chiles P. Plummer*, Wyoming
Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. William P. O'Connor*, Ohio
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

6th NATIONAL CONVENTION

St. Paul, Minn., Sept. 15 - 19, 1924
Commander: John R. Quinn*, California
Vice Commanders: Lester F. Albert*, Idaho; Celora M. Stoddard*, Arizona; William B. Healey*, Pennsylvania; F. Ryan Duffy*, Wisconsin; Dr. I. Thurman Mann*, North Carolina
Adjutant: Lemuel Bolles*, Washington
Resigned 2-1-24; Succeeded by Russell G. Creviston*, Indiana
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Ezra Clemens*, Minnesota
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

7th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Omaha, Neb., Oct. 5 - 9, 1925
Commander: James A. Drain*, Washington
Vice Commanders: Frank H. McFarland*, Kansas; Eugene P. Armstrong*, Connecticut; A. L. Perry, Panama; Peyton H. Hoge, Jr., Kentucky; William Stern*, North Dakota
Adjutant: Russell G. Creviston*, Indiana, Resigned; Succeeded by James F. Barton*, Iowa
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Joseph M. Lonergan*, Illinois
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

8th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Philadelphia, Pa., Oct. 11 - 15, 1926
Commander: John R. McQuigg*, Ohio
Bennett C. Clark*, Missouri, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: Joseph Y. Cheney*, Florida; Hughes B. Davis*, Oklahoma; Vincent A. Carroll*, Pennsylvania; Raymond B. Littlefield*, Rhode Island; Judge James A. Howell*, Utah
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. William E. Patrick*, California
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

9th NATIONAL CONVENTION

New York, N.Y., Oct. 18, 1927
Paris, France, Sept. 19 - 22, 1927
Commander: Howard P. Savage*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: C. Thomas Busha, Jr.*, Montana; Stafford King*, Minnesota; John G. Sims*, Tennessee; John E. Curtiss*, Nebraska; Dr. John G. Towne*, Maine
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Treasurer: Robert H. Tyndall*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Joseph L.N. Wolfe*, Pennsylvania
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

10th NATIONAL CONVENTION

San Antonio, Texas, Oct. 8 - 11, 1928
Commander: Edward E. Spafford*, New York
Vice Commanders: John T. Raftis*, Washington; Ralph T. O'Neil*, Kansas; Paul R. Younts*, North Carolina; Dan Spurlock*, Louisiana; John M. Henry*, Minnesota.
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Chaplain: Rev. Gill Robb Wilson*, New Jersey
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Scott W. Lucas*, Illinois

11th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Louisville, Ky., Sept. 30 - Oct. 2, 1929
Commander: Paul V. McNutt*, Indiana
Vice Commanders: Lawrence E. McGann, Jr.*, Illinois; George W. Malone*, Nevada; Edward L. White*, Connecticut; Miller C. Foster*, South Carolina; Walton D. Hood*, Texas
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Chaplain: Rabbi Lee J. Levinger*, Delaware

Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Scott W. Lucas*, Illinois

12th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Boston, Mass., Oct. 6 - 9, 1930
Commander: O.L. Bodenhamer*, Arkansas
Vice Commanders: Milt D. Campbell*,
Ohio; John J. Dugan*, Delaware; Morton M.
David*, Colorado; Frank Schoble,
Jr. *, Pennsylvania; Willis M. Brewer*,
Michigan
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Chaplain: Rev. George F. Kettell, D.D. *,
New York
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Scott W. Lucas*, Illinois

13th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Detroit, Mich., Sept. 21 - 24, 1931
Commander: Ralph T. O'Neil*, Kansas
Vice Commanders: Bert S. Hyland*,
Vermont; Roland B. Howell*, Louisiana;
Harry B. Henderson, Jr. *, Wyoming; Dr.
James A. Duff*, West Virginia; Dr. Neal D.
Williams*, Missouri
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Chaplain: Rev. Joseph N. Barnett*,
Wisconsin
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Scott W. Lucas*, Illinois to
6-24-31; Succeeded by Acting Judge
Advocate: Robert A. Adams*, Indiana

14th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Portland, Ore., Sept. 12 - 15, 1932
Commander: Henry L. Stevens, Jr. *, North
Carolina
Vice Commanders: Richard F. Paul*,
Massachusetts; Forrest G. Cooper*,
Mississippi; Roy L. Cook*, New Mexico;
Frank N. Brooks*, Washington; Harold L.
Plummer*, Wisconsin
Adjutant: James F. Barton*, Iowa
Chaplain: Rev. Harris A. Darche*, Illinois
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
Judge Advocate: Remster A. Bingham*,
Indiana

15th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Chicago, Ill., Oct. 2 - 5, 1933
Commander: Louis A. Johnson*, West
Virginia

Vice Commanders: Russell Meadows*,
Arizona; Robert D. Flory*, Nebraska;
William E. Easterwood, Jr. *, Texas; John J.
Maloney*, Maine; Chas. A. Mills*, Florida
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Irwin Q. Wood*, Idaho
Treasurer: Bowman Elder*, Indiana
Historian: Eben Putnam*, Massachusetts
(died January 22, 1933); Succeeded by
Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama
Judge Advocate: Remster A. Bingham*,
Indiana

16th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Miami, Fla., Oct. 22 - 25, 1934
Commander: Edward A. Hayes*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: Charles R. Mabey*,
Utah; Robert L. Gordon*, Arkansas; Miguel
Munoz*, Puerto Rico; Ed W. Carruth*,
Kansas; Charles L. Woolley*, Rhode Island
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Robert J. White*,
Massachusetts
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Remster A. Bingham*,
Indiana

17th NATIONAL CONVENTION

St. Louis, Mo., Sept. 23 - 26, 1935
Commander: Frank N. Belgrano, Jr. *,
California
Vice Commanders: Daniel J. Doherty*,
Massachusetts; Harold J. Warner*, Oregon;
John K. Kennelly*, North Dakota; Milo J.
Warner*, Ohio; Quemoy Melton*, Georgia
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Dr. Park W. Huntington*,
Delaware
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama
Treasurer: James A. Drain*, Washington
Judge Advocate: James A. Drain*,
Washington

18th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Cleveland, Ohio, Sept. 21 - 24, 1936
Commander: Ray Murphy*, Iowa
Vice Commanders: Raymond F. Gates*,
Connecticut; Dr. I.E. Whitlock*, Florida;
Oscar W. Worth wine*, Idaho; Dr. F.
Whitney Godwin*, Virginia; Louis R.
Proust*, Wyoming
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rt. Rev. Msgr. Thomas D.
Kennedy*, Missouri
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

19th NATIONAL CONVENTION

New York, N.Y., Sept. 20 - 23, 1937

Commander: Harry W. Colmery*, Kansas
Vice Commanders: Salvatore A. Capodice*, California; Leo A. Temmey*, South Dakota; Leonard Sisk*, Tennessee; J. Fred Johnson, Jr. *, Alabama; Jack Crowley*, Vermont
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Bryan H. Keathley, D.D. *, Texas

Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

20th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Los Angeles, Calif., Sept. 19 - 22, 1938

Commander: Daniel J. Doherty*, Massachusetts
Vice Commanders: Drury M. Phillips*, Texas; Phil M. Conley*, West Virginia; Harry M. Johnson*, Montana; James F. Daniel, Jr. *, South Carolina; James R. Mahaffy*, Hawaii
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Frank J. Lawler*, Illinois
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

21st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Chicago, Ill., Sept. 25 - 28, 1939

Commander: Stephen F. Chadwick*, Washington
Vice Commanders: Edward J. Quinn*, Maine; Charles W. Crush*, Virginia; Earl T. Ross*, Nevada; James T. Crawley*, Mississippi; Henry C. Oakey*, Wisconsin
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Jerome L. Fritsche*, Nebraska
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

22nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Boston, Mass., Sept. 23 - 26, 1940

Commander: Raymond J. Kelly*, Michigan
Vice Commanders: Leo E. Ray*, New Hampshire; Charles Q. Kelly*, Arkansas; Matthew J. Murphy*, Illinois; James B. Fitzgerald*, Maryland; H. Elwyn Davis*, Colorado
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rt. Rev. Msgr. Patrick N. McDermott*, Iowa

Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama

Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

23rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Milwaukee, Wis., Sept. 15 to 18, 1941

Commander: Milo J. Warner*, Ohio
Vice Commanders: Erwin A. Froyd*, Wyoming; James L. McCrory*, Nebraska; Harold P. Redden*, Massachusetts; Edward R. Stirling*, Pennsylvania; Alcee S. Legendre*, Louisiana
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Brigadier William G. Gilks*, Texas

Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama

Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

24th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Kansas City, Mo., Sept. 19-21, 1942

Commander: Lynn U. Stambaugh*, North Dakota
Vice Commanders: W. C. Sawyer*, Arizona; William DeLacy Allen*, Georgia; Charles E. Booth*, West Virginia; V. M. Armstrong*, Indiana; John F. Sullivan*, Vermont
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas
Chaplain: Rev. Frederick J. Halloran*, New Jersey
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

25th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Omaha, Neb., Sept. 21 - 23, 1943

Commander: Roane Waring*, Tennessee
Vice Commanders: John T. Batten*, Alabama; Arthur J. Connell*, Connecticut; Fred G. Fraser*, District of Columbia; Herman H. Lark*, Missouri; Jefferson Davis Atwood*, New Mexico
Adjutant: Frank E. Samuel*, Kansas, (died July 25); Succeeded by Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan, Acting Adjutant
Chaplain: Dr. Paul De Forrest Mortimore*, Idaho
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr. *, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

26th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Chicago, Ill., Sept. 18 - 20, 1944

Commander: Warren H. Atherton*, California
Vice Commanders: Martin V. Coffey*, Ohio; E.A. Littlefield*, Utah; Robert 'Roy'

McMillan*, North Carolina; Edward Al Mulrooney*, Delaware; Hector G. Staples*, Maine
Adjutant: Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan
Chaplain: Rt. Rev. Msgr. John F. McManus*, Kansas
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

27th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Chicago, Ill., Nov. 18 - 21, 1945
Commander: Edward N. Scheiberling*, New York
Vice Commanders: Bascom F. Jones*, Tennessee; Frank E. McCaffrey*, Rhode Island; Dan M. McDade*, Oregon; Ray S. Pierson*, Kansas; William P. Shadoan*, Kentucky
Adjutant: Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. DeWitt C. Mallory*, Florida
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

28th NATIONAL CONVENTION

San Francisco, Calif., Sept. 30 – Oct. 4, 1946
Commander: John Stelle*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: R. Graham Huntington*, New Jersey; Fred LaBoon*, Oklahoma; Sam L. Latimer, Jr.*, South Carolina; H. Dudley Swim*, Idaho; Jeremiah Twomey*, Massachusetts
Adjutant: Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan
Chaplain: Rt. Rev. Msgr. Edward J. Smith*, Iowa
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: John R. Ruddick*, Indiana, (died 7-13-45); Succeeded by Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

29th NATIONAL CONVENTION

New York, N.Y., Aug. 28 – 31, 1947
Commander: Paul H. Griffith*, Pennsylvania
Vice Commanders: Joseph W. Brown*, New Hampshire; Martin B. Buckner*, Michigan; Richard C. Cadwallader*, Louisiana; Ernest H. Dervishian*, Virginia; Edward J. Sharkey*, California
Adjutant: Donald G. Glascoff*, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Arthur L. Rustad*, Minnesota
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

30th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Miami, Fla., Oct. 18 - 20, 1948
Commander: James F. O'Neil*, New Hampshire
Vice Commanders: LeRoy William Barns*, South Dakota; Albert A. Cree*, Vermont; Richard B. Ott*, Washington; Myron R. Renick*, West Virginia; Joe W. White*, Georgia
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Frank L. Harrington*, Montana
Historian: Thomas M. Owen, Jr.*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

31st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Philadelphia, Pa., Aug. 29 – Sept. 1, 1949
Commander: S. Perry Brown*, Texas
Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.*, (NY), Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: James Lane*, (AL); Leonard W. Moody*, (AR); James Annin*, (MT); Walter E. Alessandrini*, (PA); Edward J. Kelly*, (CT)
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, (NE)
Chaplain: Rev. Thomas Grice*, (CA)
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, (AL)
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, (IN)
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, (IN)

32nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Los Angeles, Calif., Oct. 9 – 12, 1950
Commander: George N. Craig*, (IN)
Vice Commanders: Milton G. Boock*, (MN); David H. Fleisher*, (MO); Frank E. Lowe*, Maine; J. E. Martie*, (NV); Dr. D. R. Perry*, (NC)
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Edward J. Carney*, O.S.A., Massachusetts
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

33rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Miami, Fla., Oct. 15 – 18, 1951
Commander: Erle Cocke, Jr.*, Georgia
Vice Commanders: Joe H. Adams*, Florida; Herbert J. Jacobi*, District of Columbia; Felix Pogliano*, Colorado; Lewis K. Gough*, California; Fred C. Bramlage*, Kansas
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rabbi David Lefkowitz*, Louisiana
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, Alabama

Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

34th NATIONAL CONVENTION

New York, N.Y., Aug. 25 – 28, 1952
Commander: Donald R. Wilson*, West Virginia
Vice Commanders: Adolph F. Bremer*, Minnesota; Frank R. Kelley*, Massachusetts; Thomas E. Paradine*, New York; Oscar B. Rohiff*, Wyoming; Audley H. Ward*, South Carolina
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rev. Olaf G. Birkeland*, Wisconsin
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

35th NATIONAL CONVENTION

St. Louis, Mo., Aug. 31 – Sept. 3, 1953
Commander: Lewis K. Gough*, California
Vice Commanders: William R. Bourdon*, Arizona; Lyon W. Brandon*, Mississippi; Wilbur C. Daniel*, Virginia; Harry V. Groome*, New Jersey; J. Addington Wagner*, Michigan
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. John E. Duffy*, Ohio
Historian: Monte C. Sandlin*, Alabama
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

36th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Washington, D.C., Aug. 30 – Sept. 2, 1954
Commander: Arthur J. Connell*, Connecticut
Vice Commanders: John A. High*, New Hampshire; Dr. Deward H. Reed*, New Mexico; Truman C. Wold*, North Dakota; Thomas W. Bird*, North Carolina; Herbert M. Walker*, Pennsylvania
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Dr. Tom B. Clark*, Oklahoma
Historian: Robert T. Fairey*, South Carolina
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

37th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Miami, Fla., Oct. 10 – 13, 1955
Commander: Seaborn P. Collins*, New Mexico
Eric Fisher Wood*, Pennsylvania, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: Leonard L. Jackson*, Louisiana; Patrick H. Mangan*, Jr., Vermont; Howard C. Kingdom*, Ohio; Dr.

Carl J. Rees*, Delaware; Robert L. Shelby*, Utah

Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska
Chaplain: Rev. Albert J. Hoffman*, Iowa
Historian: Robert T. Fairey*, South Carolina
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

38th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Los Angeles, Calif., Sept. 3 – 6, 1956
Commander: J. Addington Wagner*, Michigan
Vice Commanders; Guy Stone*, Georgia; John H. Van Horn*, Alaska; L. Everett Page*, Texas; Gilman H. Stordock*, Wisconsin; James V. Day*, Maine (resigned Jan. 1, 1956); Succeeded by William J. Holliman*, District of Columbia
Adjutant: Henry H. Dudley*, Nebraska (resigned); succeeded by E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. Joseph MacCarroll*, New Jersey
Historian: Robert T. Fairey*, South Carolina
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

39th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Atlantic City, N.J., Sept. 16 – 19, 1957
Commander: W. C. 'Dan' Daniel*, Virginia
Vice Commanders: Gaylor M. Brown*, Iowa; George T. Lewis*, Jr., Tennessee; Carl R. Moser*, Oregon; John E. Stay*, Pennsylvania; J. Edward Walter*, Maryland
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. Bernard W. Gerdon*, Indiana
Historian: Robert T. Fairey*, South Carolina
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

40th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Chicago, Ill., Sept. 1 – 4, 1958
Commander: John S. Gleason, Jr., Illinois
Vice Commanders: William A. Cottrell*, Hawaii; Ramon R. Guas*, Puerto Rico; Harry W. Miller*, West Virginia; Leo A. Lemos*, Rhode Island; Isadore E. Levine*, Indiana
Adjutant: E.A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Feltham S. James*, South Carolina
Historian: Emily Herbert*, New Jersey
Treasurer: Neal Grider*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

41st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Minneapolis, Minn., Aug. 24 – 27, 1959
Commander: Preston J. Moore*, Oklahoma
Vice Commanders: C. D. DeLoach*, District of Columbia; John W. Collins*, Pennsylvania; James B. Kerrigan*, Missouri; Robert Charles Smith*, Louisiana; James C. Bangs*, Idaho
Adjutant: E.A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rt. Rev. Msgr. John J. Twiss*, Massachusetts
Historian: Emily Herbert*, New Jersey
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Ralph B. Gregg*, Indiana

42nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Miami Beach, Fla., Oct. 15 – 20, 1960
Commander: Martin B. McKneally*, New York
Vice Commanders: William A. Brennan, Jr.*, Indiana; A. Layman Harman*, South Carolina; Nate V. Keller*, Minnesota; (died 7-25-60); Succeeded by Irven Frank Gianotti*, Minnesota (appointed 9-14-60); Willard W. Brandt*, North Dakota; Charles McGonegal*, California; (died 1-27-60); Succeeded by Corydon T. Hill*, California (appointed 5-4-60)
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rabbi Robert I. Kahn* D.H.L., Texas
Historian: Emily Herbert*, New Jersey
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

43rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Denver, Colo., Sept. 9 – 14, 1961
Commander: William R. Burke*, California
Vice Commanders: George K. Walker*, Massachusetts; James M. Wagoner*, Ohio; Vincent J. Maxheim*, Iowa; Dr. Harry H. Kretzler*, Washington; R. C. Godwin*, North Carolina
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. William H. Moss*, Tennessee
Historian: Glenn B. Hoover*, Iowa
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

44th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Las Vegas, Nev., Oct. 5 – 11, 1962
Commander: Charles L. Bacon*, Missouri
Vice Commanders: Walter W. Barnard*, Montana; Edward T. Hoak*, Pennsylvania;

Wilson H. Morrison*, Michigan; J. Milton Patrick*, Oklahoma; Edward Wysocki*, New Jersey
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Robert G. Keating*, Connecticut
Historian: Earl David Young*, Colorado
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

45th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Miami Beach, Fla., Sept. 6 – 12, 1963
Commander: James E. Powers*, Georgia
Vice Commanders: Harold D. Beaton*, District of Columbia; James W. Doon*, New Hampshire; Claude A. Hamilton*, South Dakota; Paschal C. Reese*, Florida; Victor F. Whittlesea*, Nevada
Adjutant: E.A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rabbi Albert M. Shulman*, Indiana
Historian: H. Armand de Masi*, Italy
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

46th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Dallas, Texas, Sept. 18 – 24, 1964
Commander: Daniel F. Foley*, Minnesota
Vice Commanders: Earl D. Franklin, Jr.*, Colorado; Emilio S. Iglesias*, Vermont; Garland D. Murphy, Jr.*, M.D., Arkansas; George Emory Sipple*, Wisconsin; Harry Wright*, Mexico
Adjutant: E.A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. John J. Howard*, Virginia
Historian: H. Armand de Masi*, Italy
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

47th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Portland, Ore., Aug. 20 – 26, 1965
Commander: Donald E. Johnson*, Iowa
Vice Commanders: David Aronberg*, Kentucky; Herbert D. Black*, South Carolina; Ward W. Husted*, Wyoming; Edward H. Lynch, Jr.*, Connecticut; Joseph Paul*, Michigan
Adjutant: E.A. Blackmore*, Wyoming
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Morris N. Dummet*, Louisiana
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

48th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Washington, D.C., Aug. 30 – Sept. 1, 1966
Commander: L. Eldon James*, Virginia
Vice Commanders: Dr. A. R. Choppin*, Louisiana; William E. Galbraith*, Nebraska; Robert O. Phillips*, Philippines; William J. Rogers*, Maine; Tom Soleng*, Arizona
Adjutant: E. A. Blackmore*, Wyoming (died 4-21-67); Succeeded by Earnest N. Schmit*, North Dakota (Appointed 5-4-67)
Chaplain: Rev. Alfred C. Thompson*, New York
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

49th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Boston, Mass., Aug. 25 – 31, 1967
Commander: John E. Davis*, North Dakota
Vice Commanders: Robert M. Fritz*, Indiana; Lewis W. Emerich*, Texas; Harry V. Klein*, Pennsylvania; Frank L. Orfanello*, Massachusetts; James A. Tadlock*, New Mexico
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Anthony J. O'Driscoll*, New York
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

50th NATIONAL CONVENTION

New Orleans, La., Sept. 6 – 12, 1968
Commander: William E. Galbraith*, Nebraska
Thomas W. Miller*, Nevada, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: Coleman Nolen*, Oklahoma; Louis R. J. Malo*, Rhode Island; Roscoe D. Curtiss*, Tennessee; Dr. Edwin L. Peterson*, Utah; Marvin W. Roth*, Wisconsin
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Edward P. Nolan*, Pennsylvania
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

51st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Atlanta, Ga., Aug. 22 – 28, 1969
Commander: William C. Doyle*, New Jersey
Vice Commanders: C. Russell Huber*, Alaska; John A. Jones*, West Virginia; Howard E. Lohman*, Minnesota; Lewis E. McCray*, Alabama; Maurice Parisien*, Maine
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. C. J. Olander*, Mississippi
Historian: Harold A. Shindler*, Indiana
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

52nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Portland, Ore., Aug. 28 – Sept. 3, 1970
Commander: J. Milton Patrick*, Oklahoma
Vice Commanders: Kent. T. Lundgren*, Michigan; Roland D. Marble*, Mississippi; Raymond F. Mudge*, New Hampshire; Earl R. Norgard*, Oregon; Gilberto M. Font*, Puerto Rico
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. William D. Curtis*, Minnesota
Historian: John A. May*, South Carolina
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

53rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Houston, Texas, Aug. 27 – Sept. 2, 1971
Commander: Alfred P. Chamie*, California
Vice Commanders: Claude Carpenter*, Arkansas; Max Hanson*, Idaho; Robert E.L. Eaton*, Maryland; Gabriel T. Olga*, Massachusetts; John E. Gilbert*, Pennsylvania
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Milton B. Faust*, North Carolina
Historian: Howard M. Swinney*, Kentucky
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

54th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Chicago, Ill., Aug. 18 – 24, 1972
Commander: John H. Geiger*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: Howard W. Fann*, Kentucky; Arthur M. MacCarthy*, Florida; Roy Sweet*, Vermont; Harry G. Wiles*, Kansas; Wallace C.S. Young*, Hawaii
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana

Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Paul J. Schwaab*,
Nebraska
Historian: G. Greer McCallister*, Ohio
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New
York

55th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Honolulu, Hawaii, Aug. 17 – 23, 1973
Commander: Joe L. Matthews*, Texas
Vice Commanders: Tim T. Craig*, North
Carolina; Sam Gray*, California;
Donald L. Gruenbaum*, Ohio; Albert J.
Moeller*, New Jersey; Raymond J. Novak*,
South Dakota
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. L. P. Fitzpatrick*, Iowa
Historian: Mrs. Loretta O. Phillips*,
California
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New
York

56th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Miami Beach, Fla., Aug. 16 – 22, 1974
Commander: Robert E. L. Eaton*, Maryland
Vice Commanders: John N. Roberto*,
Connecticut; Frank C. Brooks*, Washington;
Gilbert E. Sheeks*, Indiana; Merrick W.
Swords, Jr.*, Louisiana; N. E. Brown*,
South Carolina
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Jerome D. Fortenberry*,
Missouri
Historian: R. Robert Filter*, Wisconsin
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New
York

57th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Minneapolis, Minn., Aug. 15 – 21, 1975
Commander: James M. Wagonseller*, Ohio
Maurice Stember*, New York, Past National
Commander
Vice Commanders: Boyd H. Clemens*,
North Dakota; Jack W. Flynt*, Texas; Jay E.
Harville*, Tennessee; Donald H. Jeffery*,
Pennsylvania; William A. Lindsay*,
Montana
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Harvey T. Goodling*,
Oregon
Historian: Nolie C. Deas, Sr.*, Florida
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New
York

58th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Seattle, Wash., Aug. 20 – 26, 1976
Commander: Harry G. Wiles*, Kansas
Vice Commanders: John W. Adams, Jr.*,
Kentucky; Fred W. Anderson, Jr.*, Nevada;
Leo F. Malloy*, Massachusetts; Thomas W.
Miller*, Arkansas; James F. Walker*,
Minnesota
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Claude E. Smithmier*,
Georgia
Historian: Mrs. Dorothy Crimes*, Colorado
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New
York

59th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Denver, Colo., Aug. 19 – 25, 1977
Commander: William J. Rogers*, Maine
Vice Commanders: Lloyd J. Berken*,
Wisconsin; Thomas B. Coll*, District of
Columbia; Robert B. Grauberger*,
Colorado; Frank A. Kelly*, Georgia; Wilbur
Walker*, Virginia
Adjutant: William F. Hauck*, Indiana
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. James C. Tuxbury*,
North Dakota
Historian: Alton H. Carpenter*, New York
Treasurer: William Francis Polen*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New
York

60th NATIONAL CONVENTION

New Orleans, La., Aug. 18 – 24, 1978
Commander: Robert Charles Smith*,
Louisiana
Vice Commanders: Eugene V. Lindquist*,
Minnesota; Roger A. Munson*, Ohio; John
J. O'Connell*, Rhode Island; Chester
Phillips*, West Virginia; Irving B. Selmer*,
Wyoming
Adjutant: Frank C. Momsen*, Minnesota
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Walter D. Power*,
Maryland
Historian: Arnold J. Stockstad*, North
Dakota
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New
York

61st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Houston, Texas, Aug. 17 – 23, 1979
Commander: John M. Carey*, Michigan
Hamilton Fish*, New York, Past National
Commander
Vice Commanders: L. Max Connolly*,
Arizona; Alvin F. Grauerholz*, Kansas;

Joseph F. Ward*, New Jersey; John H. Wienand, Jr.*, Alabama; Nathan M. Wolfe*, South Carolina

Adjutant: Frank C. Momsen*, Minnesota
Chaplain: R. Drew Wolcott*, Mexico
Historian: Harry H. Kretzler, M.D.*, Washington
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

62nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Boston, Mass., Aug. 15 – 21, 1980
Commander: Frank I. Hamilton*, Indiana
Vice Commanders: G. Y. Fails*, New Mexico; Keith A. Kreul*, Wisconsin; Bob Legan*, Arkansas; Max E. Robinson*, North Carolina; Lawrence R. Spaulding*, New Hampshire.

Adjutant: Frank C. Momsen*, Minnesota
Chaplain: Rev. Karl E. Kniseley*, California
Historian: Phillip Haddad*, Oklahoma
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

63rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Honolulu, Hawaii, Aug. 28 – Sept. 3, 1981
Commander: Michael J. Kogutek*, New York

Vice Commanders: Ralph M. Godwin*, Mississippi; Keith H. Gwilliam*, Utah; Matthew W. Jamieson*, Michigan; Robert W. Lowry*, Nebraska; Dr. Almo J. Sebastianelli*, Pennsylvania

Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. George S. Macres*, Minnesota
Historian: Neal S. Sundeen*, Arizona
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

64th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Chicago, Ill., Aug. 20 – 26, 1982
Commander: Jack W. Flynt*, Texas
Vice Commanders: Frank T. Markovich*, Missouri; Dan C. McDonough*, Alaska; Percy C. Miller*, Tennessee; Melvin 'Doc' Simon*, Vermont; David A. Wade*, Maryland

Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. George R. M. Rumney*, Virginia
Historian: Bernard J. Chisholm*, Minnesota
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

65th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Seattle, Wash., Aug. 19 – 25, 1983
Commander: Al Keller, Jr.*, Illinois
Vice Commanders: Robert C. Gabrielson*, South Dakota; Margaret M. Malone*, New Jersey; H. Melvin Napier*, Indiana; Jack C. Plato*, Oregon; Leo O. Walker*, Oklahoma
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. John D. Kempf*, Ohio
Historian: James W. Conway*, Massachusetts
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Bertram G. Davis*, New York

66th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Salt Lake City, Utah, Sept. 3 – 5, 1984
Commander: Keith Kreul*, Wisconsin
Vice Commanders: J. Leslie Brown, Jr.*, Kentucky; Roberto Gonzalez-Vazquez*, Puerto Rico; Charles R. Green*, Ohio; Robert W. Groccia*, Massachusetts, John N. Lockhart*, Hawaii

Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: James Clay McKee, Utah
Historian: Herberta T. Stark*, New Hampshire
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

67th NATIONAL CONVENTION

New Orleans, La., Aug. 23 – 28, 1985
Commander: Clarence M. Bacon*, Maryland
Vice Commanders: Robert S. Turner, Georgia; Harold E. Collett*, Idaho; Ronald D. Birk*, Kansas; Stewart Kunde*, Minnesota; Stephen J. Mikosky*, Pennsylvania

Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Charles G. Rice, Jr.*, New York
Historian: Roy B. Mahoney*, Florida
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

68th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Cincinnati, Ohio, Aug. 29 – Sept. 4, 1986
Commander: Dale L. Renaud*, Iowa
Vice Commanders: Bernard Black*, South Carolina; Norman Conn*, California; Vito M. DeFilipp*, Maine; Miles S. Epling, West

Virginia, H. F. 'Sparky' Gierke*, North Dakota
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Dr. Gordon L. Patterson*, Nebraska
Historian: Ethel M. Matuschka*, Wisconsin
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

69th NATIONAL CONVENTION

San Antonio, Texas, Aug. 21 – 27, 1987
Commander: James P. Dean*, Mississippi
E. Roy Stone, Jr.*, South Carolina, Past National Commander
Vice Commanders: William M. Detweiler*, Louisiana; Doris R. Gross*, Washington; Donald E. Neil*, Delaware; Allen L. Titus*, Indiana; Ervin F. Van Dyke*, Wisconsin
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Fr. Arthur J. Jakobiak*, New Mexico
Historian: J. Ruffin Apperson*, Virginia
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

70th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Louisville, Ky., Sept. 6 – 8, 1988
Commander: John P. 'Jake' Comer, Massachusetts
Vice Commanders: Neale V. Cabral*, Connecticut; Joe Frank, Jr., Missouri; W. P. 'Bill' Peterson*, Montana; Paul B. Phifer, Jr.*, Virginia; F. Leon Reed*, Arkansas
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Jerry Salvesson*, Minnesota
Historian: Edward F. Brennan*, Illinois
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

71st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Baltimore, Md., Sept. 5 – 7, 1989
Commander: H.F. 'Sparky' Gierke*, North Dakota
Vice Commanders: Thomas L. Gabel*, Ohio; Harvey Holcomb*, Texas; Archie Pozzi, Jr. *, Nevada; Ray G. Smith, Sr. *, North Carolina; John P. Tipping*, New York
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. F. Robert Davidson, Michigan
Historian: Richard A. Stevens, Sr. *, Louisiana
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

72nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Indianapolis, Ind., Aug. 28 – 30, 1990
Commander: Miles S. Epling, West Virginia
Vice Commanders: Vincent E. Blank*, Iowa; Joseph E. Caouette*, New Hampshire; Andrew J. Cooper*, Alabama; Gerald Goetzinger*, South Dakota; Vinton R. Guy*, Colorado
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Lynn S. Kearsley*, Idaho
Historian: C. Carl Pilgrim*, South Carolina
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

73rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Phoenix, Ariz., Sept. 3 – 5, 1991
Commander: Robert S. Turner, Georgia
Vice Commanders: Lewis Adams*, Nebraska; James T. Anderson*, Wyoming; Fred M. Ingellis*, Mississippi; Harry F. McDowell*, Florida; George E. Sampson*, New Jersey
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Michas M. Ohnstad, Minnesota
Historian: Harold Matthew Branton*, Texas
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

74th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Chicago, Ill., Aug. 25 – 27, 1992
Commander: Dominic D. DiFrancesco*, Pennsylvania
Vice Commanders: James 'Jim' G. Brouillette*, Vermont; Thomas P. Cadmus*, Michigan; Ronald C. Murphy*, Arizona; Lawrence F. Roy, Oklahoma; Lee R. Stolfus*, Kansas
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Donal M. 'Jack' Squires*, West Virginia
Historian: Bettie M. Canon*, Montana
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

75th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Pittsburgh, Pa., Sept. 3 – 9, 1993
Commander: Roger A. Munson*, Ohio
Vice Commanders: Joseph V. Adams*, Pennsylvania; Paul Andrejewski*, Minnesota; Robert E. 'Jack' David*, South

Carolina; John William 'Bill' Murphy*, Arkansas; Louis A. 'Tony' Santillanes*, New Mexico

Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. James R. Wagner*, Mississippi

Historian: Delfo Barabani*, Massachusetts
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

76th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Minneapolis, Minn., Sept. 6 – 8, 1994
Commander: Bruce Thiesen, California
Vice Commanders: Juan H. Cintron*, Puerto Rico; Douglas A. Mason*, Utah; John J. Mulhern*, Massachusetts; K. W. Ohl*, Indiana; Curtis O. Twete, North Dakota
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Msgr. Raymond J. Kozlowski*, New York
Historian: Marjorie T. Simpson*, Georgia
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

77th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Indianapolis, Ind., Sept. 4 – 6, 1995
Commander: William M. Detweiler*, Louisiana
Vice Commanders: Joseph T. Craig*, Alaska; Silas M. Noel*, Kentucky; Calvin E. Patton*, Maryland; H. Gordon Burleigh*, New York; Vernon K. Grosenick*, Wisconsin
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Roy L. Pryor*, South Carolina
Historian: M. LaReine Maxey*, Nevada, (died 10-7-94); Succeeded by Carl S. Wiperman*, Washington (appointed 10-19-94)
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

78th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Salt Lake City, Utah, Aug. 30 – Sept. 5, 1996
Commander: Daniel A. Ludwig, Minnesota
Vice Commanders: Keith Baker*, Iowa; William L. Ciciotte*, Maine; Robert D. Scott, Oregon; C. Darrel Haskell*, South Dakota; Ralph J. Reel*, Tennessee
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Joseph E. Reynolds*, Texas
Historian: R. Paul Tenney*, Vermont
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

79th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Orlando, Fla., Aug. 29 – Sept. 4, 1997
Commander: Joseph J. Frank, Missouri
Vice Commanders: Wilson R. Timmons*, Florida; Orland H. Taylor*, Hawaii; Roger L. Wild*, Nebraska; Albert M. Robotti*, New Jersey; Robert L. Bowen*, Virginia
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Charles H. Richmond*, Oklahoma
Historian: Barbara 'Bobbe' Stuvengen*, Wisconsin
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

80th NATIONAL CONVENTION

New Orleans, La., Sept. 4 – 10, 1998
Commander: Anthony Jordan, Maine
Vice Commanders: Erwin Gus Williams, Connecticut; Conrad A. Chisholm*, Idaho; Norris W. Preston*, Missouri; Gerald L. Moore*, Ohio; Robert E. Vass*, West Virginia
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Henry E. Eisenhart*, Pennsylvania
Historian: Tommy Mills*, Mississippi
Treasurer: Webber LaGrange, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

81st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Anaheim, Calif., Sept. 3 – 9, 1999
Commander: Butch L. Miller, Virginia
Vice Commanders: Leo P. Burke*, California; Roger L. Tingler, Georgia; James W. Gravenstein, Kansas; Fernando M. Goulart, Rhode Island; John D. Morris*, Texas
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Robert J. Sweeney*, New York
Historian: Robert L. Klipstine*, Ohio
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

82nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Milwaukee, Wis., Sept. 1 – 7, 2000
Commander: Alan G. Lance, Sr., Idaho
Vice Commanders: James F. Fraughnaugh*, Alabama; Milton W. Lobstein, Michigan; Robert Skallerud*, Minnesota; Robert F.

Neville, New York; L. Harry Easley*, Washington
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: David R. Brown, Louisiana
Historian: Robert Mead*, Nebraska
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

83rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

San Antonio, Texas, Aug. 24 – 30, 2001
Commander: Ray G. Smith*, North Carolina
Vice Commanders: Charles C. Ragsdell*, Arkansas; James E. Koutz, Indiana;
Henry P. Bradley, Massachusetts; John C. Pellegrini, Montana; William A. Weatherly*, South Carolina
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Calvin C. Turpin*, California
Historian: James Buterbaugh, Kansas
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

84th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Charlotte, N.C., Aug. 27 – 29, 2002
Commander: Richard J. Santos, Maryland
Vice Commanders: Russell H. Hanseter, Wisconsin; Charles R. John*, Oklahoma;
Terry D. Lewis*, Pennsylvania; James F. Mareschal*, Missouri; Dale R. Salmen*, Nevada
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: David F. Russell, Virginia
Historian: Walter L. Davis, Michigan
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

85th NATIONAL CONVENTION

St. Louis, Mo., Aug. 26 – 28, 2003
Commander: Ronald F. Conley, Pennsylvania
Vice Commanders: Jefferson 'Jeff' Luginbuel*, Colorado; Roy L. Kirkham*, Louisiana; Robert M. Johnson*, Maryland;
Robert G. Bournival, New Hampshire;
Donavon R. Mason*, South Dakota
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Norris A. Keirn, Indiana
Historian: Donald F. Simons, Texas
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

86th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Nashville, Tenn., Aug. 31, Sept. 1, 2, 2004
Commander: John A. Brieden, III, Texas
Vice Commanders: Richard G. Denbow, Iowa; Michael Dennis Helm, Nebraska;
Fang A. Wong, New York; Clinton E. Thompson*, North Carolina; Todd E. White*, Wyoming
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. Dr. William J. P. Doubek, III, Missouri
Historian: Fae Casper, Georgia
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

87th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Honolulu, Hawaii, Aug. 23 – 25, 2005
Commander: Thomas P. Cadmus*, Michigan
Vice Commanders: Marco A. Valenzuela*, Arizona; Charles W. Barrett, Georgia;
Samuel Barney*, Ohio; Wayne B. Richey*, South Carolina; Linda M. Thayer, Vermont
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Rev. James T. Akers*, Kansas
Historian: W. Frazier Brinley, Connecticut
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

88th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Salt Lake City, Utah, Aug. 29 – 31, 2006
Commander: Thomas L. Bock, Colorado
Vice Commanders: Willard F. Coffey, Michigan; James H. Hall*, New Jersey;
Taurino J. Trevino*, New Mexico; Sebastian T. Roll*, North Dakota; Michael E. Harris, Virginia
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Steven E. Wright, Utah
Historian: Johnny B. Keel*, Louisiana
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*, Maryland

89th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Reno, Nev., Aug. 28 – 30, 2007
Commander: Paul A. Morin, Massachusetts
Vice Commanders: Bryon W. White*, Alabama; Elgin Wahlborg*, Kansas; Lloyd H. Woods, Maine; Robert C. Lahiere, Tennessee; Allan C. Setterberg, Utah
Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
Chaplain: Stanley Gruneich, South Dakota
Historian: Michael J. Miskell, Pennsylvania
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

90th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Phoenix, Ariz., Aug. 26 – 28, 2008

Commander: Martin F. Conatser, Illinois

Vice Commanders: Peggy G. Dettori, Alaska; Thomas L. Burns, Jr., Delaware; Randall A. Fisher *, Kentucky; Donald Hayden, Minnesota; David A. Korth *, Wisconsin

Adjutant: Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
(Voted title of Past National Commander, effective 10/16/2008)

Chaplain: Rev. Elliott L. Foss, Jr., Georgia

Historian: James M. Holmes *, Indiana

Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr. *, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

91st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Louisville, Ky., Aug. 25 – 27, 2009

Commander: David K. Rehbein, Iowa

Vice Commanders: James A. LaCoursiere, Jr., Connecticut

Michael J. Landkamer, Nebraska

James W. Davis, West Virginia

Harley W. Ray, Oregon; Dellan 'Shorty' T. Simmons, Texas

Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia

Chaplain: Rev. Lawrence 'Larry' Vollink, Michigan

Historian: Charles J. Zelinsky, Illinois

Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr. *, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

92nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Milwaukee, Wis., Aug. 30, Sept. 1, 2, 2010

Commander: Clarence E. Hill, Florida

Vice Commanders: Morris M. Bentley, Idaho, Dr. Gordon B. Browning *, Maryland, Mark A. Avis, Massachusetts, James C.

Morris, Ohio, Eugene Schumacher, South Dakota

Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia

Chaplain: Rev. John L. Beaver, Alabama

Historian: James T. Higuera, California

Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr. *, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

93rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Minneapolis, Minn., Aug. 30 – Sept. 1, 2011

Commander: Jimmie L. Foster, Alaska

Vice Commanders: Russell J. Henry,

Louisiana; John M. Mella, Michigan; Carlos Orria-Medina, Puerto Rico; Eugene R. Pytka, Rhode Island; William F. Schrier, Washington

Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia

Chaplain: Rev. Daniel J. Seehafer,

Wisconsin

Historian: James Fratolillo, Massachusetts

Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr. *, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

94th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Indianapolis, Ind., Aug. 28 - 30, 2012

Commander: Fang A. Wong, New York

Richard M. Pedro *, New York, Past

National Commander

Vice Commanders: Mervin G. Gunderson *,

Montana; James H. Hales, Jr. *,

Pennsylvania; Milton G. Heifner, Iowa;

Larry D. Sheets *, Florida; David N. Voyles,

Missouri

Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia

Chaplain: Gerald Theriot, Louisiana

Historian: Robert B. Craig, Nebraska

Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr. *, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

95th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Houston, Texas, Aug. 27 – 29, 2013

Commander: James E. Koutz, Indiana

Vice Commanders: Jeanette Rae, Nevada;

John E. Neylon, New Hampshire; Glenn A.

Hickman, Ohio; James H. Holland, South

Carolina; David R. Hall, West Virginia

Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia

Chaplain: Ronald Derrick, Idaho

Historian: N. Larry Rozier, North Carolina

Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr. *, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr. *, Maryland

96th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Charlotte, N. C. Aug. 26 – 28, 2014

Commander: Daniel M. Dellinger, Virginia

Vice Commanders: Douglas W. Wooddell,

Colorado; Robert E. Newman, Indiana;

William A. Rakestraw, Jr. *, New Jersey;

Wayne D. Satrom, North Dakota; Paul E.

Dillard, Texas

Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia

Chaplain: Daniel A. McClure, Iowa

Historian: Charemon Dunham, South

Dakota

Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr. *, Indiana

Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*,
Maryland

97th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Baltimore, Md. Sept. 1 – 3, 2015
Commander: Michael D. Helm, Nebraska
Vice Commanders: Paul O. Sanford,
Kansas; Douglas C. Haggan, France;
Richard W. Neville, North Carolina;
William R. Bryant, Virginia*; Gerald L.
Jacobs, Wyoming
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Tierian 'Randy' Cash, North
Carolina
Historian: Susan B. Mason, Florida
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*,
Maryland

98th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Cincinnati, Ohio, Aug. 30, 31, Sept. 1, 2016
Commander: Harold D. Barnett, Georgia
Vice Commanders: George E. Cushing,
Arizona; Jimmy F. Lane, Arkansas; John W.
Hargreaves, Maine; Alan A. Davis, Sr.,
Minnesota; David L. Gough, Wisconsin
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: H. C. Ted Kelley*, Pennsylvania
Historian: James E. Copher, Minnesota
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*,
Maryland

99th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Reno, Nev., Aug. 22 – 24, 2017
Commander: Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon
Vice Commanders: Paul Martel, Florida;
Fae Casper, Georgia; Douglas L. Boldt,
Nebraska; Paul L. Espinoza, New Mexico;
Vincent James Troiola, New York
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Harvey H. Klee*, Texas
Historian: Paul D. Bennett*, Missouri
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr.*,
Maryland

100th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Minneapolis, MN, Aug 28 – 30, 2018
Commander: Denise H. Rohan, Wisconsin
Vice Commanders: Larry J. Marcouillier,
Denver; William J. Flanagan, Illinois;
Bobby D. Bryant, Oklahoma; Byron I.
Callies, South Dakota; Paula R. Stephenson,
Utah
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Robert A. Vick, Florida

Historian: Richard T. Dubay, Michigan
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.*, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Kevin J. Bartlett, Michigan

101st NATIONAL CONVENTION

Indianapolis, IN, Aug. 27-29, 2019
Commander: Brett P. Reistad, Virginia
Vice Commanders: James E. Pisa, Alaska;
Paul I. Spedaliere, Connecticut; John F.
Milburn, Maryland; James E. Wallace,
Michigan; Steve Sweet, Mississippi
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Phillip G. Salois, Rhode Island
Historian: Frederick S. Doten, Nevada
Treasurer: George A. Buskirk, Jr.* , Indiana
Judge Advocate: Kevin J. Bartlett, Michigan

102nd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Phoenix, AZ, Aug. 31, Sept. 1, 2, 2021
Commander: James W. "Bill" Oxford, North
Carolina
Vice Commanders: Bruce C. Feuerbach,
Iowa; David L. King, Kentucky; Francis J.
MacDonald, Massachusetts; Richard A.
Heigert, Missouri; Robert D. Liebenow,
Oregon
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Edward L. Harris, Jr., Indiana
Historian: James A. Mariner, New Mexico
Treasurer: Shawn T. Long, Indiana

103rd NATIONAL CONVENTION

Milwaukee, WI, Aug. 30, 31, Sept. 1, 2022
Commander: Paul E. Dillard, Texas
Vice Commanders: James T. Higuera,
California; Jerrold W. Wilson, Ohio; Angel
O. Narvaez, Puerto Rico; Cory D. Bates,
Rhode Island; Michael F. Mitrione, Virginia
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Stanley K. Hamamoto, Colorado
Historian: Robert B. Gilmore, Arizona
Treasurer: Shawn T. Long, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Mark Seavey, Virginia

104th NATIONAL CONVENTION

Charlotte, NC, Aug. 29, 30, 31, 2023
Commander: Vincent J. Troiola, New York
Vice Commanders: Kenneth C. Hylton,
Indiana; Patricia A. Harris, North Carolina;
Glenn L. Wahun, North Dakota; Paul M.
Kennedy, Pennsylvania; Douglas R. Uhrig,
Wyoming
Adjutant: Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia
Chaplain: Daniel M. Antel, Sr., Minnesota
Historian: Deborah A. Davis, Colorado
Treasurer: Shawn T. Long, Indiana
Judge Advocate: Mark Seavey, Virginia

PROCEEDINGS
of the
104th Annual Convention
of
The American Legion

Tuesday, August 29, 2023

...At 8:30 a.m., the members assembled for the 104th Annual National Convention, and the following proceedings were had.

Call to Order
Vincent J. Troiola, New York, National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Ladies and Gentlemen, as we begin our program, please join me in a round of applause for Rick Pedro on the keyboard. *(Applause)*

The 104th National Convention will come to order. Ladies and gentlemen, please rise as the color guard of American Legion Newport Harbor Post 291 in Newport Beach, California, presents the Colors, and then remain standing while rendering a salute for the singing of the National Anthem by Army Ranger veteran and country music artist Keni Thomas. *...At this time, the delegation rose and rendered a salute to the Colors, followed by which the National Anthem was performed.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Color guard, you may retire. Thank you. For the invocation, I call on National Chaplain Daniel Mark Antal, Sr., of the Department of North Dakota. Ladies and gentlemen, please uncover.

Invocation
Daniel Mark Antal, Sr., North Dakota, National Chaplain

From Psalm 111, Praise the Lord. I will extol the Lord with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the Lord. They are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are His deeds, and His righteousness endures forever. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. All who follow His precepts have good understanding. To Him belongs eternal praise.

Eternal God, You have graced our nation with blessing upon blessing. You have given us wise leadership to lay the foundation of our land with the words of the Constitution of the United States. Gifted men and women have filled this audience with their character, guided by the principles of The American Legion. Help us today to learn and lean into their wisdom as we conduct the business before us for this 104th Convention. Give us listening and attentive minds to hear one another.

We thank You for the entire American Legion Family. No post is too small that its voice is not heard here. No post is so massive that it should dominate, forcing their way to sway the hearts of others.

Today we remember the brave men and women who serve in the armed forces, either on active duty, in the guard, or reserve. Bless, guard and protect them. Help them to serve with duty, honor, integrity and compassion. Watch over their families who await their return. To You, O God, belongs the glory. Amen.

Pledge of Allegiance**Michael T. Byrnes, New York, National Sergeant-at-Arms**

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you, Chaplain Antal. Please remain uncovered as Michael T. Byrnes of New York leads us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

...The convention recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony

Matthew J. Shuman, Arizona, Chairman, National Security Commission
Kenneth J. Trumbull, Illinois, Vice Chairman, National Security Commission

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: At this time, we pause to remember those who are listed as prisoners of war or missing in action from wars in which we have been engaged. We in The American Legion will never forget them. We will not ease the pressure on our government to do the right thing and continue to work for an accounting of all those missing. I now call on the chairman of the National Security Commission, Matthew J. Shuman of Arizona and Vice Chairman Kenneth J. Trumbull of Illinois to place the POW/MIA flag on the empty chair.

Preamble to Constitution**Vincent J. Troiola, New York, National Commander**

Please cover and join me in reciting the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion. *...The delegation recited the Preamble to the American Legion Constitution.*

Opening Ceremony

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Before we begin the opening, I do have an important announcement regarding the commander's banquet tonight. There has been a misprint on the tickets. It states that the event is black-tie. That is incorrect. Black-tie and tuxedos are just for the head-table. For everybody else, it is business attire.

Now, let me introduce this morning's master of ceremonies. As a member of Bravo Company, 3rd Ranger Battalion, Sgt. Keni Thomas was deployed to Mogadishu, Somalia as part of a special operations package called Task Force Ranger. Their mission, to find and capture criminal warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid.

Outnumbered 10-to-1, the men of the task force distinguished themselves in an 18-hour firefight that would later be recounted in the highly successful book and movie "Black Hawk Down." Nineteen Americans died, and 78 were wounded. Keni received the Bronze Star for Valor for his bravery in combat. Following his service in the Army, Keni decided to pursue a career as a country music artist. His band Cornbread was featured in the movie "Sweet Home Alabama" and regularly tours with the USO overseas.

An Emmy-winning producer and a best-selling author, Keni has been recognized by Congress and the White House for his dedicated work on behalf of veterans and military families. He now works globally as a motivational speaker and leadership coach at the Downrange Leadership Development Course. Keni is a proud national spokesperson for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, which provides college education to the children of special operations personnel killed in combat or training. Please turn your attention to the screens for a video. *...The delegation viewed a video. (Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Let's give a warm American Legion Family welcome to Keni Thomas.

KENI THOMAS: Thank you so much. Good morning, good morning. I'm just going to warn you guys, I have no script. I have this cool gavel. I don't have any slides. When I walked in, they asked me, "Do you have any slides or anything you want to show?" No, I don't have any PowerPoint presentations. There's a reason for that, it's because I was in the

Army. If I had been in the Air Force, I would have brought a PowerPoint presentation.

So, here's what I'm going to do with my 15 minutes that I'm here on the stage. At every point that you go in your career, you always go to a leadership school, and they teach you how to give a block of instruction, and there's always a communication course in there. They tell you the best way to make a point is to tell a story. There are so many stories I can tell you from this battle, but there's one that I think makes the point about Be the One, be that person who can set the example for others to follow. There's a lot of ways I can go with it. The way that I want to go today is the leadership aspect, which everybody in this room understands.

When you came into the Ranger regiment, they told you, leadership is not a rank, it's not a title, it's not a pay grade. They were very clear about what leadership is. It is the example we set for the people we serve. So, what I hope you get from this story today is, when you walk out of the room and you head on home and head back to your families and your hometowns, what example am I setting? And who are the people on my left and my right? Because there's always somebody on our left and our right, whether we remember that or not.

Then I think what the story earns the right to say is when we need you to do that for each other is when it's hard. We don't need you when it's easy. We can do it ourselves. I'm glad you guys got to see the video. It gave you a good background of what went on.

The original mission was a raid. We were sent into Mogadishu to go get two guys on our most wanted list. They were in this meeting in the middle of the day. If we could launch and get there in ten minutes, we had a good chance of getting these guys. The mission went down flawlessly. We came in. We hit the target building. The Delta operators cleared the building. They got the prisoners. The prisoners were loaded on trucks. The trucks are driving away. Everything's wrapped up.

I'm looking at the last vehicle turning the corner. They took the prisoners, loaded them on the vehicles. The vehicles are driving back. And I'm standing there, I'm like, man, 35 minutes from start to finish, we wrapped this thing up. Then everything changed, and that's when the first helicopter got shot down. The call sign for the first helicopter was Super 61, and it was Bull Briley and Ray Frank were the two pilots. On board were his two crew chiefs and two Delta Force operators. All six of those guys are going down.

The mission has now changed. And I can remember what we were feeling in that moment because you guys have all felt it. It's no different. It's life. When life hits us hard and we didn't see it coming, that's exactly what we were all thinking. It's like when you get that phone call. I know there's people in this room that over the last two years probably lost somebody unexpectedly. My family was one of them. You get the call, hey, Tracy's in the hospital. You need to get here. Well, I just talked to Tracy ten days ago. He's fine. No, man, they say he's got COVID. He's not going to make it. You need to get here.

Or God forbid, something happens with our kids, or you get that phone call from the attorney saying, hey, man, your wife is done with the deployments. Could you just sign these papers so that, when you get back, it will all be done. We're all saying the same thing when life hits unexpectedly.

I'm watching the helicopter. There's a Black Hawk going down, and we see Super 61 is spiraling off to the northeast. I can't believe that it's happening. And I get it, it's not supposed to be happening, and I understand that. And we all take that step backwards, I can't believe that's happening. But it is happening, and it's happening to you. And the sooner that you can come to grips with the fact that it's happening to you, the quicker you can realize it's happening to the people on our left and on our right.

There are so very few things in this lifetime that we go through on our own and by ourselves. People around us are always affected. Then we have a choice to make, and that choice is who do we want to be in that moment?

I used to have a college coach. I'm very careful with the words I choose when I have a microphone in my hand. I had a college coach who would strike that pose and tell me, "Hey, when things go down, you need to do the right thing." I always thought that, "Do the

right thing" was way too broad because, even among the Legionnaires in this room, if I asked you all what is the right thing, I would get some slightly different answers. Even in this room, we're all aligned in our thought process, but we would still get slightly different answers.

Unless, every single morning you stood shoulder to shoulder, and you recited your Ranger Creed. Every single morning, we stood there in formation, and we said the Ranger Creed. We said things like "I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemies." To the point, this is how the brain works. When you say something over and over and over again, you begin to believe it. When you believe something, you will live it. That's why I say, please be careful what you catch yourself saying to yourself. We are humans, and we are magnificent at selling ourselves short. Stop doing it. You are a fearfully and wonderfully made one-of-a-kind creation, and you have an ability to do something in that moment.

So instead of me telling you, "Do the right thing," what I ask you is who do you want to be in that moment? Because who we want to be will always dictate what we do. And if who you want to be is the person in the Ranger regiment when our whole culture was, I am here in the service of others, when someone else is in trouble, you will move to help. I get it. It doesn't mean just in combat. We send our kids on mission trips. We go, and we help our community. We go with this program for kids. We do what we can, we move to help. Obviously, our nation had no shortage of shortcomings and tragedies in the last 15 years. Pick one. Then go back and watch the news, and you'll see there's always a story about one or two folks who did something absolutely heroic, and I love those stories. But the question I always ask is why didn't everybody? Why didn't everybody move to do something to help? Why?

The sad truth is, folks, that most people don't understand what you already know because you've worn the boots. Most people have been lied to all their lives. They've been told, hey, you got to take care of number one. You'd better look after yourself. You'd better watch your back, Jack, because if you don't take care of yourself, no one else will, and they begin to believe it.

The problem with that way of thinking is it doesn't work. Nobody takes the hill alone. So, what ends up happening in those moments is, oh, my gosh, people default, the research is very clear. When we get in these very stressful situations, we revert to that fight, flight or freeze, and people will revert to the level of their training and the level of their thought process. Most people in those moments don't understand their value because they've never been told that they matter, they've never been told that you're part of something bigger than yourself. So, they default to doing nothing.

I don't want to point my finger of hypocrisy at the do-nothings because I understand I've got to have some grace. I understand what do-nothing looks like because it's very insidious. Do nothing, oh, my gosh, there's a helicopter going down. I can't believe that's happening. Then you start backpedaling, oh, gosh, I hope they're going to be okay. You know, the best of intentions.

Y'all, I can preach on this with authority because I catch myself saying it. Man, somebody ought to do something about that, and I hear that voice over my shoulder going, "Yeah, Keni, what can you do about it? Somebody ought to do something." Oh, I hate that voice because it means I've got to roll my sleeves up and go do something that I didn't want to have to do. It means I have to step out of my comfort zone and go do something that's hard. Nobody wants to go do something that's hard, but you will when it's in the service of others.

So, the little bit of the story that I wanted to tell you is now the mission's changed. We now have to go move to that crash site. So, the 80 guys that are at the target building are now going to move on foot to that crash. If this is north, east, west, we move about three blocks to the east, and then we turn left towards the target building is where the helicopter's supposed to be.

When I turned the corner with my guys, we were the last guys to roll on this long

group of men. I could look down the street, and I could see the first element making the left turn towards the crash, and everybody's kind of strung out down the road, and the whole city during the mission, the people that have been shooting at us, but it wasn't that bad. I know that sounds odd to say. There were people shooting at us, and it really wasn't that bad because they were missing, which is exactly what you want to happen when people shoot at you. I had a Ranger instructor that used to say, "Hey, Ranger Thomas, you know if someone shoots at you and they miss, it's just like they never shot at all. No reason to get upset about it. Just stay calm and do your job."

Now the whole city is rushing for this crash, so it's become a foot race. When my guys turn the corner, picture the crash is about two blocks up here off to the right. You've got about 100 guys now fighting on both sides of the street. The volume of gunfire is crazy over the top. Long before they ever made a movie, we called that moment Hollywood because I'd never seen anything like it.

We'd been in some gunfights before, but they were over so fast because rule number one of a gunfight is don't get into one. Number two is, if you have to, overwhelm them through violence of action with fire superiority. Now, this is a hint for you guys. This works really well. Violence of action through fire superiority works really well in a fire fight, not in relationships. Don't try and take that tactic. Heidi doesn't like that part of it. (*Laughter*)

So, when we made the turn, there was so much gunfire going on, and I felt like I could handle the situation. I'm giving my guys sectors of fire. I'm pointing out bad guys. We're trying to figure out who's got a weapon, who's not, why is this taking so long?

So, one of the pilots didn't make it was the word I got. They got his body crushed in the wreckage. They're trying to get his body out of the wreckage. Should be about 15 minutes, hold what you got.

I'm running around disseminating the information to my guys. It felt like I could handle it. It was training up until it wasn't training anymore. When it isn't training is when you start losing people. For those of you who have been in that moment, you understand it. It's a whole different shift of reality. People started going down.

They told us in retrospect that at that moment, within seven minutes of that crash hitting the ground, most of us were already there. They told us we were already outnumbered 10-to-1. So at least 1,000 people with weapons, insurgents moving in on that crash site. I never saw ten guys at one time charging, but I did see twosies and threesies everywhere. But because we were so outnumbered, when one guy goes down, now you've got two or three guys that move to help him, you start getting gaps in the line. Then the gaps start getting wider and wider, and it starts becoming a little bit overwhelming.

This, y'all, is when I saw people doing things that were incredible. And you guys know, we as a general public, we throw the word hero around quite a bit, and everyone in this room would agree, just because I just want to grab my guys and get out of here. But what I saw on that battlefield when guys started getting hurt was nothing short of acts of valor. They will never be able to write enough citations that honor the valor and the heroic acts.

It's very simple, like when you take it and cut everything back, like why are you all doing this? Because none of it made sense to me at this point. I really wished I could have just taken the red flag and thrown it out there and been like, hey, time-out. Hey, you, stop shooting. Just stop because I just want to grab my guys and get out of here. I'll be out of your neighborhood in a minute. But it just became this crazy firefight.

What I saw guys doing for each other, it was so basic and simple, and when you've had that at that core level, you know, if you take the basic needs, the basic human needs, if you go back to your psychology classes, after being food and shelter and safety, you know what the next thing is on that list? It's human connection. Most of us in this room, it's why you're still here together. We've had that shoulder to shoulder, that connection. I don't have to like you and be my best buddy, but I damn sure know I can count on you because you're coming.

The reason is so simple. If there were guys, if you asked them why they did what they did, I know what their answer would be. It would be the same answer you would give, the

same answer I would give. "They would have done it for me."

I don't care how far back you go in the history of the American soldier. I don't care. Take your pick. Go to Gettysburg, go back to Gettysburg. Take those boys on both sides of the line and ask them, hey, what you fighting for? I guarantee you, no one would say I'm fighting for the preservation of the union, or I'm fighting for states' rights, or I'm fighting against the atrocities of the institution of slavery.

No one in World War II will tell you, you go ask someone in the Battle of the Bulge, what you fighting for? No one's going to tell you, I'm fighting against fascism, against Hitler and his atrocities against the Jewish people, and world order. No one's going to tell you that.

You go to my dad's generation, which is quite a few of you guys in here, hey, what are you fighting for? I'm fighting to prevent the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. That's not what dad was fighting for.

You go and ask any of us that made it out of the desert and all my buddies that went to Afghanistan and back, none of us were fighting Al Qaeda. None of us were fighting Sunni clan fighters. We weren't fighting ISIS. We were not fighting the spread of global terrorism.

The only thing that you fight for is each other. That's it, and it's so simple. And each other is enough if you told yourself every day that I am here in the service of others, that my calling is to be here for my comrades. We said it every day, and everybody from the general to the captain to the lieutenant to the platoon sergeant, all the way down to private. My youngest guy was Private David Floyd. The only person David was in charge of was himself. But if he was setting the example for others to follow, we knew we could count on him, we knew we were getting out of there and we would make it.

I don't know what you all tell yourselves at this point in your lives every day, but if you need something great to tell yourself and remind you of why you put the boots on in the first place and why you're proud of that time in service and how do you take that and translate it into your daily life and who you come in contact with, I've got a great one.

It's the motto of all Special Operations. Every unit I have ever worked with, it's on the walls. The Ranger Regiment has it up on their walls. You go into all the Delta teams and the SF teams up at formerly Fort Bragg, they've got it up there on their walls. All the guys down at Hurlburt and all the kids down in Florida who are the Special Tactics Squadrons in the Air Force, the 160th Special Operations Air Regiment guys, all the pilots and crews have it. I don't know if you saw Jay yesterday talking on the panel, all my buddies with the great hair and the Oakley sunglasses and the tattoos of small sea mammals on their arms, they'll tell you. You know how you know a Navy SEAL when you meet one, right? They'll tell you, that's right. I wish Jay was here because I would make fun of him. (*Laughter*)

All over the Special Operations world, it's an Old Testament scripture. It's from the book of Isaiah, chapter 6, verse 8. And it reads like this, "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying who will go for us? Whom shall we send? And I answered, here, my Lord. Send me." It should have been called the "put me in coach" scripture. I'll do it. Put me in.

Y'all, that was easy when I wore the boots. It was easy when I was jumping out of planes at 30,000 feet in the middle of the night. It was easy when I stood shoulder to shoulder in the dark corners of the world knowing, if I made it back, I made an impact for the guys that I went in with. But when I got out that transition was tough. It took me ten years to figure out this story wasn't a curse. I didn't want to tell it to anybody. I just wanted to go to Nashville and do my music and do my thing, but this story kept following me.

One day one of my buddies who had been in the battle saw me on an interview. He said, "Hey, man, how's the music business going?" I started complaining and whining. Oh, they just want me to be like Keni, the singing Ranger. All they ever want to talk about is Black Hawk Down. Jeff looks at me and says, "Shut up." Jeff at this point had become a pastor.

"You can't talk to me like that. You're a pastor."

"Just shut up and do push-ups." He said, "We do not have to be happy about the soup

sandwich we get handed. We do not, but we got to own it because, if we don't own it, who will?" That is not a rhetorical question, y'all. The hard truth of it is that someone else, someone else has to own it.

I'm not telling you to be omnipresent, put on your junior God badge and do everything all the time, but do what you can when you can because, if you don't own it, someone else will.

Jeff knew that was going to kick me in the butt. And he looked at me and says, "Dude, I don't know anyone else from Task Force Ranger that has a microphone put in their face the way that you do, so if you don't tell our story, who will? So, you'd better figure out what you're going to say, and you'd better say it fast."

Jeff was right. It took me a while to figure out what I was going to say, but I got good at it. Just so you guys know, the key to being asked back for events is to not suck, so they will ask you back. I'm sure I'll see you again somewhere because I know I don't suck at this anymore because I owned it.

I haven't told you all anything you don't already know. That's another key to being a great speaker. Tell people what they already know, and then they'll think you're smart. I have told you, please, remember that day that you raised your hand way back when. For guys, even if you just did two years, what you learned in the basic training and what you learned at your unit and what you learned on the battlefield and what you learned on your time in service is that I am here in the service of others. All these skill sets that they're teaching me is so that I can better serve my people. The better I serve my team, the better I serve my people, the more likely our mission will be successful.

Can you imagine if we can turn that mindset around to this way of thinking in our nation? Instead of it being me, me, me, me, me, me. And we start thinking about how do I serve others so that we as a country can do better? Who are you leading? Who are you following? What example are you setting? That's what I hope you get from it. You see what I just did there? I told you what I was going to tell you, then I told you, then I told you what I told you. That's good communication.

Follow me. I'm going to sing a song, and I'm going to transition as best I can. Actually, there's another song that I like to do at these types of events because I think it sums up the story pretty well. I actually had a request that someone asked for, and they're like, "Man, I'm a big fan of your music," and I said, "You're the one." But the song I want to do, I'll tell you where it came and the story behind it. ...*Strums guitar.*

We went to Arlington one afternoon, and it was right around the 3rd of October, which was the anniversary of the battle, and we were going to visit some of the gravesites of the guys, and I saw this old guy, not unlike some of you. (*Laughter*)

Am I allowed to say that? Okay. And he was talking to himself. And I watched him, and I realized that after a minute he wasn't talking to himself at all, he was having a conversation with his buddies. When he was done, I walked over to him and just started asking him his story. He was a World War II guy. That's how I got this story. I went home, song kind of wrote itself, and I think it sums this one up. It works well for this crowd. It's called The Last Band of Brothers. ...*Song "The Last Band of Brothers."*

God bless you guys for what you do and who you are and where you've been. Carry it forward. My name is Keni Thomas. Rangers lead the way! (*Applause*)

ANNOUNCER: The 2023 Eagle Scout of the Year comes from Walla Walla, Washington, and is a member of Boy Scout Troop 305. For his project, he relied on 3D printing to design and create COVID-19 personal protective equipment during the height of the pandemic. Through his efforts, he doubled his goal of providing 1,000 ear-relieving mask straps to his community's frontline workers. His earlier project to restore a wilderness trail was disrupted due to the coronavirus pandemic. Ladies and gentlemen, our Eagle Scout of the Year, Jackson Adams. (Applause)

**The American Legion Youth Champions
2023 Eagle Scout of the Year
Jackson D. Adams, Walla Walla, Washington**

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, and esteemed delegates of The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and Sons of The American Legion, I stand before you today profoundly grateful and humbled to be selected as the American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year. My gratitude is not just for this award and your gracious hospitality this week, but also for the opportunity to explore the deeper connections between scouting, The American Legion, and our veterans.

As Eagle Scouts, we fill a role rather than a rank. Our mission was carved out by the founder of the scouting movement, Lord Baden Powell. It has been passed down through every Eagle Scout who has come before me. Lord Powell wrote, "It's the spirit within, not the veneer without, that makes a man." The trail to Eagle composes our spirits into something recognizable worldwide irrespective of our color, creed and class. I'm called here today to preserve that spirit and its legacy, not just as the Eagle Scout of the Year, but as a reminder of our organization's shared mission.

Recognizing these mutual goals after its founding in 1919, one of the first acts of The American Legion was to formalize its support of the Boy Scouts of America at the first National Convention. Since then, Legionnaires have devoted their service, learned skills and experiences as veterans to help build character and positive traits in our country's youth. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to witness this continued devotion to fostering leadership, community engagement and patriotism through this Convention.

Most of all, I would like to thank my family, though. Today's honor holds a special significance as my father is a fellow Eagle Scout and a Legionnaire. He's been a guiding light both within and beyond the scouting realm, instilling in me the shared values of our organizations, such as the importance of selfless service and unwavering dedication.

I'm about to embark on the next leg of my journey as I begin studying mechanical engineering at Northwestern University. I'm determined to uphold the exemplary standards set by my father, his fellow Legionnaires and the remarkable lineage of Eagle Scouts who preceded me. Thank you so much for making this generous investment in my future and for naming me as your American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year. Thank you. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: In competition in Colorado Springs a few weeks ago, two Youth Champions took top prize in the annual Junior Air Rifle Championships. In the Sporter category, our top competitor is a young shooter who comes from Clover, South Carolina. He plans to attend Harvard University and finished the competition with a final aggregate score of 2318.4 out of a possible 2400. Please welcome our American Legion 2023 Sporter Shooting Champion Charles Bratton. (Applause)

**2023 Junior Shooting Sports Sporter Champion
Charles Bratton, Clover, South Carolina**

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. My name is Charlie Bratton, and I have the distinct pleasure of speaking to you this morning as the 2023 Sporter Champion of the American Legion Junior Shooting Sports program.

With this honor, comes some especially well-deserved expressions of gratitude to several groups and individuals. Firstly, I'd like to thank the most obvious groups and associations: The American Legion, the Sons of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary. Without these groups and their tireless members and volunteers, the Junior Shooting Sports Program, its annual championship, and the most generous college scholarship opportunities would not be accessible to me, those who came before me, or those who will follow hereafter.

Secondly, I'd like to thank the Civilian Marksmanship Program, Clover High School,

my Air Force JROTC Unit SC 951 and my instructors there, including my coach and personal mentor, Senior Master Sargent Clarence Woodham, and my teammates. Without them, I would not have stumbled upon the great sport of competitive shooting and the many lessons it has taught me, including discipline, perseverance and indispensable attention to detail and self-awareness.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my family, including my life coach and academic coach, Mrs. Theresa Courier, who, through the good times and the bad, the matches where I crushed records and won championships, and those where I, in the words of Sergeant Woodham, "Left some points out there," relentlessly supported me and drove hundreds of miles for me to shoot some holes in paper.

As I begin the next chapter of my life at Harvard University and the Air Force ROTC Detachment at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology tomorrow, I will carry these things in my heart and mind for as long as I live. The scholarship I've received will help me pursue my goal of bettering others' lives. I hope to accomplish this through neurosurgical care with purposeful attention to veterans as well as their families following my commission into the Air Force and successful completion of medical training. I believe it is the least I could do to thank them for their selfless sacrifices and dedication to our great country. Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: Our other junior shooting sports champion is a high school senior from Independence, West Virginia. He was sponsored by Post 174 and claimed the Precision title with an overall score of 2481.4. Please welcome our American Legion 2023 Precision Shooting Champion, Jacob Wisman. (Applause)

**2023 Junior Shooting Sports Precision Champion
Jacob Wisman, Independence, West Virginia**

Hi, my name is Jacob Wisman, and I'm a senior at East Fairmont High School. I'm from Independence, West Virginia. I am proud to stand here today and to state that I'm the 2023 American Legion 3-P Air Rifle Precision National Champion.

First, I would like to thank The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion and the Auxiliary for all the support that was given to myself as well as my competitors to compete in such a prestigious competition. To qualify and compete against the best of the best in the nation is a great honor. I'm so grateful for the opportunity that I was given to travel to Colorado Springs and compete with the best for the opportunity of the title and very generous scholarship offerings.

I believe this scholarship will aid me in achieving my goals, academically as well as athletically, as I would like to attend and compete in college, and this scholarship will certainly help with that goal by minimalizing the debt of such an endeavor. I plan on continuing my education in sports management at whichever university I choose to attend.

Finally, in addition to all of The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion in attendance here, I would like to thank American Legion Post 174 for the continued support they've shown our club, Mason Dixon Junior Rifle Club. Their support of not only myself but also the others in our club helped make opportunities like this possible for our athletes.

I appreciate the Legion, and I am happy to join the Sons of The American Legion myself. I am proud to be able to bring this championship home to the great state of West Virginia and to our local post. Again, thank you for all of these opportunities. I personally appreciate them all very much. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: Our next Youth Champion is the first Kentucky Boys State delegate to be elected president of Boys Nation. He was sponsored by Kentucky American Legion Post 9 and is a student at Owensboro High School. He has called for Congress to note the message of unity achieved by the teenage boys of his Boys Nation class. The 2023 Boys

Nation President, David Daniel. (Applause)

**2023 Boys Nation President
David Daniel, Owensboro, Kentucky**

My name is David Daniel, and on July 26, I became the first Boys Nation president from the state of Kentucky. It's a week that shapes a lifetime, but any of the alumni over the past 77 years would repeat that.

Boys Nation is one of the greatest programs this country has to offer to its young men, with the brightest two political minds from each state coming, not to recreate the government we have, but to forge the one we wish to see. It doesn't teach young men to play the game of politics, but to improve it, expand upon it, and rebuild it from the ground in the vision of our founding fathers because the future does not need politicians, it needs strength and innovation, and that is what Boys Nation creates. *(Applause)*

My vision was that, if 100 teenage boys can prove that in a week, that it shows everyone that a better government is not only imaginable but that it is on the horizon.

I'd like to extend a great level of thanks to The American Legion. Veterans affairs was a major topic of discussion in the program, and when asked about what we will do for the physical and mental health of our veterans, I said that you do not repair a building while it is falling. Our aid should not just be when it's most needed, but from the minute our soldiers depart and the second they get back home. *(Applause)*

I'd like to thank the Sons of The American Legion, American Legion Post 9 in Owensboro, Kentucky, and Director Dennis Floden from Kentucky Boys State. I'd like to thank my mother, my grandfather and most importantly, I'd like to thank my father, who is also here with us today.

Pretty soon I'll depart for adulthood, one of the scariest moments a parent can go through, but I know that he and The American Legion have prepared me to be the best man that I can be. Thank you. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: Our final Youth Champion hails from Indianapolis, Indiana. Her prepared oration titled, "The Black Hole of American Democracy: American Territories are Where Voting Rights Vanish," helped her earn first place in this year's National High School Oratorical Scholarship program. She was sponsored by American Legion Post 3 in Indiana. Please welcome your American Legion 2023 National Oratorical Contest winner, Haley Bock. (Applause)

**2023 National Oratorical Contest Champion
Haley Bock, Indianapolis, Indiana**

Good morning. Ten generations ago, our forefathers gave their lives to begin a new world. They drafted a document with the freedom of generations to come on their minds. Empires are saved and nations are preserved when men and women consider the lives that may follow them, not the flicker of life that is theirs, but the flames that will one day be a light in the darkness.

The American Legion Oratorical Contest is a picture of America seeking its own preservation by giving young men and women like me an opportunity, no matter the circumstances we were born into, an opportunity to stand up and step onto the stage that you all have set for us.

It's people like Rees Morgan, Ben Olsen, Pete Holts, Jerry Straub and Andy May from my post back home, Post 3, District 11, who earnestly give of their time and wisdom to raise up a generation that knows what it rose from. To teach those who came before them that if you long to make something of your life, think not of your own, but of the lives of those around you. And if you want to see your country's future change, invest in those who will build it up.

It's my Colorado family, Tom and Elaine Bock, my department commander, Wendy McGinnis, and former department and National Commander Butch Miller, who, through their dedication to seeing the next generation of America strong, patriotic and informed, serve. You all are a picture of America's family, because much like my own family, my mother and father, who are willing to give their time, comfort, and if necessary, their lives for me, you all give. Yet you do so without seeing the face of a loved one saved. A blood relation does not sway your dedication. You give, in the words of the American Legion Constitution, for God and country, for something greater than yourselves.

My generation is searching for truth. We are searching for a lasting meaning, for a larger purpose, and there is only one place where it is found, and that is in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The knowledge of what he's done for us and the knowledge of who we belong to. Sacrifice for freedom, sacrifice for liberty, sacrifice for the preservation of a people, those are American Legion principles, and they point in the direction of absolute truth.

Thank you all for your service, for carrying the burdens of our nation, for fighting for the freedom of our children, for standing on truth and giving us all hope. May God bless The American Legion, may God bless you all and may God bless America. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, your 2023 American Legion Youth Champions! (Applause)

Presentation of Spirit of Service Awards
Lieutenant Colonel Harold A. Fritz, USA (Ret.)
Sergeant Major Michael P. Barret, USMC (Ret.)

ANNOUNCER: Our next awards exemplify the best of military volunteerism. The American Legion Spirit of Service Awards are given to men and women on active duty for their contributions to their communities and fellow citizens above and beyond the call of duty. Assisting National Commander Troiola in presenting the awards are Medal of Honor Recipient and retired Lieutenant Colonel Harold A. Fritz and the 17th Sergeant Major of the U.S. Marine Corps Michael P. Barrett. Please rise as the commander leads us in rendering appropriate honors to retired Lieutenant Colonel Fritz. (Applause)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Hand Salute. Two.

ANNOUNCER: Our first Spirit of Service Award recipient is a leader and youth mentor at Springfield First Baptist Church and served as a third vice commander. He helped provide meals for families with newborn infants and coordinated a care-package programs for deployed servicemembers. Representing the United States Army, please welcome Spirit of Service Award recipient, Sergeant Christopher M. Irvine.

SERGEANT CHRISTOPHER IRVINE: First of all, I want to say thank you so much. Two words, wow and awesome.

First, I want to thank Father God, Lord, for giving me a spirit and a heart to serve. Second, I want to say thank you to my wife and my three boys. Because of their sacrifice and their support and their love, I can Be the One.

I want to say thank you to my Post 162 in Lorton, Virginia, for their guidance, their friendship, their leadership, and my team and my command at work. Because they are, I can Be the One.

Lastly, I want to thank you, The American Legion, ladies Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion because what you have done, what you do, and what you have yet to do. I can Be the One. Send me. Irvine out. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: Our next American Legion 2023 Spirit of Service Award recipient exemplifies the Navy's Core Value of Commitment. He has served as a volunteer firefighter and donated time with North Carolina's Adopt-a-Highway, Croatian Buck Fifty and the Parks and Recreation Department. Please welcome United States Navy Hospital Corpsman Justin D. Santoyo.

PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS JUSTIN SANTOYO: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. All right. Looking good. Representing the world's finest Navy as the Spirit of Service Award recipient this year is truly an honor. First, I'd like to thank God, and through Him, His mercy, and His grace have gotten me to where I am today.

I'd like to also thank my beautiful wife, who is in attendance today, for her continued support and for putting up with me and the crazy hours I work and volunteer.

To my church, to the sailors I lead and have led, and to my present and past Navy and Marine Corps leadership, thank you for your guidance, wisdom and continued support.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that a big contribution to this award was serving with Onslow County Fire Rescue, specifically Station 2 Bear Creek, where career and volunteer firefighters serve 12,000-plus citizens in over 30 square miles of Eastern North Carolina.

Finally, I'd like to thank The American Legion and the American Legionnaires for your support to the military community. Your continued service is a testament to your honor and the branch that you have served. Semper Fortis, Semper Fidelis, hit her hard from the yard. Thank you. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: This year's American Legion Marine Corps Spirit of Service recipient volunteered time fighting child hunger, providing comfort to the elderly in hospice homes, assisting local fitness initiatives and building unit cohesion on her base. She has volunteered more than 867 hours while at her current duty station. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Sergeant Nhatalyne Bordes, United States Marine Corps. (Applause)

SGT. NHATALYNE BORDES: Good morning, everyone! First, I want to say we all know the Marine Corps is the best branch obviously. Thank you, thank you.

I want to start with thanking The American Legion for this amazing opportunity. A lot of people don't know about this. I didn't know about this before I saw an ad about it, and my Lieutenant Colonel Ankram, even though he's not here today, he said that The American Legion is one of the best organizations to be a part of. So, thank you for this great opportunity. *(Applause)*

I thank God for everything he's done for me. He's definitely made me into the human I am today and given me all the qualities of compassion and respect, and everything that I've done has led me to where I am today because of Him.

I want to thank my family for giving me the wonderful foundation. Mom and Dad are sitting over there, happy as ever. I'm sure they're tired of all the ceremonies I take them to, but this is giving back to everything they've done for me from when I was a little girl all the way up to now. Made me into the woman I am today.

I thank my command who's also here today. They came over on the C-12. I was kind of scared about the weather, but everyone made it safely and on time. They've given me honor, courage, commitment, everything I needed to flourish into the marine I am today.

Semper Fi, everyone. Even if you're not a Marine, thank you for serving in the armed forces. We're all together. We're all a wonderful branch together. Thank you again. I hope you all have a wonderful day. I'll see everyone. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: Our next recipient has been active in the Coast Guard Enlisted Association, volunteered for the Alameda Food Bank, and has provided financial management and procurement services for over 60 Coast Guard units throughout California. He is also a lead planner for the annual Asian American and Pacific Islander

Heritage Month and is certified in suicide prevention through the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training program. Representing the U.S. Coast Guard, please welcome Petty Officer Third Class Ryan Knick. (Applause)

PETTY OFFICER 3RD CLASS RYAN KNICK: Good morning, everybody. Hi. Also, I made rank since then, so E5 now. That's good. The extra money does help out a little bit.

I'm not nearly as articulate as my fellow speakers, especially those young people. They made us really feel dumb up there. Pretty much, the big takeaways are thank you to my girlfriend, very supportive dealing with me. Thank you to my sister, also for longer, you know. Thank you for my mom, you know, I literally would not be here if she wasn't around. Thank you for that. Thank you for my dad, for after 39 years in the Navy, he made sure I didn't go Navy and went to the better nautical branch. I'm joking. I love you guys, yeah.

Thank you to the Base Alameda, my commander who submitted me for this award. I came back from leave, and he was like, hey, you won this. I was like, oh, I didn't even know I applied. He was like, yeah, I did it for you. Thank you for that, sir.

Thank you to the food bank who I do most of my volunteering at. I'm going back there next Wednesday. I have a standing commitment with them. Without them, I wouldn't be here as well.

Of course, the biggest thank you is for The American Legion. Without you guys, I would not be here because I don't make that much money to fly transcontinental. Ask my mom. I don't make enough money to come out here all the time. Thank you so much. You guys have a great day. God bless you. God bless America. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: Our next award winner was selected by the National Guard Bureau for his volunteer efforts, which include the co-founding of the Peech Ke Maaro Foundation in the nation of India. The foundation provided opportunities for 72 under-privileged and aspiring golfers to compete at the professional level. More than \$15,000 in donations were raised through the planning, advertising, soliciting and executing of the charity tournament. Please give a warm round of applause to Staff Sergeant Dhruva S. Poluru, U.S. Air National Guard. (Applause)

SSGT DHURVA S. POLURU: Good morning, everybody. So, like my counterparts over here, I also don't have a script. So, I'm going off the cuff.

First off, I want to say a big thank you to The American Legion and everyone here in Charlotte and the city of Charlotte for having us here. The hospitality has been amazing. I've only been here one day. Yeah, especially an award coming from an organization that preaches mutual helpfulness, this means more than I can actually express in words.

I also want to thank Chief Master Sergeant Steven Davies from my unit up in Rome, New York. All the mentoring, guiding, the shared love for the game of golf, and to spread that joy is what he had taught me. I also want to wish him a happy retirement in ten days. I also want to thank state leadership, Chief Stefik, Command Chief Williams, and SEA Whitehead for recognizing the guard's ability to make a bigger impact on our neighbors and our friends.

Last but not least, my family, my loved ones, and my friends for actually facilitating everything that I want to do and willingly be a part of it and helping me be a part of something bigger. For that, thank you so much. I can't say thank you enough. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: Our next Spirit of Service winner served 240 meals at a local homeless shelter and collected ten thousand pounds of food and supplies. He organized a charity race and raised 50,000 for a local playground. He also raised money for five national charities. Representing the United States Air Force, please welcome Staff Sergeant Joseph M. Allen. (Applause)

SSGT JOSEPH ALLEN: Good morning. I'd like to say a special good morning to Ohio in the back. You all ready? O-h. (*Chorus of "i-o"*).

Yeah, let's go. I am extremely humbled to be chosen for this award. It is an honor, and I'm deeply affected by it. I'm so happy there's an organization like this that helps veterans and servicemembers. I would not be here today if it weren't for my support network, who luckily, I have in the audience: my mother, my aunt and uncle and my wife. Thank you so much for all you've done for me.

Lastly, I would just like to thank The American Legion. The work you do, I wish I could thank each and every one of you for the wonderful work you do for our veteran community and our servicemembers. It really does deeply affect me with just how I see lives changed by your work, and I thank you so much for everything you do. Thank you. (*Applause*)

ANNOUNCER: Our final Spirit of Service Award recipient has organized eight fundraising events as Delta Booster Club president and led an elementary school supply drive, which benefited 170 underprivileged children. He also organized school shoe and pajama drives for local families in need. Representing the United States Space Force, please welcome Specialist Tyler J. Baker. (Applause)

SPC3 TYLER BAKER: Good morning, everyone. It's an honor to be here. I want to say thank you to The American Legion for having us here and for bringing us here for this prestigious award. It's an honor to be selected. I want to thank my family for being here as well as for making me who I am today. I would like to take this time to thank my leadership for all their guidance and support that they have given me through my short time here. And I thank The American Legion again. (*Applause*)

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, again please show your appreciation to the 2023 American Legion Spirit of Service Award winners.

... The delegation viewed a video.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: A Paid-Up-For Life member of American Legion Post 24 in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, our next speaker was awarded the Medal of Honor for his amazing bravery and valor as a platoon leader with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Binh Long Province, South Vietnam.

On January 11, 1969, his seven-vehicle armored column came under intense crossfire from an enemy ambush. After being seriously wounded, he leaped to the top of his burning vehicle and directed the positions of his men and their vehicles. Vastly outnumbered by the enemy, he assisted the wounded, directed fire, distributed ammunition and encouraged his men. Under fierce assault, he manned a machine gun and repelled his attackers. Moments later, a second enemy assault threatened his unit. Our guest, armed only with a pistol and bayonet, led a small group of his men on a daring charge, which routed the enemy and inflicted heavy casualties. Their actions forced the enemy to withdraw. Despite his serious wounds, he refused treatment until all of his comrades had been treated and evacuated.

The Illinois native remained in the Army until 1993, when he retired as a lieutenant colonel. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome a true American hero, Harold "Hal" Fritz.

**Address: Lieutenant Colonel Harold A. Fritz, USA (Ret.)
Medal of Honor Recipient**

Thank you very much. It's a great pleasure to be here today. Following the speech of my fellow Army veteran that spoke earlier, I do not have a PowerPoint presentation, nor do I play a guitar. (*Laughter*)

So, what you see is what you got. It truly is a pleasure to be here amongst this group of true American patriots, and I represent the 65 living recipients of the Medal of Honor. And if any of my brothers were here, they would tell you the following. We as Medal of Honor recipients do not wish to have the light shine upon us for our valor, but to reflect in our blue ribbons and our medals the valor, the sacrifice and the dedication of all those that have served and that are serving in the armed forces of the United States. We are merely the messengers carrying that message. The medal that I wear and the medals that my 64 fellow recipients wear belong to you. We are simply the carriers of the message, wearing that medal to highlight that message.

It's important for us as Americans to understand that young men and women, now under the volunteer concept of the services, step forward knowing that there are benefits but there are also inherent dangers. And yet they step forward in all the services to project, protect and preserve freedom for not only Americans but people throughout the world.

We have one of the greatest armed services of the world, and that force is manned by the best quality men and women, Americans that really care, the sons and daughters, the nieces and nephews, the grandchildren of ours. I'm so proud of them.

We talk about leadership, and we talk about the responsibilities of leadership and the honesty of leaders with their men. I think it best can be relayed by a simple story that I wish to share. There was a young man, we'll call him John, and John was very successful, so successful that he had acquired wealth, a beautiful home and people to assist him in managing his home. He had servants.

Inviting his mother over for dinner one evening, he wished to express his appreciation to her for everything she did to help him in mentoring him to reach the status that he had today. When the mother came to dinner, she recognized the beautiful home that John lived in, the beautiful dinner that they had. But she also noticed that the lady servant that was serving the dinner was young and rather attractive and seemed to lock gazes with John throughout the dinner.

John, noticing his mother's apprehension, simply stated, "Mom, I want you to know that my relationship with the housekeeper is truly professional and only professional." With that, they concluded the dinner, and Mom left. The housekeeper came to John later on and said, "John, I don't know what to say, but we're missing the silver ladle, the silver gravy ladle. And we're missing that since your mother was here last for dinner."

John said, "Well, I don't think it was my mother, but I'll write her a nice little note." So, John wrote a note that said, "Dear Mom, we enjoyed very much having you here for dinner. It was a wonderful experience. However, we're missing a silver gravy ladle. I'm not saying that you took the silver gravy ladle or you didn't take the silver gravy ladle. I'm only saying that, since you were here and left, it's been missing. Love, John."

The mother receives the letter, read the letter, and wrote back to John. "John, thank you for your wonderful letter. Thank you for a wonderful evening. Regarding the silver gravy ladle, I'm not saying that you're sleeping with your housekeeper or you're not sleeping with your housekeeper, but had she been sleeping in her own bed, you would have found the silver gravy ladle. Love, Mom." (*Laughter*)

I mention that, and some of you may have heard that before, but I want to emphasize the importance of leadership of being honest with your subordinates and really providing the leadership that's necessary for those men to follow you, to follow you not only in peacetime, but in combat. You've got to ensure as a leader that you will take care of your men besides executing the mission. You will ensure, and I've always told my people, I would never ask you to do something that I wouldn't do myself. If you're on the battlefield and you're wounded, I'll get you evacuated. If you're on the battlefield and you happen to fall victim and you're killed, I will ensure that your body gets back to your family.

With that, we went forward. As you heard in the tape, the men that I had were 17 to 20 years old. I was the oldest person. My medic on that particular trip was a young man who was 18-and-a-half, almost 19 years old, and this was his first combat.

To give you a little background on that particular mission, I was with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and it was commanded at the time by the son of World War II Patton. George Patton was the colonel that was in charge. He was a great commander.

But Alpha Troop's mission was to escort a vehicular convoy of logistical supplies from Lai Khe up to Quan Loi. And that consisted of 50 to 100 trucks carrying fuel for helicopters, diesel, gasoline, bullets, beans, uniforms. They made that trip once weekly. We had with Alpha Troop, as a reconnaissance troop, the 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, we had three platoons, and each platoon had eight vehicles apiece, and they were the armored cavalry assault vehicle configuration with two M60 side guns and a shielded .50 caliber for the commander.

We also had that day an experimental Vulcan, 20-millimeter mini gun that was being tested in Vietnam. I was the executive officer of Alpha Troop. The platoon leader that normally would be in that platoon had been evacuated due to combat injuries, as had been the platoon sergeant. The new CO came on board just about a week before the mission of escorting the convoy, so I indicated to him, as the executive officer, I was familiar with the route, familiar with the mission and I would fulfill responsibilities of platoon leader in this particular instance. It was really going to be kind of a gravy run because we hadn't had much action on highway 13, but unbeknownst to us, once we passed the site that was the site of the ambush, the North Vietnamese Army reinforced company moved in to ambush the truck convoy.

As we came, refueled at Quan Loi and started our downward trek, my mission was to logger or put the vehicles in the position as a reactionary force so that we could react in case the convoy was hit. The position that I chose was the killing zone of the North Vietnamese reinforced company. As we started to slow down or move off the road, they triggered the ambush. We had no choice because, if they wouldn't have triggered the ambush, they would have been discovered and we would have had heavy contact with them off the road.

We were on a very narrow road, and they had both positions on each side of the road. One was a defile position. In other words, they were down below the level of the road firing up. And the other side of the road, they were firing directly across. So, they had us in effective crossfire. They took out the two command vehicles. Initially, I thought they hit a mine, flipped me off the vehicle. I got back in the vehicle. Both my gunners had been killed. Vehicles were on fire. We had North Vietnamese Army regulars trying to breach us, running into our column. It was very chaotic. But the young troopers were up to the task. And even though we had 28 men, most of which were wounded, they fought, and they fought ferociously. We were able to, in fact, hold back the enemy, trying to get some help in.

When there was a tank platoon that Jimmy Caldwell had from the 2nd Squadron, it was attached to Alpha Troop in our forward support area, heard the call, that we managed to get out. They came thundering down the road. The vehicles stopped. They were 100, 150 yards south of us, trying to ascertain what the situation was, where we were, where they were, because we had North Vietnamese. It was the dry season, so there was a lot of dust on all of us. It was hard to tell from that distance who the good guys were and who the bad guys were. Keep in mind, we could not use our vehicle machine guns because some were on fire, but we couldn't deflect them low enough to hit the enemy that were in the trenches on both sides of the road. So, it was pretty much off the vehicles, on the ground, fighting the North Vietnamese regulars with about five of us out of 28 that were wounded and still could fight.

So, the only choice I had was to either wait and see what happened or run down to the lead vehicle to start getting them deployed. So, I chose to run down to the vehicle and get them deployed. As I did, the main vehicle, which was the front tank, turned its 90-millimeter cannon my direction. I don't know how many of you are familiar with armor, but an M48 A2C tank has a 90-millimeter main gun. When you're looking at the business end, it's about this big. He had no choice. He had to engage because there was a separate

position that I didn't know about that was going to engage that tank. It knocked me into the bushes, and I came back out.

We got the reinforcements in, and we got the enemy pushed back, and we got the evacuation in progress, and we did get everybody out of there. We got some good intelligence information. But during that battle, earlier it was mentioned fight or flight, and people say, what does that really mean? How do you equate to that? I say, it all happens in two seconds. Two seconds, when you're faced with a situation that's a very dangerous situation, you can either be involved in it and embrace it or turn your back and let the other guy take care of it.

We didn't turn our backs. We took care of it. I want to tell you in the case of John and his mother, if he would have been honest with her, there might have been a different outcome. In our case, it was an outcome that favored the success of the men of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. The North Vietnamese reinforced company was about 170, 175 men and equipment, and we had 28 and one Vulcan. It shows you the fighting spirit and dedication of the American fighting men and women. I say that today because we've got women involved in the combat roles.

So, what we need to do as Americans, as patriots, as veterans, as members of The American Legion, we need to keep promoting and protecting and preserving freedom not only for this generation, but future generations. We've got the team to do that. We just make sure that everybody's part of it.

It doesn't matter what your contribution is. And I applaud all those members of The American Legion that are in leadership positions, number one, because that takes a lot of responsibility and that's one helluva big challenge. And I applaud the membership for being an active member of The American Legion and doing all you can to promote those values that help promote a positive America for the future.

I try to get out, as a Medal of Honor recipient, to the mom-and-pop communities of the country. We have the opportunity in many cases like this one to be involved with major organizations, to go to some big dinners, but we also need to get out there and talk to the local people, the local organizations, so they understand how we as Medal of Honor recipients envision the direction we're going and to let them know that we're just ordinary Americans. I don't wear a Superman suit under this. My mother didn't have a Wonder Woman outfit on. They came from Chicago, blue collar family. Both their families, one came from Germany, emigrated, and one from Poland. They worked hard. My dad worked in a Kenosha plant to build Rambler cars. My mother worked with Motorola and as a waitress.

So, it's important for Americans to understand that we, that is, you and I, as dedicated Americans are part of that fiber that keeps this country so strong, and we want them to join that. I say this to anybody that says, well, what about the other guy? Ladies and gentlemen, when you get up in the morning, as you well probably know, and look in that mirror, you are the other guy, as are all Americans. We've got to work together.

The country's going through some turbulent times right now, and we've got a lot out there that are challenges that we face on a daily basis. I really don't think it's a Republican versus Democrat versus Libertarian, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. I think it's a crisis that faces all Americans that we've got to come together on this thing and resolve it so that we don't kick the can down the road for our grandchildren to be stuck with. That's literally what would happen if we don't do anything. I'm not saying that you're not doing anything. I say we need to continue to do what you're doing to support that effort to be a unified country, not a divided country.

You look at the military organizations and what we've done in military organizations in terms of diversity, opportunity, leadership, what role models, fantastic. I've got friends in all the services, and I've got friends that are active in services and are veterans in service, and I'm talking about all five of the services, including the new space command. Wonderful opportunities there and great teams that are doing a great job.

In the Medal of Honor Society, we're continuing to look at better ways of getting out into the community with our message. And we are now in 2023, and quite frankly, I'm at 79 years old, I find some of it very challenging. I don't know how many of you out there find some of the things challenging, but here's one of the things I find challenging.

My grandchildren come in and tell me, Grandpa, here's how you work the computer and here's how you do the Apple and work this app. I call somebody up with a problem and say, here's option 1, no. Option 2, no. Option 3, no. Option 4, no. Option 5, no. I'm sorry, that's all your options. Good-bye. I'd like to talk to a human. And when my grandchildren come in, sometimes they're worried that I don't understand things as quickly as they do.

We've got to bring ourselves up to speed. We've got to involve the older generation as part of the team with the newer generation. We're doing that right now with the Medal of Honor Society. Sixteen younger recipients are getting into the leadership roles. Our election comes up in November, and we will have new leadership.

Presently we've got one of the Afghanistan recipients, Leroy Petry, he's the president. Vice president Jim McLoughan, he's Vietnam, but his particular award was upgraded from a Silver Star. We've got some of the young people. Ryan Pitts is the treasurer. He's Afghanistan. We got some in the director roles.

I've got the 3rd District, but we're trying to infuse the younger guys into leadership roles. That's what the Legion is doing. The Legion is working to try to get the younger people, successfully getting the younger people into the leadership roles. You don't want to throw the old guys under the bus. You want to include them in your efforts because that's part of the growth, the positive growth that you'll experience.

I've had a very positive experience with veterans organizations, and I think they all react very well to the mission of looking at where the country is and where it needs to go and how to get there. I spoke with the Coast Guard yesterday, a small group. As Dale Punch said, yeah, you spoke to all two of them. Actually, it was a small group, what they're doing is this. They want to join other veterans' organizations in their efforts to move forward in terms of publicizing it and looking at supporting patriotism and a positive future for this country.

You know, if you take the veteran voice and you unify it, there's where your strength is. But sometimes up in Congress you see the elected officials looking at not diversity, but division between veterans organizations. Groups that can't seem to come together because one doesn't want to take credit for the efforts of another one. We've got to eliminate that feeling. We've got to eliminate that feeling that we are working divided. I think you've got the group here at the convention and the various states that are willing to do that, are working towards that. And the potential is there. I think it holds a great positive future for the country. It sends the right message to the upcoming younger generation and especially for the veterans that are leaving the services.

Years ago, the younger veterans said, if I join The American Legion or the VFW, all they send me is a monthly magazine, and I get that, and then I can go to the local post for bingo night, fried chicken night, or sit there and watch television, drink beer, and smoke cigarettes. Years ago. That was too competing for them. What you see today are the veterans organizations, including those in The American Legion, that embrace the communities, and those are your posts and your districts that are most successful.

So, I would challenge you to continue to go that direction because that does mean success. You're going to get the younger veteran involved because it's something that's offered to him that is something that he or she is looking for. We certainly want to support the veterans as The American Legion has in all our efforts with our elected officials in terms of providing the best health care and benefits for those that have, in fact, paid the price with their dedication to the various services.

So, to me, the mission is pretty simple. It's challenging but pretty simple. We can't stop. We've got to keep pushing. We've got to keep pushing for unification of the organizations, bringing the younger recipients on board, putting them in some of the

leadership roles, and showing that our organization is a viable, living, ever-changing organization that is there for the veteran, it is there for America, which The American Legion is. I'm proud to say that. *(Applause)*

I was once told by a more mature individual than myself, I won't say older because I'm 79, just a more mature individual than myself, about presentations. He said, here's my take on presentations, and I said, okay. Now, this may be a little risqué, so I don't want anyone to throw tomatoes at me or get up and walk out. He said this. When you give a presentation, give it from the heart, first of all. Second of all, compare it to a lovely woman's skirt. Long enough to cover the subject, but short enough to make it interesting. *(Laughter)*

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. It's my pleasure to be here. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Colonel Fritz, don't leave yet. I know that you are already a member of The American Legion, but I have a diamond lapel pin that I would like to give you. I know that I speak for this entire delegation in saying we are proud to serve with you in The American Legion. *(Applause)*

Our next guest was elected to the North Carolina General Assembly in 2002. He is serving his fourth term as the presiding officer of his state's House of Representatives. A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he earned a Juris Doctor degree at Oklahoma City University School of Law. As North Carolina's speaker of the House, he has been a staunch advocate for The American Legion World Series. His support has made a substantial difference toward enhancing a great program. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to present an American Legion 2023 Patriot Award to the Honorable Timothy K. Moore, speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives. *(Applause)*

**Presentation: The American Legion Patriot Award
Honorable Timothy K. Moore, Speaker, North Carolina House of Representatives**

Good morning. Thank you for this incredible award. It means a great deal. There are so many great things that I can say about The American Legion, but I've got to give a special shout-out to my North Carolina folks that I see over there. *(Cheering)*

You guys have been great hosts for all these other 49 states, aren't you? If they don't feed you well or anything, let me know, okay?

We are honored, in fact, to the command and organization of The American Legion, that you all chose to have your convention here in North Carolina. We really appreciate that. And we pride ourselves in our state as being the most military-friendly state in the nation. And that also includes our veterans. And we were pushing forward numerous agenda matters, numerous issues to try to continue to do that.

We know full well the service that those of you in this room and those that you represent from around the country have given to this great nation. As the saying goes freedom is not free, and it takes those willing to stand in the breach, willing to serve, willing to take that oath to do so. On behalf of the people of North Carolina, I thank each and every and every one of you.

The other thing I want to speak to is The American Legion world series. Shelby is very proud to be the home of that series. And I want you to know we do not take that for granted. Eddie Holbrook is here and I think Eddie and a couple other folks were sitting around and came up with this idea and realized the opportunity that we had to be a host state and a host city, in fact, for this World Series, to not only promote youth, to not only promote baseball, to not only promote sportsmanship, but also to promote what it means to have those American values.

And I think that's what makes The American Legion World Series so unique. The love of country, the spirit of service, patriotism, all those things coming together in one thing where we at the same time enjoy America's past time. On behalf of the people of North Carolina I want to, of course, thank you for the award, but more importantly thank you for

your service, thank you for your confidence and your trust in our state, and thanks for what you're doing around the country to help veterans and to help youth.

I can tell you that I have a son that went to Boys State. It meant a lot to him. As a matter of fact, he's in law school right now despite my best efforts to tell him to do something else. And I'm telling you, it is something, the work that you guys do, the efforts that you put in, there are young people today, there are children around this nation who are learning from that who are seeing that example and who will go on to be the leaders of tomorrow because of efforts and things that you guys are doing right now.

So, on behalf of everyone, thank you for that. Thanks for the honor. Again, I hope you have a great time here in North Carolina. Wish you all the best. God bless. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Ladies and gentlemen, we'd like you to hear the reason why we gave this award.

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion Patriot Award presented to the Honorable Timothy K. Moore for your dedication in promoting the values of The American Legion through your leadership and staunch advocacy as the speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives. You have been instrumental in acquiring state grants to enhance the hosting and visibility of The American Legion World Series in Shelby, North Carolina. The tourism traffic created by the premier event of the American Legion Baseball program provides substantial economic benefit to Cleveland County and the Tar Heel State. From 2018 to 2022, you obtained and delivered \$3.2 million of funding to upgrade safety netting, replace fences, add lights, purchase television exposure and host city welcoming events. Your support of the youth of America and the nation's largest veterans organization epitomizes The American Legion's ideals of public service. On behalf of the more than two million members of the American Legion Family, thank you for your patriotism and service to America. Presented this 29th day of August 2023 at the 104th National Convention.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Ladies and gentlemen, please turn your attention to the video monitors for a message from the president of the United States.

**Video Address: Honorable Joseph Biden
President of the United States**

Hello, American Legion. I'm in the White House right now but I wish I could be with you in person. You're the backbone of America, and we owe you. As a nation, we have many obligations. You've heard me say this many times, but we have only one true sacred obligation. That's to prepare and equip those we send into harm's way and care for them and their families when they return home or when they don't return home. As president, I'm keeping an obligation. I signed into law more than 25 bipartisan bills to get veterans the support they deserve, and that includes the PACT Act, one of the most significant laws in our nation's history, to help millions of veterans who were exposed to burn pits and toxins during their service.

My administration is also working in veterans homelessness and reduced veterans suicide. I thank the Legion for your work on these critical issues and so many others. Know that my administration is always going to have your back because you have the back of our veterans. God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Elected to represent North Carolina in the United States Senate in 2014, our next guest was re-elected in 2020. He is a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and also the Finance Committee, Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee. He lives with his wife, Susan, in Huntersville, North Carolina. Please welcome, the Honorable Senator Thom Tillis. *(Applause)*

**Welcome: Honorable Thom Tillis
United States Senate**

Good morning, everybody. Thank you for your past service and the service you're demonstrating by being here today. And a special welcome to the North Carolina delegation. Get loud just one more time. *(Cheers and applause)*

There you go. You all, thank you for being here. I'm now in my second term as U.S. senator, and I've been eight and a half years on Veterans Affairs' Committee. It's absolutely my favorite committee, because it's one of the few committees where Democrats and Republicans come together and recognize that we have a debt that we need to keep on making installments, but we're never going to fully repay it.

Your service and your work on behalf of veterans is saving lives and giving veterans hope. I hope you understand just how important that is to me. Now, what we have to do in Washington is make that job easier for you and easier for veterans who have the visible and invisible wounds of war, and they come back, and they get various treatments. I heard the speech earlier about 1-800 number where you can get digitized to death. How many buttons you've got to press before you hear a human voice. We hear about people in mental health crisis with no place to go. We have to recognize that the mental health crisis in America is even more so among our veterans, and we should move heaven and earth to do everything we can to help them. As long as I'm a member of the U.S. Senate that's what I'll be focused on.

I know you'll hear from Secretary McDonough shortly. I have a lot of confidence in him, and I've had confidence in every secretary since I've been in the U.S. Senate. Democrat and Republican administrations, the one thing that strikes me about the people at the Veterans Administration, they all want to do well. We just have to figure out how to get them to do better. For as long as I'm a U.S. senator that's going to be one of my top priorities. And before I go, I want to recognize my colleague, Speaker Moore.

Tim Moore was my judiciary chair when I was speaker of the House, and we started making a lot of progress on veterans. And what we want to do, and we will not stop until it's done, is to make it very clear to every veteran that North Carolina is the number one friendly veteran state. We passed a lot of legislation to do it, but we've got a lot more to go. And with your help and in your engagement and politics, and going to Washington and going to Raleigh, that's how we're going to produce the best results.

So, thank you all for being here, particularly thanks to everyone who traveled far to visit our beautiful city of Charlotte. God bless you. Learn a lot. And teach us all what more we can do for you, again, to make just another installment on a debt we'll never fully repay. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our next speaker has had a hugely successful Marine Corps career. He served eight months as a sniper in the Gulf War, completed two combat deployments in al Anbar Province and served as the NATO Regional Command Southwest Sergeant Major for Nimruz and Helmand Province, Afghanistan. In 2011, he was named the 17th Sergeant Major of the U.S. Marine Corps. He served in that position until his retirement from the Corps after 34 years in 2015.

If you have ever heard him speak before, you would understand that his genteel, mild-mannered spirit is one that could have only been developed at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, where he nurtured young Marine recruits, always with a tender hand. Fortunately for us, he brings the same passion and commitment to essential veterans' issues. He is "all-in" on our Be the One initiative to prevent veteran suicide. He co-authored the leadership anthology, "Breaching the Summit" with five other senior enlisted leaders from the different military branches. He is also a member of American Legion Post 18 in Bloomington, Indiana. Ladies and gentlemen, the 17th Sergeant Major of the United States Marine Corps, Micheal P. Barrett. *(Applause)*

**Address: Sergeant Major Michael P. Barrett, USMC (Ret.)
17th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps**

I need to do an acoustics check. Everybody ready. On the count of three say, hell, yeah! One, two, three. (*Chorus of "Hell, yeah!"*)

Washington, D.C. needs to hear you. One, two, three. (*Chorus of "Hell, yeah!"*)

Good morning. Thank you for that. You just regenerated my battery. So last night, I had an opportunity to have dinner with our Spirit of Service award recipients. And their back stories are exceptional. I hope you seek them out, share some time with them because you all offer, you provide decades upon decades of sage knowledge and experience that will serve them and then ultimately will serve you for the decades to come.

I'm who you get when everybody else who is important is busy. So, this is the third time I've been given the privilege to speak at The American Legion's National Convention. And every single opportunity to share time with my brothers and my sisters in arms is always a true blessing. So, commander and the leadership, always, gentlemen, thank you. So, we just did an acoustics check. So, you know the proper response to every question I'm about to ask you. Are you a proud veteran that has served our great country? (*Chorus of "Hell, yeah!"*)

Remember, D.C. needs to hear you. Would you do it all again? (*Chorus of "Hell, yeah!"*)

Yep, me too. My senses tell me that you will continue to defend our freedoms and our liberty. Am I right? (*Chorus of "Hell, yeah!"*)

2015, I took off the cloth of an active-duty United States Marine. But I assure you that the Eagle, Globe and Anchor is still tattooed on my soul. I'm just as gritty, and my mind and my body are still able to apply a proper ass kicking to anyone who is looking for one. (*Laughter*)

I know you, too, are ready to deliver an ass kickin' when required, am I right? (*Chorus of "Hell, yeah!"*)

We are still defenders of our Constitution, aren't we? (*Chorus of "Hell, yeah!"*)

Every single morning, I spring to my feet at 0430. I work out. I fight twice a week with my MMA group. I'm 60 years old and I'm still kicking 30- and 40-year-old guys' ass. I read. I think. I study and then I start my day. And that's all before 8:00 in the morning. This is my uncompromising basic daily routine. It is my mindset that has been applied over the last 43 years.

It's what was instilled in me by my recruiters, my drill instructors and my mentors along the way. I live by many axioms, but there are two that jump out to the forefront of me when it comes to being whole in mind and body and in spirit.

And the first one is, the nature of man is always the same. It's their habits that separate them. And the second one is rely not on the likelihood that the enemy is not coming, but on my readiness to receive them. I will not be caught ill prepared with a "deer in the headlights" stare. History reminds us that our military must be the most ready when and where our nation's leaders are least ready or prepared. Yep. (*Applause*)

You've seen it. You need not look very far. The past eight decades and the tens of thousands of attacks on our way of life and those of our global partners are the grim example. Over the past couple of years, I've read, I've watched, I've witnessed. I've been paying attention to the news stories and the events of the challenges of our largest military branches of service to make their recruitment missions. Recruiting across the services is and always will be a Herculean task. It's a task of the greatest magnitude.

And it doesn't matter which branch of the service it is. Recruiting is tough. It is the most demanding duty outside of combat that there is. And I can speak of firsthand knowledge. I was a recruiting station sergeant major in Cleveland, Ohio, during the Global War on Terror's wartime build-up from 2002 through 2004. I came from a fighting rifle battalion, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines. I went to Cleveland with 21 years of service. I brought my experience, my drive, my passion, my love of God, country and Corps. I brought that

to the streets and the families of Cleveland, Zanesville, Mentor, Parma Heights, Medina, Strongsville, Ohio, all the way down to Wheeling, West Virginia and all the way east over to Erie, Pennsylvania. Every day, every month was a knife fight in a phone booth to make mission. But we did it.

What's changed? I have my fact-based thoughts and my educated opinions, not for this stage, however, but buy me a whiskey later and I'll tell you to hold onto your fricken seats. When I was a Poolee, just like you were all Poolees, inductees at one time, back in 1980, we had Poolee functions every other Saturday with our recruiter. That was in preparation of getting us ready for the rigors of recruit training. You see, my recruiter, Gunnery Sergeant Ron Swann, he liked to eat crayons, too, just like me. (*Laughter*)

We liked the purple ones because they taste like grape. We had to take off our shoes when we wanted to count to 21. That's because I have six toes on one foot. But he said his office, his recruiting station, substation, in Niagara Falls, New York, was always packed. And we asked him why he did so many Poolee functions. And he said, well, it's to keep you guys ready to get you all prepared to go to recruit training. And I remember him talking to us. He goes, there's a secret to these functions. He goes, they're the three Fs. He said, it's got to be fun. It's got to be physical. It's got to be informative. The three Fs -- we don't spell well either. (*Laughter*)

But what was interesting is once a month, all the recruiters in the one big station that was in, the Army, Navy, the Marine Corps, Air Force, all of us, we would do a collective field meet, compete against one another. And you would do the typical things, running things, pull-ups, crunches, sit-ups, tug-of-war, play a football game, play a baseball game, something, made it fun, that was physical.

But the thing that struck me, and it didn't dawn on me until later on in my young Marine Corps life, the informative piece. After every Poolee function, we'd look, for those of you from New York, Upstate New York, Pine Avenue, Hyde Park and Niagara Falls, New York, there was always, over by the picnic area, the tables were already set up in a big giant square and they surrounded the barbecue pits. And over there working the pits was The American Legion, was the VFW, was the Marine Corps League. I believe it was the John Bobo Detachment in Niagara Falls. We'd go over there and eat hamburgers and hot dogs afterwards and get a drink out of the cooler. And then the 10 to 12 veteran service, military service organizations, gentlemen, women, would come over. And they would talk to us, and they would prepare us cognitively for the challenges we were about to embark on for the rest of our lives.

And in one of those Poolee functions, I met my girlfriend's grandfather. I had no idea who he was until he started talking. He went to Iwo Jima. He survived Iwo Jima. But when he got up to talk to us, he didn't talk about his exploits on Iwo Jima. He talked about the brotherhood and the fact that 35 years later, from 1945 to 1980, he was still in contact with every member that survived Iwo Jima. And he talked about it's a bond that will last forever. And that's what you're about to take on, and on their shoulders we stand today.

So, if you fast-forward 21 years from that moment in 1980, me as a young Poolee before going to boot camp, I'm now the sergeant major of recruiting station, Cleveland, Ohio, and I'm doing my turnover with the sergeant major that's about to retire. As he drove me around the 17,000 square miles of area of responsibility, showing me the 11 recruiting substations, the six permanent contact stations, the 315 high schools and the regular male non-prior service population for those who are 17 to 24 was 1.3 million, you never forget your mission: Now go make mission.

But I was focused on the things he did not tell me, like, for example, Cleveland was sixth out of eight stations in the district. If you had that kind of record and you played ball you'd be fired as a coach. And then I found out that Cleveland was 30th out of 56 stations nationally. That's not even 50 percent. And I thought to myself, as we were moving around, Gunnery Sergeant Ron Swann, when I was a Poolee, his office was always filled. Why was that?

I immediately, after taking the mantle, I went and visited all of our veteran service organizations, all of our military service organizations, all of our community influencers. And before my first year had ended, we were first in the district, and we were first in the nation. Now, this is not a coincidence. I did not do that. My recruiters are good, but it was those community influencers. It was the community involvement. It is you, the get-it-doners. After World War I, our veterans came home to a society that was unprepared for the care of our combat casualties. The wounded were lodged in poor houses, jail cells and asylums.

The American Legion took on a fight by creating legislation that provided compensation and built veterans hospitals. And that was the founding of today's Department of Veterans Affairs. After World War II, and you all know this, The American Legion created the GI Bill of Rights that changed the nation forever. Higher education, better jobs, the ability to move into the home of our dreams. These efforts created the middle class of America.

After Vietnam, The American Legion demanded Congress account for all POWs and fund research to study post-traumatic stress disorders and demanded the federal government to conduct studies on the effects of Agent Orange.

And today, "Be the One" mission. I don't call it a campaign, personally, because this is a mission. The "Be the One" mission is absolutely making a difference. I get not less than 12 to 15 pings a month. When critical issues face veterans and military families, America's must-not-fail issues, The American Legion doesn't sit back and admire the cluster****. You get at it. (*Applause*)

That's okay. You can clap to that. It's okay. People have heard that word before. Don't be offended. There's no delicate flowers in here. You don't sit around and admire the problem. You get at it. We still have a duty to ensure that our grand republic thrives. And the strength of our military is an imperative. We all have a unique set of skills and resources, a real and substantive connection to our communities. We are the community influencers. We are the problem solvers. We are the get-it-doners.

I recently learned about the Vet the Vote campaign. And the impressive results yielded in just the three- or four-month period. We were 130,000 election poll workers short across the United States. And a robust group of veterans filled over 65,000 vacancies in a three- to four-month period. What if the Legionnaire family aggressively applied their unique skill set to our nation's military recruiters, our military recruiting effort, like my recruiter did over 40 years ago.

I remember once reading in a book, you want a new idea, read an old book. Recruiting our next generation, like all of our wonderful spirit recipients earlier today, they're the future. What do you think we could, what we would achieve? I love my country. Serving her has been the greatest privilege that I've ever had.

The rest of the world wishes that they could have the less than one percent of those who wear our cloth. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, our guardians are in all six geographical, combat and commanders' areas of responsibility doing the heavy lifting for this nation. They are forward deployed, forward engaged, shaping, training, deterring aggression, supporting, assisting and enabling our partners and our own citizens. They're responding to every crisis, conflict and contingency around the world. They are doing it all, from the Pacific Rim and the South China Sea to the Baltic region to the Middle East to the Strait of Malacca, or along our own borders combatting human trafficking and the drug war, to providing relief efforts to those who have been affected by hurricanes, tornadoes and fires that have scorched our own backyard. They live hard. They train hard. They fight hard. And they provide a capability to contain a crisis, to fill a gap or to hold the line.

They don't know when or where or who they're going to have to fight or help next. But they have to be ready to leave tonight. And you know, like you, they intuitively know the joy and sense of purpose that only comes through great challenges and subordination to a calling greater than self. They know what it means to keep company with the finest

men and women in the world under the toughest conditions, and they are living their lives right and to the fullest. And that motivation that binds us is our respect for and our commitment to those who have chosen to put their lives before others.

And it's upon those young shoulders, freedom, liberty, America's ideals ultimately rests. I've said it before. I've sat and I have stood with presidents and other world leaders, members of Congress, cabinet secretaries, impressive in their own rights and accomplishments, don't get me wrong, but none have impressed me more than the young man or woman who subordinates needs for others, putting it all out there and leaving it out all on the battlefield. Also known as the less than one percent who are our warrior defenders.

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and found that life was service. I acted and behold service was joy. A must-not-fail mission for this nation is the physical strength of our military. Can this be our next get-it-done mission for our nation? I am done with my words. God bless you. Long may we endure. Always faithful. Let's bring somebody to the fuckin recruiter's office. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: You may have noticed in the back of the hall is a booth. It is an informational booth about The American Legion 1919 Society. I recommend you visit the booth during breaks when you get the chance. It will be here throughout the Convention. You can see why so many generous donors strongly believe that our Veterans & Children Foundation is a program worth supporting.

Nominated by President Biden, our next guest was confirmed by the Senate and sworn in as the 11th secretary of Veterans Affairs on February 9, 2021. He previously served as White House chief of staff for President Obama. During the confirmation hearings for his current position, he said, "There is no more sacred obligation nor noble undertaking than to uphold our promises to our veterans, whether they came home decades ago or days ago." His leadership and advocacy were important factors in the passage and enactment of the Sgt. First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act, which indeed enables VA and our country to uphold the promises made to veterans. Please give a warm welcome to the Honorable Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis R. McDonough. *(Applause)*

**Address: Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs**

Good morning, and thank you so much, Jim, for that kind introduction and for your unwavering leadership of The American Legion. I want to take a minute before we start to say a word about Idalia, that storm, which appears to be strengthening even more as it approaches the Gulf Coast and Florida. I just ask you to communicate with your fellow vets in Florida to please listen to our local authorities. Our team is working overtime to make sure that all of our vets in the Bay Pines facility are taken care of, moved to safer ground. And any of our vets who are worried about listening to local authorities and leaving, rest assured that your VA benefits will travel with you. We're working overtime to make sure that pharmacy contracting is available to you no matter where you are, that the Clinical Contact Center for urgent medical care is stood up and ready for you. So please communicate to our vets to take this looming storm very seriously.

We have no more important partner in our effort at VA than you and your team here at the Legion. Every single day, I see the real impact of your work, of your devotion to veterans and of your partnership with all of us at VA. Let me just acknowledge some of the many great partners at the Legion who are deserving of our gratitude. Chanin, your fantastic executive director. Dan, who is celebrating his 15th year as your national adjutant. The Legion's incredible service officers, who have been working tirelessly to support the influx of vets filing PACT Act claims; And, of course, all the Legionnaires, it's great to be here today and to see you gathered to undertake this really important work.

I just want to say real quickly about one of the other leaders on the stage here, Senator Thom Tillis, a fierce advocate for veterans. And as the senator from North Carolina also happens to be the senator of our fastest growing state for veterans. So, he is exactly the kind of fierce advocate that veterans here need and for whom he does so much.

Now, last year up in Milwaukee we talked about the promise our country makes to honor your service and sacrifice. I promised you that this year, 2023, would be a year of executing on some of our most important priorities. And together with the Legion, I'm proud to say that we're fighting and delivering for vets.

Since the president took office, and with the Legion's support, we've delivered more care and more benefits to more veterans than at any time in our nation's history. And look, all of that work adds up to the only statistic that matters. Veterans lives saved, or veterans' lives improved by the work we do together. So let me give you some quick updates on the work I promised when we got together last year.

First, we're fighting to end veterans' homelessness. I told you last year that our ambitious goal was to house, permanently house 38,000 homeless veterans. We've exceeded that, having permanently housed 40,401 veterans. *(Applause)*

We're doubling down on that goal this year. And halfway through the year we have data through June, we are on track again to exceed 38,000 homeless veterans permanently housed.

Second, we're fighting to prevent veteran suicide. At last year's convention, I discussed how the rollout of "988, Press 1," the brand-new national suicide prevention lifeline that connects vets quickly and directly to the vet crisis line. Since that launch, the hotline has fielded over one million calls, texts and messages, with an average time to answer of just under 10 seconds. Every second counts in a time of crisis, so vets are getting the help they need when they need it the most.

Third, we're fighting to get vets timely, I underscore timely, access to world-class care. In the past year, vets have had over 73 million outpatient visits at VA, and 37 million more outpatient appointments with community providers. Meanwhile, we've seen a staggering 3,000 percent increase in virtual home visits since 2020, nearly 28 million total such visits in that time, offering care that is more convenient to veterans, be that at VA, in the community or via telehealth, alongside focused process and technology changes that have led to improved average wait times at nearly 60 percent of our facilities.

Fourth, we're fighting to deliver for toxic-exposed vets. We recently marked the one-year anniversary of President Biden's historic toxic exposure law, the PACT Act. This can be the largest expansion of VA health-care benefits and direct benefits in decades.

In fact, since the PACT Act was signed last August, veterans and survivors have filed over two million claims. Over 950,000 of those claims have been filed for toxic exposure-related benefits under the PACT Act. Over four million veterans have received toxic exposure screenings. And VA has awarded \$2 billion in earned benefits to vets, their families, and importantly, to survivors for claims filed under the PACT Act. This new law that not would have been passed without The American Legion's support, has the potential to help deliver care and benefits to millions of toxic-exposed veterans and their survivors including many of you here today.

And that brings me to my fifth and final point. We're fighting to hire at an unprecedented rate. None of this happens, from ending veteran homelessness, to ending veteran suicide, to delivering toxic exposure benefits, none of it happens without growing the size of the VA workforce. So, this year of execution has also been a year of hiring, hiring faster and more competitively, while retaining the great workforce that we have. In fact, we're hiring at a record pace, having grown the VBA workforce by 18 percent, and the VHA workforce by five percent, the highest levels in the past two decades, in spite of nationwide labor and health-care shortages. Because people want to work for our nation's heroes. People want to work for you.

In short, this has been a year of execution, but the execution isn't because of me. It's because of you and it's because of the 450,000 VA employees in your communities, your

neighborhoods across the country who keep veterans at the heart of their care. People like my colleague Julie Patton. Julie, are you there?

JULIE PATTON: Good morning. I'm Julie Patton. I work for the VBA Winston-Salem Regional Office. I've been with the VA for 26 years. While I'm not a veteran myself, the mission is very personal to me.

My grandfather was a World War II veteran. He was badly wounded when his ship was hit by a Kamikaze. My uncle was a POW in the Korean War. These special men in my life never reached out to the VA for help when they were discharged. They lived with debilitating illnesses and injuries the rest of their lives.

It has been my mission during my career to reach and serve as many veterans as possible. I never forget that each and every claim application represents a person and their family, people like my grandfather and my uncle. And I'm so eternally grateful to work with our American Legion colleagues because I know how deeply you care for veterans, too.

So, we are leaning forward, working hard and processing claims in record numbers. The Winston-Salem Regional Office did more outreach last fiscal year than any other office in the country. Just four years ago only 25 percent of veterans in North Carolina were receiving VA benefits. That's up to 40 percent, and we are working each day to increase that percentage until every single veteran receives the benefits and care they earned and deserve.

One veteran here in North Carolina comes to mind. I'll call him Rich. Rich has one of the most unique stories. He served in the Navy, Navy Reserves, Air Force and the Air National Guard. Rich deployed to Southwest Asia seven times over the course of his 35-year career. Thirty-five years, seven deployments, two different branches, two different reserve components.

Rich was a member of air search and rescue units saving the lives of his fellow sailors and airmen. And while he was doing that for us, Rich was being exposed, like so many of his fellow servicemembers, to toxins. Rich remembers seeing the ground change colors as different toxins seeped across the topsoil from the burn pits nearby. Because of that toxic exposure, Rich developed sinus problems, including sinusitis, which is now a presumptive condition covered by the PACT Act. And while we all hope that Rich's health gets better with treatment, he's so grateful that his condition is now service connected.

For Rich, the retroactive and monthly toxic exposure benefits are a big step financially and a blessing. Even more than that, it's what this country owes Rich, what he has earned and what he deserves for courageously serving and sacrificing for this country for all of us. And when it comes to veterans like Rich, our commitment at VA is to fight for them, to fight for all of you. There are thousands of veterans out there just like Rich, and it means so much to serve them as well as they have served the rest of us.

Thank you so much for having me. And I'm going to pass it to my colleague, Jan. *(Applause)*

JAN PICKETT: Good morning, and may I say, wow, I cannot believe this assembly. I'm honored and humbled by this group of folks here. And I want to introduce myself. My name is Jan Pickett. I'm a nurse practitioner, and I work at the South Charlotte VA in the same-day access. I'm a retired Air Force veteran and have served most of my career right here in the 156th Air Medical Evacuation Squadron in Charlotte. My last two years in the Air Force Reserves was as the IMA workforce by 18 percent, a to the chief nurse at Sheppard Air Force Base.

I come from a legacy military family. My father, who passed when I was 25, was a retired Army master sergeant. My brother is a Navy veteran. And my husband is a retired state command chief for the North Carolina Air National Guard.

I've been in the medical profession for 40 years, and just joined the VA about a year ago. I have worked in many medical systems, and I am proud to say that the VA is hands down the very best place for veterans to receive medical care.

As a provider, I'm routinely amazed at the benefits and the breadth of services that we provide. The VA is constantly adding new benefits and services to our veterans. And I work in the same-day access clinic, Onslow Beach. My clinic is a full access walk-in clinic. And we service all veterans, all comers. We are able to provide urgent and immediate care for veterans, including lab work, medications, refills, imaging, referrals. And we also, upstairs, have a walk-in mental health facility.

We serve as a stopgap for veterans while they're waiting for an initial appointment with the veteran provider that will see them and be their primary care provider. And also, for veterans where providers are not available to see them as quickly as they need to. We also service our traveling vets, which may be coming into play soon with Idalia.

There's no medical system in this country that is better equipped and provides the same level of care for our veterans. And I'm so thankful and privileged to be serving my brother and sisters in arms to care for our veterans.

Let me tell you a little story about my brother Jim. My brother refused to get care at a VA medical system for years. He has several medical conditions that are fairly severe, and he was skeptical. He just wasn't sure because there was negative press, and back in the day there were issues with the VA system.

So, after much cajoling and the rising costs of medical care, he finally agreed to give the VA a chance. And I will say that he is so happy with his medical care here. He feels that he gets better care at the VA than he ever did in the community. Let me be clear, he received excellent care in the community. But he is no longer a skeptic, and I'm so proud that he chooses the VA, and I am proud of his service to our country.

The PACT Act has brought historic opportunities for the VA to reach out to veterans and those around the country, and based on this assembly, around the world, in fact, to communities big and small and to veterans like me, my husband, my brother and you. So, I would say that the PACT Act allows us to focus holistically on veteran care, helping veterans and their families deal with not only their toxic exposure issues but also other medical conditions that, frankly, come away in our life. So, many of these veterans are seeing the VA for the first time. And it gives us an opportunity to show that we care for them as people first, and we are there to help them any way we can.

To my fellow veterans in this audience, I want to thank you for serving our great country. I am proud to serve beside you in uniform for 24 years and to work with some of the best people I know, best providers in the VA system now. God bless you and God bless America. *(Applause)*

ELIZABETH WHITTINGTON: My name is Elizabeth Whittington. Caring for veterans is especially meaningful for me because both of my grandfathers served in World War II. And I have a close cousin who is serving on active duty in the Navy today. I am fortunate to interact with veterans as neighbors, friends and colleagues. I am so grateful to serve the best people. People I know and love, our country's veterans. It's an honor to give back to the men and women who have sacrificed for our safety and to serve them every bit as well as they have served us.

The PACT Act has helped veterans in my community receive much-needed VA health-care services. Too often we discover that veterans have other important needs such as stable housing and mental health care. Helping veterans with these basic needs allows them to focus more on what matters most so they are able to live healthier and happier lives.

My team works with veterans who are in need of home-based care or community nursing home services. Our goal is to meet veterans where they are and help them achieve what is most important to them. For many, that is being able to stay in their own home for as long as possible. For others, it's living in a setting with fellow veterans where they receive nursing services around the clock.

I vividly remember a Vietnam-era veteran, I'll call him Steve, that we were able to help. Steve wasn't enrolled in VA health care and had received a terminal diagnosis with only weeks left to live. His family called, devastated and fearful of what was to come. But

someone in the community told them to call our department because they knew we would help. We immediately connected Steve's family to the Eligibility and Enrollment Office to expedite his enrollment and connected them with a VA hospice provider so home hospice services could be ordered.

Meanwhile, other team members worked to set up home health-aide services to help his family care for Steve at home. His symptom-management needs later became too difficult to manage in the home setting, and Steve was able to transfer to Liberty Lane Hospice House at the Salisbury VA, where he received around-the-clock care by specially trained staff to ensure that his physical, emotional and spiritual needs were met. His family was cared for by the same team. This allowed his family to be present with their veteran and savor their final days together.

There are thousands of veterans out there like Steve, and it means so much to serve them as well as they have served the rest of us. Now, I'll hand the microphone back to Secretary McDonough.

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: Elizabeth, thank you so much. (*Applause*)

Now you see why I'm so excited to be a part of this team. They represent the very best workforce in the federal government. The most passionate, highest-performing public servants in the country, people who want to make a real difference in the lives of veterans. And I'm blessed to call each of them my colleagues. And you heard them. They each share the same deep devotion to serving veterans that characterizes all of VA's employees.

People like Mark Bilosz, who leads VA's Winston-Salem Regional Office that you heard about a minute ago. Julie said it, but it's worth saying again. Mark's team has done more outreach to veterans over the past year than any other office in the country. His intensive, data-driven approach has dramatically expanded the number of vets applying for benefits across this state. And his team will not rest until every single vet in North Carolina receives the benefits and care they have earned and so richly deserve.

The reason I come to this convention every year is to hold myself, and all of VA, accountable to you. So, if you hear that we're not living up to these highest ideals. The ideals exemplified here in North Carolina by Julie, Jan, Elizabeth and Mark; I want you to let me know. Chanin, your executive director in Washington, D.C. will surely let me know because America's vets deserve our very best, and we'll never settle for anything less.

So, with that, let me close with a final request. To each of you vets, I ask, please, apply for your toxic exposure benefits now. Right now. There is no deadline to apply for the PACT Act. It is here to stay. Let me say this again. You can sign up for VA benefits including the PACT Act at any time. And thanks to the PACT Act, many vets are now able to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits or establishing a service-connected disability.

Now I just want to say to all of you, if you're a post-9/11 vet who deployed to a combat zone you need to enroll directly in VA health care right now. There's a special enrollment period. If you left active duty before October 1, 2013, you have until September 30, this year, to apply. So, if that's you, if you discharged between September 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013, please get your application in. And if it's your buddy who discharged in that period, please tell them to get their application in.

Don't wait because VA is the best, most affordable health care in America for veterans. And this is a new chance to sign up. Even if you don't need care today, you might need it tomorrow, or the next day, or 30 years from now, like Jan's brother. All you have to do is enroll. Then you have access to VA care for the rest of your life. So, apply today. I promise, we will fight like hell to get you the care and the benefits that you deserve.

Now, listen, there are people out there who will try to convince veterans that you need to pay somebody to apply for your VA benefits. That's just not true. Do not pay anybody to file your initial claim with the VA. Working with us or working with the incredible team here at the Legion, it's free and it's easy to apply. In fact, we have a claims clinic at this conference. So please stop by and meet with VA claims representatives who will help you file a PACT Act claim and answer any of your questions.

And we need your help getting the word out. Please reach out to every vet you know. Reach out to your old Vietnam battle buddies with hypertension. Anyone who may have been exposed to Agent Orange. Reach out to every trooper you know who fought in Central Command over those 30 years of war, members of the 1st Division in Saudi Arabia in August of 1990 and one of the last divisions to leave Afghanistan over 30 years later. Can I get an "All the way" from the 82nd Airborne paratroopers in the audience. (*Chorus of "All the way!"*)

Or any of the brave soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who served in the many years between in those 30 years of war. We want you to file a claim. We want you to reach out to your brothers, your sisters, your parents, your neighbors, your sons, your daughters. Have every vet you know get a toxic exposure screening, file a toxic exposure claim and sign up for VA health care.

We need every single person in this room to help communicate with veterans and families and survivors to get the benefits that they've earned and so richly deserve. We just can't rest until we do. And with your help, with your help, we're going to keep our sacred promise to those who served and sacrificed to serve all veterans as well as they, as well as each of you, have served us.

God bless you all. God bless our nation's servicemembers, our veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. Thank you so much. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The woman who has led the American Legion Auxiliary for the last year is a passionate advocate for veterans. A member of Unit 200 in Boonville, Indiana, she is eligible for membership through the service of her Vietnam war veteran husband, American Legion Past National Commander Jim Koutz. She has worked as a legal assistant for Fox & Lutz, LLC, Attorneys, and has served in numerous offices at the unit, district, department and national level of the Auxiliary. She has a sharp mind and was an outstanding ambassador as she represented her organization with pride. Please give a warm welcome to the national president of the American Legion Auxiliary, Vickie Koutz. (*Applause*)

Greetings: Vickie Koutz, Indiana
National President, American Legion Auxiliary

Thank you. Commander Jim, can you believe a year has already gone by? And it seems like yesterday we were anxiously waiting to be installed in our respective offices. We've had a great year meeting so many of our Legion Family members and it has been such an honor serving with you this year, my new tall brother. (*Laughter*)

Thank you for your kindness during our travels and for sharing your aide, Gary, with me. You promoted "Be the One," which is so important, and I've talked about the POW/MIA awareness. Yesterday, I had the honor of presenting a former Marine from Team Long Road with my Public Spirit Award. He was one of three Marines who walked 3,665 miles across 12 states in six months' time bringing awareness to POWs and MIAs.

This team works with DPPA in returning remains to families. At the end of his speech, I presented him with a check from the ALA. And suddenly, a voice rang out from the audience, challenging all the departments to donate. After it was all said and done, \$18,512.50 was collected for Team Long Road. (*Applause*)

This was totally unexpected and a great surprise to both of us. And this is just a reminder of how generous our members are, and sometimes all it takes is just sharing your story. I want to thank all the Legion Family members in the departments that I visited this past year for your kindness, your hospitality, your generosity. I was treated like royalty everywhere I went.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize my own Department of Indiana for supporting me on my journey to becoming the national president. Soon, soon to be a past national

president. All these memories will last me a lifetime. But I promise that I will continue to honor our veterans every single day as every day should be Veterans Day.

Commander Jim, this year serving with you and Chris has truly been such an honor, and I do believe we have all shown that we are truly an American Legion Family. So, I wish for you a successful convention and I need to get back to mine. So, thank you all and God bless. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I have an encore presentation for you. You may have noticed in the back of this hall is a booth. It's an informational booth about The American Legion 1919 Society. I recommend you visit that booth during your breaks when you get a chance. It will be here throughout the convention. You'll see why so many generous donors strongly believe in our Veterans & Children Foundation. It's a program worth supporting which is an integral part of "Be the One."

The man who has led the Sons of The American Legion for the past 12 months is eligible through his grandfather's World War II service and the service of his Vietnam-era father. A journeyman sheet metal worker, he is a member of Leo F. Welch, Jr., Squadron 495 in Indianapolis and has served in offices at every level of the Sons of The American Legion. His wife is a longtime member of the American Legion Auxiliary and a registered nurse at Roudebush VA Hospital in Indianapolis. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the national commander of the Sons of The American Legion, Christopher Carlton. *(Applause)*

**Greetings: Christopher Carlton, Indiana
National Commander, Sons of The American Legion**

Thank you, thank you. Commander Troiola, national officers, past national commanders, distinguished guests and all the members of the nation's largest veterans service organization, The American Legion, good morning. Thank you for an opportunity to speak to you today. First, I'd like to thank you, thank you for your service to our nation and thank you for belonging to The American Legion and helping our veterans.

By a show of hands, does there happen to be any Legionnaires that are also Sons of The American Legion? Awesome. Thank you for being a member of the Sons of The American Legion and honoring your parents and grandparents.

Commander, if you notice anything different, I am still the national commander, but I thought I'd try a different color.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Nice cap.

SAL NATIONAL COMMANDER CARLTON: Thank you. I worked hard for that. The Sons of The American Legion have had a successful year this past year. You see, during COVID we lost over 21,000 members, but we are currently at over 102 percent in membership. *(Applause)*

Throughout this past year we not only met our goals and target dates, we passed the goals and did it before the target dates. As a matter of fact, we're at an all-time high of over 375,000 members. So not only did we lose them, we got them back and then we went on further and got more. *(Applause)*

We once again were the main contributors of the CWF, the Child Welfare Foundation, raising over \$424,000. Now this past year, commander, I decided to help you on your efforts to raise \$2 million for the VCF. We raised over 70,000 for VCF veterans, the Veterans & Children Foundation. *(Applause)*

But we would also like to make a donation of \$250,000 to VCF. The check's in the mail, though. *(Applause)*

That 250 will go towards this coming year. But besides our great strides in membership and our monetary contributions to the great programs of The American Legion, we have also volunteered our time. On our national level we have contributed 434,685 hours to Americanism. *(Applause)*

And 4,974,268 hours to community service and 849,928 hours to VA&R. And making that a grand total in dollar amount of \$121,826,225 in direct labor costs. *(Applause)*

I think we can all agree that the Sons of The American Legion adopt in letter in spirit all the great principles that The American Legion stands for and we do carry on for God and country. You can find that in our preamble to our constitution and bylaws, and I have heard the saying across the nation in my travels. If you need something done, call on a Son.

I was asked, when I became or was becoming national commander, somebody said, Chris, what do you want your legacy to be? And I said, I'm not quite sure I understand what you're asking. And they said, look at it this way. If you're driving down the road and you're looking in the rearview mirror, what are you going to see left behind you? And I said, well, you know, I don't need my name in the marquee lights. I don't need to reinvent the wheel. All I need to do is continue in pushing our programs, The American Legion programs, helping our veterans. I said, you see, I think the legacy I'm going to have is how I made people feel, encouraging them, inspiring them, leading, guiding, congratulating, making those friendships. And I think that we have been successful to do that.

On a personal note, I'd like to thank you, Commander Troiola. You have encouraged me. You've inspired me and you've made me feel included. I feel you truly believe in the American Legion Family, something that as a national organization we must take hold of and embrace. If we're going to carry on for our veterans and the families of our veterans and the children of this great nation, to keep this nation great, we must act as a family. I have said from an anonymous quote that a family doesn't have to be perfect, they just need to be united. I honestly feel that the American Legion Family is united.

And on a lighter side, I have to say what a pleasure it has been serving with you. I'm not sure if you know, but you've rubbed off on me a little bit, and I say that because I've tried the tongue sandwich and it does speak for itself. I've also found out that I can't eat rabbit stew because it kind of makes me jumpy. *(Laughter)*

I've enjoyed your company, your leadership, your mentorship and sense of humor. I look up to you not because I have to but because I want to. I'm proud to call you my commander, and even more proud to call you my friend. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Next, I would like to call the chairman of the American Legion Riders Advisory Committee, Mark Clark, to the podium so he can help lead the presentation of Legacy Scholarship Fund donations.

...National Vice Commander Hylton assumed the Chair.

Presentation: The American Legion Riders
Mark Clark, Chairman, American Legion Riders Advisory Committee

Good morning, everyone. National Commander Troiola, distinguished national officers, both past and present, our dedicated headquarters staff and fellow Legion Family members, I bring you greetings on behalf of The American Legion Riders.

I have the privilege and honor of serving in two positions this year, first as a department commander for my department, the great state of Missouri. So, give a shout-out to my department back there, and thank them for sharing me with all of you. It is a significant challenge to split that duty, but they are always there watching my back, and I just want to tell them how much I appreciate that. I also get the privilege to serve as the national chairman of the American Legion Riders, and that's something that I believe is a privilege, and I don't take that for granted. I also have the distinct honor of serving as the chief road captain for the national Legacy Run, which is the largest cross country motorcycle ride of its kind.

The national Legacy Run is the single largest media event that The American Legion holds all year, and we believe that we're a rolling billboard for The American Legion, and that we represent the best of us to all whom we come in contact with. The national Legacy

Run is much more than a once-a-year event. It serves as a catalyst for department Legacy Runs and fundraising activities that occur all across the nation all year long.

This year, we were privileged to have National Commander Troiola, National Vice Commander Harris, National Auxiliary President Vickie Koutz, and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Chris Carlton, together to kick off our event in Kokomo. Commanders Troiola, Harris and Carlton also rode with us and stayed with us on multiple days during the ride. And that's meaningful to our riders that our national leaders will take the time to be with us.

This year we celebrated our 30th anniversary as an American Legion program, and we did so by completing our historic mission to support the Legacy Scholarship Foundation. Since accepting this mission in 2006, the American Legion Riders have raised more than \$18 million to support this worthy cause and have postured the foundation to be financially stable for the foreseeable future.

Thanks to your generosity, we're making dreams come true and fulfilling the promise we made back in 2001 to never forget the children of the fallen and those who have come home carrying both the visible and invisible scars of war. None of this would have been possible without the entire American Legion Family, and for that I give you thanks.

The American Legion Riders are the only program under The American Legion that encompass the entire family, and we take a great deal of pride in representing all of us to everyone with whom we see. Contrary to the rumor mill, this is not the last Legacy Run. In fact, we're just getting started.

The Legacy Run is always reflected the fundraising priorities of our national leaders, and we're going to move smartly into the future carrying on that same tradition. It was never the legacy scholarship run; it was always the Legacy Run. Because it's about our legacy of service to others, our legacy of caring for our fellow veteran and their families, and our legacy of strengthening America through community service.

We're proud of this legacy and we will continue to build upon it for years to come. To begin our fourth decade of service to The American Legion and the broader veteran community, we will embark on a new and exciting mission to raise funds for the Veterans & Children Foundation. This foundation, commonly referred to as the foundation of hope, provides a variety of critical services to our fellow veterans and their families. It provides training for service officers who in turn connect veterans with the needed services and benefits they so rightly have earned. With the passage of the PACT Act there's never been a time when we need more trained and certified service officers. And The American Legion is rising to meet that challenge. And the American Legion Riders are going to assist in that effort.

This foundation also provides financial assistance to our fellow veterans with children in their homes when they're at their lowest point. I will tell you this, if there was ever a foundation that The American Legion had that encompassed the spirit of the "Be the One" initiative, it is this foundation of hope that we call the Veterans & Children Foundation.

My fellow riders have asked me, how do we explain this to our members, this change? The answer is a simple one. We need to support this foundation because it saves lives by providing veterans and children with the hope of a brighter future. If a foundation ever existed that met our motto of Veterans Strengthening America it's the Veterans & Children Foundation. And I'm going to ask you all to get behind this effort because I believe when the American Legion Riders put their name on something and put their effort behind it, that it has no chance but to succeed. We can make this happen, folks, and we can help grow this foundation. *(Applause)*

We can work with the folks that manage the foundation and make it represent today's environment. We can do all of those things. And I'm going to ask you to stick with us, to help us make this transition a successful one because once the Riders say that something can happen, it can happen. And I'm counting on you all to be part of that.

This year's Legacy Run was an awesome ride through some of the prettiest country we've ever ridden through. It traversed eight states and covered 1,100 miles starting at Post

6 in Kokomo, Indiana, and ending at the Hendrick Motorsports complex in Concord, North Carolina. And what a finish it was. We left Kokomo with 300 motorcycles and 343 souls on board lined up behind me for more than three and a half miles. Every day we averaged over 280 motorcycles and over 340 riders, and it was something to see.

I will tell you that if you have not watched the videos and seen the presentations that our media team has put together, please take the time to do that. It will make you proud. As we traversed the heart of America, we stopped at 10 American Legion posts and one VFW post, and we enjoyed the hospitality of our Legion Family and our community partners. We enjoyed riding legendary motorcycle roads and witnessed NASCAR's cathedrals of speed in Bristol and Charlotte. We ended this year's Legacy Run, on the run itself, when we left Concord, we had collected \$667,608.71. (*Applause*)

It was an amazing run. I would like to thank everyone who supported us this year and all those that rode with us. It was a privilege to ride with you, and I look forward to seeing you all on next year's run.

I would also like to thank my wife, Linda, she's in here somewhere. For 44 years she has been my champion. And this run and planning this run and leading this run demands an inordinate amount of my time. And she's always been a supporter of that. So, baby, wherever you are at in here, I appreciate you. I appreciate you sharing me with all of my family and friends here. (*Applause*)

We'll now show a short video with highlights of this year's Legacy Run. And then we'll accept donations from the departments who wish to present their donations to National Commander Troiola. ... *The delegation viewed a video.* (*Applause*)

Additional Donations to the Legacy Fund

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (KY): American Legion Riders Department of Kentucky contributes \$1,500.

DELEGATE SWEET (MS): Steve Sweet, Department of Mississippi. I guess I was supposed to speak for the Riders. They gave me a speech. We have raised an additional \$7,235.

DELEGATE MEYSEMBOURG (TX): I'm Mark Meysembourg, on behalf of the American Legion Family of the Department of Texas, we donated \$36,510.

DELEGATE BARKER (IA): Cliff Barker, Department of Iowa. Chairman Clark with me, the individuals who believe in the true spirit of what the ALR represents. In particular, thank you to Department Commander Randy Johnson. On behalf of and with great honor, Department of Iowa brings \$17,378.

DELEGATE PHILLIPS (AR): Good morning. I'm Doc Phillips. I'm proud to be here as a member of the Department of Arkansas American Legion Family. We are proud to donate this year to The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, \$5,800.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (VA): On behalf of the Department of Virginia, I'm proud to present a check for \$121,000.

DELEGATE CULVER (TN): Lanny Culver, commander of the Department of Tennessee. We had our second annual Legacy Ride this year, and we raised \$41,120.

DELEGATE CARSON (FR): Jeff Carson, commander China Post 1, the only post operating in exile since 1948. On behalf of China Post 1 and our Dragon Riders, we present a check for \$1,000.

DELEGATE PISA (AK): The Alaskan Riders where the summers are short, the winters are really long and the potholes are deep. Today we donate \$6,500. In addition, with our other donations, brings our total to \$12,500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OK): On behalf of the Department of Oklahoma, \$12,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): On behalf of the American Legion Family and the Department of France American Legion Riders, we donate \$770.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): On behalf of the great state of Arizona and our incoming commander and the Legion Riders, we donate \$30,000.

DELEGATE WALLACE (MI): Home of past rider, Past National Commander Tom Cadmus and current rider, Past National Commander Robert Spanogle, I'd like to introduce our department director of Legion Riders, Jim Austin, Chapter 478, and I'm Jim Wallace, Chapter 419, charter rider. With the help of Grand Rapids Boat and Canoe Post 4 for hosting and spearheading the Michigan Legacy Run and also honoring Garden City Post 396, who founded the first American Legion Riders chapter 30 years ago. Our Convention Chairman Marilyn Britten will give the donation to the foundation.

DELEGATE BRITTEN (MI): We are happy to present \$83,913.43.

DELEGATE STUVENGEN (WI): Karl Stuvengen, commander Department of Wisconsin, along with two of my Riders, Department Vice Commander Jim Johnson and Past Department Commander Ken Ratish, today Wisconsin brings \$12,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MO): On behalf of the American Legion Riders Department of Missouri and the entire Legion Family of the Department of Missouri, we have a donation of \$67,377.78.

DELEGATE SMITH (CA): Mike Smith, state director for the state of California. I have with me Past Department Commander Jere Romano. On behalf of 2,000 American Legion Riders from the Department of California, which encompasses the entire American Legion Family, we're donating \$67,503.18.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): On behalf of the Department of New Jersey, we donate \$2,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): On behalf of the Department of New Jersey American Legion Riders and the entire American Legion Family, we donate an additional \$3,512.

DELEGATE EVERMAN (IN): My name is Jeff Everman. I'm the director of the Department of Indiana American Legion Riders. This past July 15 we had our first ever in-state Legacy Run. I have up here with us Chris Carlton, immediate past commander of the SAL and Department Commander Bob Oeth, along with several other members of the American Legion Family. Chairman, it is my honor to present to you commemorative T-shirts from our event for you, your wife, and Commander Troiola, as well as our check for \$83,474.72.

DELEGATE RIDDELL (HI): Fran Riddell from the Department of Hawaii. As a Legion Rider and on behalf of our 18 Legion Riders from Chapter 17, I present a check for \$1,000.

DELEGATE JARVIS (SC): Jim Jarvis from the Department of South Carolina and the 25 best chapters in the country. We have a donation for \$78,579. *(Applause)*

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NH): From the "Live Free or Die" state of New Hampshire, we donate \$2,100.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (DE): From the Department of Delaware and the Legion Riders, total donation of \$9,830.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (KS): Department of Kansas American Legion Family proudly donates \$29,913.75.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (CO): From the American Legion Riders, Legion posts, Auxiliary units, and Sons of The American Legion squadrons from Colorado, we have \$33,796.

DELEGATE LAVELLE (PA): Steve Lavelle, commander, Department of Pennsylvania. With me I have NECman Mike Stelacio, Alternate NECman Mike Murphy, and Adjutant Woody Hogan. We have an additional \$1,250.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FL): From the Department of Florida, Post 69, an additional \$1,000.

DELEGATE LAND (NC): Good afternoon. Rick Land from the Department of North Carolina, Legion director. Commander, thank you for allowing me to represent these 47 chapters in North Carolina and the 1,100 members. We have a check for \$36,417.45.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NC): And from the Department of North Carolina, we will be happy to repatriate Air Force Lieutenant Fred Hall, killed in action Vietnam, F-4 pilot, on the 10th of October, in just a couple of months. We're still riding, and we're still serving.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NC): And that final stop of the ride at Hendrick Motorsports, we had a commemorative T-shirt made. They sold out so quickly, Commander Troiola did not get one, so I brought one for him today.

DELEGATE BUSKE (IL): Delmar Buske, commander, Department of Illinois. We've got Joe Lampert, senior vice commander, with me today. Donations made on the ride and here today total \$16,856.

DELEGATE RUE (OH): Jason Rue, department commander. With me is Steve Masowick, NEC, from the Department of Ohio. Today our Legacy Ride, we donated \$40,500, and our Legion charities donated \$10,000 today. Thank you.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN RILEY (NY): Dave Riley, delegate chairman from the great state of New York, also known as the "Empire State." With us is Department Commander Timothy Collmer, our Department Adjutant James Casey, and today we're donating \$500.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NM): On behalf of the "Land of Enchantment," Department of New Mexico, combined donations on behalf of all of our posts, squadrons, units, and posts, Riders Chapters, \$23,371.

DELEGATE LENNON (CT): Rich Lennon and Dennis Beauregard from the Department of Connecticut. On behalf of our department Legion Riders, \$1,250.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN FERNLUND (MN): Tom Fernlund, delegate chair from the Department of Minnesota, home of Past National Commander Dan Ludwig. With me is NEC Bill Barbknecht, Alternate NEC Peggy Moon, and new Department Commander Paul Hassing. We have our Riders director from the last two years, Ted Berg, and our Auxiliary President Mary Kuperus, along with the new President Sharon Cross. To read our total is our Legacy Run director and the new department Riders director, Dr. Jody Hassing.

DELEGATE HASSING (MN): On behalf of the state of Minnesota American Legion Family, the Department of Minnesota donates \$162,000. Since the inception of the Legacy Run, Minnesota has donated over \$1.6 million.

DELEGATE HEREDIA (MD): Good afternoon. I'm David Heredia, Jr., and I'm this man's right here assistant chief road captain for the Legacy Run. This year I have a check to present on behalf of my family for \$500. Also, along the ride, this 6'5" gray haired gentleman, who I will not name, gave me a check for \$500. Thank you, Commander Troiola, for that great check. Did it anyway. Thank you, Commander Troiola, for that check for the Legacy Fund. Thank you very much.

DELEGATE HOLCOMBE (MD): Good morning. Ronald Holcombe, past department commander for the state of Maryland. With me is Ruth Higgins, present department commander, and Senior Vice Dave Heredia. On behalf of Department of Maryland, and I want to say this, our Past National Commanders Eaton, Bacon, and Santos. I want to say on behalf of the Department of Maryland, the Legacy Run, the Gold Star Legacy Run, they have collected a total of \$214,500. Outstanding. Outstanding.

DELEGATE WARTHEN (MD): My name is Eric Warthen, senior department vice commander for the Department of Maryland, northern central region. On behalf of the northern central region, we'd like to add \$600, making our grand total \$215,100.

CHAIRMAN CLARK: Folks, we'll see you on next year's Legacy Run. Help us launch into this new mission and be successful. God bless everybody.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HYLTON: Our next guest is a former lieutenant in the United States Navy. She has led large scale marketing transformations in major organizations in the consumer products and health-care sector. She holds a bachelor's degree from Harvard University and an MBA from Duke University. She is currently the

chief marketing officer for Centene Corporation, an organization committed to quality health care accessible to all. By a recent email vote, the National Executive Committee authorized the Legion to enter an exciting agreement with Centene that we are about to hear about. It is my honor to introduce Suzy DePrizio.

...Commander Troiola resumed the Chair.

**Announcement: Suzy DePrizio, Chief Marketing Officer
Centene Corporation**

Thank you for such a lovely introduction. It's so wonderful to be here today with so many fellow veterans. I've been out of the service longer than I was in, so I don't get that many opportunities to spend time with my military family.

As mentioned, I'm the chief marketing officer for Centene, the nation's leading provider of Medicaid and other government-sponsored health care. Our purpose is to transform the health of the local communities we serve, one person at a time. At Centene, we are honored to help nearly three million military families and veterans access high-quality and affordable health-care services that are designed with the military and their families in mind, like our Wellcare Patriot Plan for aged 65+ Medicare-eligible veterans and our support of TRICARE beneficiaries through our subsidiary, Health Net Federal Services.

Centene also employs more than 2,000 veterans, was recently recognized as a Best of the Best Top Veteran-Friendly Company by U.S. Veterans Magazine for the fourth consecutive year and was named a Military Times 2022 Best for Vets Employer for our efforts to recruit, retain and support current and former servicemembers, military spouses and caregivers.

With such a strong focus on recruiting veterans, and a purpose-driven culture of service, it's no surprise that I wound up at Centene, although I could not have foreseen this when my career path started more than 30 years ago. Like many of you, military service runs in my family. My father served in the Air Force, my older brother in the Navy Reserves, my younger brother in the Air National Guard, and two of my five sisters on active duty in the Army. Also, no doubt like many of you, I was motivated to serve not only by a sense of duty and service that my family instilled in me, but also by the opportunity the military afforded to further my education. A scholarship through Navy ROTC allowed me to attend my dream college and further not only my formal education but started me on a lifelong path of learning about leadership, camaraderie, discipline, resilience.

Once I graduated from college, the Navy opened up the world for me. Before I received my commission, I had never been outside of the U.S. Then, in nine years on active duty, I had assignments that spanned four continents. I completed two UNITAS deployments circumnavigating South America, where I got to see every major port city. But before that, as a brand-new ensign, fresh out of college, I landed at Narita Airport in Tokyo, headed to my first assignment as the officer in charge of a personnel detachment in Atsugi, Japan.

Standing at baggage claim in my sweats, my hair up in a ponytail, looking, let's face it, a bit rough after 13 hours in coach on a commercial flight. After about 20 minutes, a gentleman approached me and said, "Are you Ensign Fehskens?" Fehskens is my maiden name. "Yes, yes I am." "Oh, I'm Senior Chief Gimutao. I'm so sorry. I've been searching the crowd for the past 20 minutes. I saw you, but I just thought you looked too young to be our new ensign."

So not quite the illustrious start to my first assignment that I had imagined. In hindsight, now with 30 more years of experience, I can only imagine how young and how green I must have looked. And I can only say, "Thank you, Senior Chief Gimutao." The countless junior officers that poor man had to train over the years. I like to think that I was one of the better ones.

As the officer in charge, I was accountable for making decisions, and I recognized the importance of leading decisively and confidently. But I also recognized that I needed to approach my role with humility and a willingness to learn from my team, especially my senior enlisted advisers. I had to be comfortable asking questions, admitting what I didn't know and asking for help. And I was so fortunate because my senior enlisted advisers were incredible teachers and mentors who never failed to step up when help was asked.

This idea of creating space so that it's okay to ask for help and being ready to offer help when asked is why I'm so excited to be here today to announce Centene's new partnership with The American Legion and that Centene will be a key sponsor of the Legion's "Be the One" campaign aimed at reducing the rate of veteran suicide.

Our two organizations each have a deep commitment to improving access to mental health-care services for our veterans. This mutual focus makes us the right partners to shine a spotlight on this critical need, and I couldn't be prouder and more excited about the opportunity to combine forces in support of this important initiative.

If you attended yesterday's Be the One Symposium, then you heard that it's estimated that between 17 and 22 veterans or servicemembers take their lives each day. That's more than 6,000 annually. The rate of suicide for veterans is more than 50 percent higher than that of non-veteran adults. The Be the One campaign focuses on destigmatizing asking for mental health support, providing peer-to-peer support and resources in local communities, and deploying FDA-approved therapeutics to help veterans to identify mental health issues and find resources for support. Through our partnership, Centene will work with The American Legion to drive awareness of Be the One at targeted events and promotions around the country.

As both a veteran and a military spouse, I'm also married to a Navy submariner who served for 21 years, I have seen and experienced firsthand the stress of military life. And, like many of you, I lost a teammate and friend to suicide. That's why I'm so proud to represent Centene here today to announce this partnership and our support of the Be the One campaign.

And that's why I'm drawing on what I learned from Senior Chief Gimutao all those years ago about creating space so that it's okay to ask for help and being ready to offer help when asked. It's why I'm personally committed to Be the One to destigmatize talking about mental health and make it as okay to talk about mental health as it is to talk about physical health. To Be the One to ask the veterans in my life how they're doing, to Be the One to listen when a veteran needs to talk, to Be the One to reach out when I see a veteran struggling. As National American Legion Riders Chairman Mark Clark said recently, "We can save a life if we take the time to do so. Be the One is more than a slogan. It's a commitment that our organization has made. Now's the time for us to act, because each one of us can be the one."

Are you ready to Be the One? Will you show your commitment now by getting out of your seat and standing with me. Thank you so much for your attention this afternoon. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I believe we broke a record in the Legacy Scholarship Fund. The total amount as of right now is \$1,545,531.12. Thank you so much.

Our Distinguished Service Medal is The American Legion's highest award. This year it is going to an organization that is a longtime friend of The American Legion. They have been our allies and legal representatives in cases that have been heard all the way up to the Supreme Court. President John Adams once said, "A Constitution of government, once changed from freedom, can never be restored." The brilliant legal minds that we are honoring today defend the ability of Americans to live according to one's beliefs, no matter one's faith, ideology, or background, because the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is not conditional.

From defending a high school football coach's right to pray on the field to winning the landmark Supreme Court case, *The American Legion versus the American Humanist*

Association, the First Liberty Institute has been valiantly fighting in the legal trenches to preserve the intent and true meaning of the First Amendment. As they defended the use of the Cross and other symbols on veterans' memorials, they reminded us that the framers of the Constitution believed in protecting religious beliefs, not cancelling or removing them.

Accepting the award for First Liberty Institute is its executive vice president and chief operating officer. He is a former fighter pilot and retired U.S. Air Force colonel. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal to First Liberty Institute and its vice president, David Holmes.

**Presentation: The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal
Colonel David Holmes, USAF (Ret.)
Executive Vice President and COO, First Liberty Institute**

Good morning. It's a pleasure to be here and accept on behalf of all our employees and our CEO Kelly Shackelford this award. It's with a humble heart that we accept it.

As mentioned, I was a 21-year veteran in the Air Force, Aim High, and a fighter pilot, and I know full well the value of The American Legion. You help protect some of the most precious attributes of our country, and it's most appreciated. Thank you very, very much.

We at First Liberty for 20 years have been standing alongside the Legion as we've tried to protect these rights, starting 20 years ago in Mt. Soledad overlooking San Diego Bay, all the way to just up the road at Bladensburg, Maryland, where we won a monumental case with the United States Supreme Court. So, it's with enormous gratitude we accept this award. I thank you very much from the bottom of our heart. Look forward to working with you in the future.

On behalf of all the folks at First Liberty Institute, I'd also like to say, as I look at this, the list of people who have received this award in the past, presidents and flag officers, and my combat call sign was Dallas with a secondary call sign of Cowboy. So, I was really tickled to see that the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders had received this award in the past. So that's quite an alliance to be proud of as well. Thank you again very much. God bless all of you. God bless our troops, and God bless America. *(Applause)*

... *The delegation viewed a video.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Serving his second term as governor of this great state, our next guest was born and raised in Nash County, where he attended public schools and worked on the family farm before earning undergraduate and law degrees at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He previously served in the state House, the state Senate, and four terms as North Carolina Attorney General. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the governor of North Carolina, the Honorable Roy Cooper.

**Welcome: Honorable Roy Cooper
Governor of the State of North Carolina**

Thank you so much, Commander Troiola. Once again, once again, The American Legion chooses to come to Charlotte, North Carolina, for the third time in the last 20 years or so. Now, I know there's some disagreement out there, but we believe that North Carolina is the most military friendly state in the country. With all of our military bases, our tens of thousands of active military and their families, and many of you have served here, along with our almost 800,000 veterans.

I'm deeply grateful for your courage and your service to our country, and I'll talk about that in one minute. But another reason that I am so grateful to this organization is that, when I was a junior in high school, I was selected to attend American Legion-sponsored Tar Heel Boys State. It was there where I learned a real appreciation for our great country's representative form of government, how local and state government interact, how the process works to make important decisions, how to run for office and how to help others

to do so, how to debate issues, how the process has checks and balances, and how elected officials ultimately answer to the people.

I learned there, I think, for what you meant me to learn. I learned there what I believe today that our republic, our representative democracy, though imperfect it may be, is the most effective form of government in the history of the world. (*Applause*)

That it is worth preserving and that it is worth improving, that we know that it is strong, but we also recognize and remember that it can be fragile. At Boys State I met professors and counselors and Legionnaires who cared deeply about young people and their future in North Carolina and this country. I'm grateful for my time at Boys State, and it's one of the reasons why I'm standing here as governor of North Carolina. I'm grateful for the many works that The American Legion does in our community, and I'm grateful for the World Series in Shelby, North Carolina. (*Applause*)

Which we really love. Now, I was a pretty good high school football and basketball player, but I went into a batting slump in the eighth grade and never pulled out. So, baseball is not my forte even though I love the game and I love that you guys continue to host baseball all across the country for young people.

And just like The American Legion, our state is constantly advocating and supporting our active military and their families along with the more than 800,000 veterans who are here in North Carolina, 35,000 of which, by the way, are Legionnaires at 291 American Legion posts. We're continuing to work hard for our veterans and our active military.

Our military childcare in your Neighborhood-PLUS program helps eligible military families get quality childcare and their spouses. I was at Seymour Johnson just a few months ago touting this program and providing help for people who do need childcare, our active military. Our Veterans Medallion program, our military retirement income tax exemption in North Carolina, our scholarships for children of wartime vets, helping veterans get the disability compensation they deserve, the transition services from military to civilian life. Our expansion of Medicaid that's going to help many veterans, our work to fight homelessness, addiction, and mental illnesses that affect many of our veterans who have been hit hard.

And we've continued to push the federal government for resources for our veterans and are very pleased that all of us together helped to push through the PACT Act to provide needed and just compensation for our veterans. Those are just a few of the things that we have done, and I have continued to work to put veterans at the forefront. I just want to tell you a few of the proclamations that I have issued. North Carolina Military Appreciation Month, Vietnam Veterans Day, Korean War Veterans Day, Month of the Military Child, Military Spouse Appreciation Day, National Veteran and Military Families Month, Employ a Veteran Week, North Carolina: A Veteran Friendly State proclamation, Blue Star Welcome Week, to name a few.

And why do I do that? Because it's important that we be constantly reminded of what our veterans have done for us and for me personally. Let me say this from the heart. I thank you for your sacrifice, your courage, and your service. I thank you that you have allowed me to live in a free and safe and secure country.

Because of you, because of you, I can go where I want, do what I want, and say what I want. Because of you, I can run for office. Because of you, I can live in the greatest country in the world. And because of you, I am free. I will forever be deeply grateful for all of you and your sacrifice. Welcome to North Carolina, everybody. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our next speaker earned a Ph.D. in art education and multicultural education from The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. Before being elected to congress, she served nine years on the Greensboro, North Carolina city council. In 2022 she was elected to a fifth term representing the peoples of this state's 12th Congressional District. Please give a warm welcome to the Honorable Representative Alma S. Adams.

**Welcome: Honorable Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
United States House of Representatives**

Good afternoon. I'm Congresswoman Alma Adams, and I'm proud to represent the city of Charlotte and the state of North Carolina in the United States Congress. I'm honored to welcome the Legion, one of the few organizations chartered by the Congress to the Queen City. Thank you for joining us in Charlotte for your 104th Annual National Convention and thank you for your service. Service is indeed the rent we pay for living on this earth, not only on active military duty, but also as advocates and voices for millions of American veterans.

I am the daughter, I am the niece and the granddaughter, the cousin of veterans. I'm also honored to be joined by your National Commander Vincent Troiola. Jim, thank you for your leadership in this organization and for never wavering in your support of our nation's veterans. Legion, I also want to recognize national Finance Commission Chairman Gaither Keener from the great state of North Carolina. In Congress we know that we always need to recognize the person in charge of the money. Finally, is North Carolina in the house? Can all of those from the land of the longleaf pine please stand. All right.

As a 40-year college educator, I know the debt our colleges and universities owe to The American Legion for your work in passing the first GI Bill and all of the subsequent veterans' benefits bills in Congress, and because of your work, millions of American veterans have had the opportunity to attend college and university.

And while they had to fight Jim Crow to do it, a historic number of black veterans used the first GI Bill to attend historically black colleges and universities, tripling the total number of black students nationwide and growing the most diverse middle class ever.

In the years since, the Legion has made sure that legislation includes and benefits all of our veterans because, when you're serving with someone, you don't care about the color of their skin or what may make them different. You care about the flag on their shoulder and their shared commitment to our country.

I've always believed that we owe you a debt for that service, and I hope that my voting record in Congress reflects that. That's why I voted for the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, the PACT Act, and because if you're injured or you're hurt or disabled in service of our country, Congress should foot the bill. Even if it's not an injury that's easily seen or the result of a grave mistake like the toxic water at Camp LeJeune, four hours east of here, and let me be clear, we take care of our own in this country. When we don't live up to that promise, well, sometimes it takes the Legion to give us a push.

So never stop pushing, delegates, and never be discouraged, and never, never give up. Your service has earned you an audience with your congressional office and don't ever let us forget it. Again, I thank you for joining us here in Charlotte for your convention, and I thank you for never leaving your fellow veterans behind. So, thank you so very much. Enjoy the convention. God bless. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our next guest was elected in 2017 as an at-large member of the Charlotte City Council. He is also a stagehand, a grip, and a member of Charlotte's thriving sports television and entertainment production community. A proud member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees Union, he holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology from Davidson College, where he was a two-time letterman on the football team. Please welcome Mayor Pro Tem Braxton Winston.

**Welcome: Honorable Braxton Winston
Mayor Pro Tem of the City of Charlotte**

Thank you, Commander Troiola. I understand the commander and many of you were up at Hendrick Motorsports a little while ago, and I'm a fan. So, I hope that you can try to

come back in October to the ROVAL 400 race. It will be lots of fun.

Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Braxton Winston, and I do have the pleasure of serving as the mayor pro tem of Charlotte. On behalf of my colleagues on city council, the mayor, the over 8,000 employees that make this city run, and the hundreds of thousands of people that call this place home, that work here or come to play, I'd like to extend our welcome to Charlotte, North Carolina.

It is a great honor to have The American Legion and the Legion Family, Legion Auxiliary, and the Sons of The American Legion and Legacy Riders return for the third time to Charlotte, for this, the 104th National Convention.

On a personal note, as the son of a Marine, I salute you and your families. I was born at Camp LeJeune, or is it "LeJern"? My momma called it LeJeune, so I'll call it LeJeune. My leatherneck father retired as a Marine captain. My father's service and commitment to this country, along with my mother, who was a schoolteacher, left an indelible impression and are a big part of who I am.

If my father were here with us today, he would remind me to mention that today is the 108th birthday of the United States Marine Corps Reserves. He was a reservist for five years before his retirement, so I would like to extend a thank you to all that have served in Marine Corps Reserves here today. *(Applause)*

The city of Charlotte has a history of supporting our military. Just three miles west of here is Camp Greene. It was a major training facility for World War I, home to over 60,000 soldiers at its peak. If you drove here from the airport, you may have passed Remount Road or taken Remount Road. It's called that because of the stables where the cavalry officers saddled their horses.

Speaking of our airport, it's one of the many things that have grown, along with our skyline, since this event was last held here in 2014. Numerous financial institutions and businesses are headquartered uptown, and last year the Airport Council International ranked Charlotte Douglas Airport number seven in the U.S. and world for air traffic. It is named after three-term Mayor Ben Douglas. During World War I, Ben Douglas served as a first lieutenant in a machine gun battalion. Our airport is our hub for economic growth and development in this city and region. It's responsible for over a quarter of a million jobs. We should never forget the sacrifices you and your brothers and sisters in arms have made to protect the ability for us at home to try to build thriving neighborhoods and cities. This economy, these opportunities are protected, and in many ways made possible because of your service. On behalf of the people of Charlotte, I thank you.

An important priority of Charlotte is positively impacting the livelihood of our residents, not only nurturing an ideal community to live and work in, but also generating economic impact in creating jobs for our residents.

The Charlotte regional tourism and hospitality industry employs 1 in 9 residents in our community, and that's about 147,000 jobs. The visitor spending that comes from people traveling for conferences, like The American Legion National Convention, and people attending one of our many major events, like the Major League Soccer match at Bank of America Stadium right up the street, and stadiums like tonight when we'll have a concert where Guns 'N Roses is playing, or travelers and visiting family members and friends here generate \$7.8 billion in direct visitor spending for our local businesses. For that spending, again, we thank you.

As you gather over the coming days, I hope you take advantage of the great location of our convention center. Rain or shine, the exterior pedestrian bridge will give you easy access to uptown restaurants, shopping, and entertainment, and easy access to the Lynx Blue Line rail connecting you to more of Charlotte. So, get out there and see it.

I hope you will see and experience the buzzing energy of this city. Thank you all for the honor of speaking to a group I respect and hold dear. Again, thank you for your service. And if you meet my dad one day, I hope you'll give me a decent review. Thank you all very much. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our next speaker was first elected to the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners in 2008. He served 14 years on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board. He is a former DARE officer with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department. He holds a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's in criminal justice from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Mecklenburg County Commissioner George Dunlap. *(Applause)*

**Welcome: Honorable George Dunlap
Mecklenburg County Commissioner**

Well, good afternoon. My name is George Dunlap, and I have the privilege of representing District 3 on the Board of County Commission. I also have the privilege of serving as the chair of the Board of County Commission. So, I bring you greetings on behalf of the more than 1.1 million citizens who call Mecklenburg County home.

Now, I want to tell you up front, I am not as formal as all of those elected officials who came before me. I believe in just kind of relaxing the atmosphere. So, I'm going to tell you what they didn't tell you because I know that you guys don't want to hear the same speech again.

I will tell you that Mecklenburg County is indeed honored to have you here. We are delighted that you chose Mecklenburg County as the place to have your conference. I had the privilege of meeting some of your dignitaries a few months ago when they told me that you guys would be here. Now, they told me that you were coming, but they didn't tell me how many of you were coming. So, as I look out over the conference, I can tell you I'm excited that you visit every city and every state in the United States.

Now, I want to take a minute just to tell you a little bit about Mecklenburg County because what I've already experienced, I know will and has already happened. Mecklenburg County is the second largest county in the state of North Carolina. So, we represent not just the city of Charlotte, but six other municipalities that call Mecklenburg County home.

To the north of us is Huntersville, Davidson, and Cornelius. To the south of us is Pineville, Midhill, and Matthews, all within a 30-minute ride of uptown. I don't have to tell you that all of these places would welcome you. Not only would they welcome you, they would also welcome the funds that you brought with you.

Now, they're all unique. They're all special places. And they are learning that you guys have just become a part of what Mecklenburg County has to offer. So, I want to invite you to go out and visit some of these places. I will tell you that on my way in I saw a number of you outside. In fact, there might be as many outside as there are in here. But I know you're here. So, they're taking advantage of what Mecklenburg County has to offer, and I want to make sure that you have that opportunity to do so as well.

I will say to you that Mecklenburg County respects its veterans. Arthur Griffin is one of the other veterans who serve us on the Board of County Commission. We also have a third veteran who serves us on the Board of County Commission. So, all of the men who are on the Mecklenburg County Board of County Commission are veterans who serve this country. *(Applause)*

I am indeed happy to be able to serve with them because, if there's anything that we know about veterans, we know that they are loyal. We know that they are committed. And we know they will stay until the job is finished. I am so happy to be a part of that group.

So let me again say on behalf of our board, all nine of us, on behalf of all of our citizens, welcome to Mecklenburg County. And while you're here, you make it your home too. Thank you so much. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Next, we will be accepting donations, first for American Legion Charities, then the Veterans & Children Foundation, and after that

the National Emergency Fund. Those presenting checks will please proceed to the microphone, announce the amount and donor, and go to the front on the floor for a photograph. ...*National Vice Commander Uhrig assumed the Chair.*

**Donations to American Legion Charities
Donations to the Veterans & Children Foundation
Donations to the National Emergency Fund**

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TN): Department of Tennessee donates \$2,500 to the National Emergency Fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (SC): Department of South Carolina donates \$10,023 to the National Emergency Fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IA): The Department of Iowa donates \$1,000 to the Veterans & Children Foundation.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): John Ivens Post 42, Grand Canyon, Arizona. \$500, Children and Youth, and \$1,000, National Emergency Fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AZ): Department of Arizona and its Legion Family donate \$3,000 to the National Emergency Fund and \$2,000 to the Veterans & Children Foundation.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): China Post 1, on behalf of the Sons of The American Legion with China Post 1, we're happy to present a check for \$500 to the Veterans & Children Foundation, and also on behalf of China Post 1 and Department of France, we're presenting another check for \$500 to the same organization for a total of \$1,000

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BROWN (ND) Representing legendary North Dakota, I'm the delegation chairman Dan Brown. I brought with me Commander Clarence Carroll, Commander-Elect Mamie Havelka, three regional vices Allan Magnuson, Brennan Bell, Jack Volk.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (ND): On behalf of the American Legion Family in North Dakota, the future home of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, we have a donation to the National Emergency Fund in the amount of \$16,665.75.

DELEGATE BRITTEN (MI): I am Marilyn Britten, the chairman for Michigan, and I have with me our alternate NEC-elect, and we're happy to donate \$2,000 to the Emergency Fund.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN RILEY (NY) David Riley, delegate chairman from the great state of New York, home of Past National Commander Michael Kogutck, Past National Commander Richard M. Pedro, Past National Commander Fang Wong, and current Commander Vincent James Troiola. Also with me is our Department Commander Timothy Collmer and Department Adjutant James Casey. For the NEF fund, \$3,100. For the Be the One campaign, \$23,330. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NH): From the "Live Free or Die State," New Hampshire, \$2,000.

DELEGATE HOLCOMBE (MD): From the great state of Maryland, Ronald Holcombe, past department commander. And I have beside me my Department Commander Ruth Higgins and Senior Vice Commander David Heredia. On behalf of the Department of Maryland and the home of Past National Commander Eaton and Clarence Bacon and Rick Santos, we'd like to present a donation to the national commander under the umbrella of the Be the One of the Veterans & Children Foundation of \$11,000 from the Department of Maryland Legion Family.

DELEGATE KAIKKO (MD): I'm Wayne Kaikko from Frances Scott Key Post 11, Frederick, Maryland. I'm here with Past Commander Keith Clevenger. We're here to present checks for \$2,000 each to the Be the One, Veterans & Children Foundation, and National Emergency Fund.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NE): On behalf of the great state of Nebraska, go Cornhuskers, Veterans & Children Foundation for \$1,940.

DELEGATE BUCKWALTER (MO): I'm John Buckwalter, senior vice commander for the great state of Missouri, accompanied by our National Executive Committeeman George Scarborough. On behalf of the Department of Missouri, we donate \$1,050 to the National Emergency Fund.

DELEGATE GROSSET (AK): My name is Jim Grosset from Calgary, Alberta. I'm president of FODPAL and with me is Terry Huisman, who will give you our donation value.

DELEGATE HUISMAN (AK): \$1,632.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TX): On behalf of the Mighty 20th District of the great state of Texas, I'd like to donate \$446.47.

DELEGATE DAVIS (MA): On behalf of the Department of Massachusetts, Department Commander Sandra Davis. With me today is our NECman, the other Davis, also with us is ANEC Jodi Pajak and immediate Past Department Commander Sally Nay. We're donating an additional \$5,000 to the Veterans & Children Foundation today.

DELEGATE CRAIG (CA): I'm Jim Craig from Pacific Palisades, great state of California, and I represent the Ronald Reagan Palisades Post 283, and we're presenting a check for \$10,000 for the Veterans & Children Foundation.

DELEGATE LAVELLE (PA): Steve Lavelle, commander of the great state of Pennsylvania. I'm here with our NECman Mike Stelacio, our alternate NECman Mike Murphy, and our Adjutant Woody Hogan. We'd like to donate for Veterans & Children Foundation \$2,000, Child Welfare Foundation \$6,022.25, and our National Emergency Fund \$3,977.75.

DELEGATE LINNON: (CT): Good afternoon. Rich Linnon, immediate past commander from the Department of Connecticut. We would like to proudly donate \$2,268.69.

DELEGATE JOHNSON (WY): Hello, everybody. I'm Doug Johnson, department commander from the great state of Wyoming, and with me today is my First Vice Commander Bill Barnes, Second Vice Russell Stafford, Finance Officer Deanna Hurless, NECman Keith Davidson, Past Department Commander Ken Persson Sr., and our National Vice Commander Doug Uhrig. And Gina Mayhan, our department adjutant. We have a check for \$2,000 for the VCF in memory of Past Department Commander Jerry Clark.

DELEGATE CASE (UT): Good afternoon. I'm Doug Case from the industrious state of Utah. I'm here with our Commander Ninzel Rasmuson, leading candidate for national vice commander Randy Edwards, and some of the distinguished people including our adjutant. Through the combined efforts of a number of like-minded comrades and a special note for the 19th Special Forces Group Airborne and the Special Forces Association chapter of Utah, challenging some dedicated small donors in the Department of Utah takes great pleasure in donating \$2,500 to the 1919 Foundation. Thank you.

DELEGATE FISHER (OH): I'm Richard Fisher and Rich Mead. Our family, The American Legion Post Dolan-Wetzler 139, is glad to present \$1,000 to the National Emergency Fund. Thank you.

DELEGATE RUE: (OH): Jason Rue, department commander. I have with me Adjutant John Robinson and NEC Steve Masowick. From the great state of Ohio, we donate \$10,000 to the NEF.

DELEGATE STUVENGEN (WI): Karl Stuvengen, commander, Department of Wisconsin. Wisconsin donates \$425 to the National Emergency Fund and to Legion charities.

DELEGATE SCANLON (VT) I'm Past Department Commander Tom Scanlon from the very green and very wet state of Vermont. On behalf of my home post of Middlebury 27, I'd like to present a check for \$1,000 to the Veterans & Children Foundation and the National Emergency Fund.

DELEGATE BUTTS (FL): I'm Eunice Butts from the great state of Florida. Today on behalf of the state of Florida, we're making a donation of \$5,269.85 to the National Emergency Fund. We would like for you to continue to keep us in your prayers. We have not recovered from the last hurricane, and as you all know now, we're going through it again. We thank you for all that you have done and continue to do. Keep us in your prayers. I have with me Adjutant Bruce Comer.

DELEGATE ORZECZOWSKI (FL): I'm Rick Orzechowski, district commander for District 7 in the state of Florida, and we're presenting a check for \$400 for Children and Youth for Mulberry Post 72.

DELEGATE MIROBELLA (WV): I'm Thomas Mirobella, from the Fighting 1st District of Department of West Virginia. We are donating \$400 to the 1919 Society Foundation and \$1,000 to the OCW.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN FERNLUND (MN): Tom Fernlund, delegate chair from Department of Minnesota. With me is Pat Logan from Bayport Post 491. He's got a check for \$25,000 from Post 491 Bayport.

DELEGATE LOGAN (MN): This \$25,000 is in addition to the \$30,000 that we have already donated to the Veterans & Children Foundation.

DELEGATE SIMMONS (GA): Good afternoon. I'm Bill Simmons, most recent department commander for the state of Georgia. Georgia, the home of champions, to include our most recent National Commanders Dale Barnett and Bob Turner and our multiple National Recruiter of the Year, Pat Liddell, and the back-to-back national football champions. We would like to donate \$10,000 to the NEF and \$5,000 to the American Legion Charities. Thank you.

DELEGATE STEFFEN (SD): Greetings. My name is Courtney Steffen. I am the department commander from the beautiful but tough state of South Dakota. I have with me my NEC Denny Brenden, and my Department Adjutant Chris "Van" VanDelist. We are proud to donate \$25,000 to the Veterans & Children Foundation supporting our families in need and our department service officers. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: The Past National Vice Commanders Club would like to donate \$1,000 to the Veterans & Children Foundation. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NJ): The Department of New Jersey makes a donation to the National Emergency Fund in the amount of \$3,000.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OK): Department of Oklahoma donates \$14,913.12 to the Veterans & Children Foundation and \$2,500 to NEF.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE: On behalf of the National Association of Sergeants-at-Arms, those folks standing around in blue bands on their arm, we would like to donate \$1,000 to the Veterans & Children Foundation.

DELEGATE SHORE (NC): David Shore, North Carolina NEC. With me is North Carolina Department Commander Tom Ehlers. I have a check for \$12,425.51, which is the final installment of the \$68,000 goal for the Veterans & Children Foundation from North Carolina.

DELEGATE BUSKE (IL) Delmer Buske, commander, Department of Illinois. I've got Tom Marciciak, past NEC. The Department of Illinois would like to donate \$4,760 to the National Emergency Fund. Thank you. ...*The delegation viewed a video.*

...*National Commander Troiola resumed the Chair.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The donations today for the Veterans & Children Foundation, the total for the year so far, \$1,288,789. Thank you very much. National Emergency Fund, \$600,747.29. thank you again. (*Applause*)

A member of Franklinton, North Carolina Post 52, our next speaker was elected department commander of this state at its convention in Raleigh on June 11, 2022. He served in the U.S. Navy from 1972 to 1991. He also served on the national Americanism Council and national Americanism Commission. Please give a warm welcome to immediate past department commander of North Carolina, Mike Donnelly. (*Applause*)

**Address: Michael C. Donnelly, North Carolina
Immediate Past Department Commander**

Good afternoon, everyone. You know, here in North Carolina, we have a unique way of welcoming friends and family to town. So, with no further ado, Hey, y'all. (*Laughter*)

Want to welcome you to North Carolina. There's so much to do and see here in the Queen City of Charlotte. We have football, baseball, museums, some tremendous restaurants, pubs, everything you need is right here in the city of Charlotte.

I can't be happier that all of you are here, and on behalf of the over 34,000 members of the Department of North Carolina, I want to welcome you to North Carolina and hope that you have a great visit. Thank you. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Another retired Navy veteran, our next speaker was elected North Carolina department commander for 2008-2009. He has had multiple years as a 100-percent membership commander at the post, district and division levels. He is a graduate of National American Legion College and has served on the national Veterans Preference Committee and Foreign Relations Council. Please welcome the president of The American Legion National Convention Corporation of North Carolina, Past Department Commander James C. Mayhew.

**Address: James C. Mayhew, North Carolina, President
The American Legion National Convention Corporation of North Carolina**

Yes, welcome to the great state of North Carolina, the magnificent county of Mecklenburg and the Queen City of Charlotte. I'm looking for Bill Richards. He's supposed to take a picture. There he is. I want to make sure I'm looking at him. I'm thinking they put us up here at lunchtime so that you all wouldn't miss the speakers that count. But we do thank you for attending this year's National Convention.

If you're not having a good time, it might be your own fault. But you can come see one of our people. And I want to thank the North Carolina team that I had to put this thing on. I think everything went smoothly. And again, thank you all for coming. (*Applause*)

...The delegation viewed a video.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The Royal Canadian Legion is committed to making a difference in the lives of veterans and their families, providing essential services in their communities and remembering the men and women of Canada who sacrificed for their country. The dominion president was a member of the Third and Fourth Battalions of the Royal Canadian Regiment. He retired from the Beachville Volunteer Fire Department in London, Ontario after 32 years of service. Please welcome, the Royal Canadian Legion president, Bruce Julian. (*Applause*)

**Greetings: Bruce Julian, President
The Royal Canadian Legion**

Good afternoon, everyone. National Commander Troiola, members of the leadership team, Legionnaires, guests, my comrades, all, I'm pleased to be back for your 104th National Convention, this time in North Carolina. It is fitting that this conference is being held here, a city that holds strongly to its beliefs and independence, a characteristic that both our veterans organizations also share. Since we last met, we have continued upon our path of supporting veterans directly, advocating for their needs and strengthening our operations. I'd like to share a short update.

The Royal Canadian Legion has an Army of volunteers. They're a strong base of 250,000 members. They are the ones who help us accomplish our varied goals every year. Over the past year, our service officers assisted thousands of veterans across our country,

with everything from emergency funding for food, fuel, clothing and shelter, to letting them know they may be eligible to receive new benefits from Veterans Affairs Canada. For example, additional pain and suffering compensation, and additional claims related to PTSD medications.

Legion programs offered a form of peer support such as Operation VetBuild. It's a gathering of veteran and Legion branches and offers a safe space for model building and social connections. Work continued with the Legion's Operation: Leave the Streets Behind, which is focused on eliminating veterans' homelessness. We also became involved in a new initiative called the Burns Way project. It is designed to help indigenous veterans receive mental health and wellness services by strengthening the current pathway to clinical care through an app.

When it comes to our research and advocacy, which really go hand in hand, I'll start with our advocacy agenda. We continued to advocate for solutions to fix various problems, in part, through contact with our prime minister and the minister of Veterans Affairs, whom I might add just recently changed due to a cabinet shuffle. I was able to meet our new minister in person just a few weeks ago, to both establish an important connection and outline our advocacy positions. She expressed a commitment to tackle the most glaring issue affecting our veterans right now, a completely unacceptable backlog of disability claims, which has dragged on for several years.

But we've also proactively offered our opinions on issues that matter through our public relations efforts. And we remain positioned as a key voice for immediate engagement. For example, last year we were gratified to play a role in the government's decision to help end the plan for the construction of condos on Juno Beach in France. For those who don't know, Juno Beach is to Canadians what Omaha and Utah Beach is to Americans. And we felt we had already fought and given our blood to gain those beaches. We didn't want condos on them so people could enjoy a nice view. We also shone a light on the financial strain of housing on Canadian Armed Forces personnel posted in various high-cost regions across the country. Those are just a couple of examples.

Supporting research is another focus. It's our way to add knowledge that can improve the lives of our veterans. I'll share one example. Each year we provide a \$30,000 masters scholarship to a student investigating ways to improve veterans health outcomes. In 2022 the chosen student embarked upon a project to better understand treatment outcomes in veterans with PTSD who also use medicinal cannabis. The Legion has been advocating for research in this realm for years.

As with The American Legion, one great pillar of ours is to promotion of remembrance. In November, we officially launched our new biodegradable poppy and wreaths. It was a true milestone, resulting in a tremendous amount of media interest. We introduced an innovative initiative called Poppy Stories, where we take our lapel poppies and somebody with a smartphone can just put it over the lapel poppy and it will give a story of a Canadian veteran, providing an introduction to their family, community and military service.

Our national Remembrance Day ceremony last November 11, which is organized annually by the Legion, was particularly unique. It highlighted the 80th anniversary of the Dieppe Raid. At the base of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Ottawa, we placed a unique ensign, originally brought to us by the son of an American military veteran. The flag is understood to have been carried by a Canadian soldier at Dieppe and garnered much attention throughout the Remembrance period.

When it comes to operations, we're growing. Last year we saw membership growth year over year for the first time in over three decades. I'm proud to say we welcome 35,000 new and reinstated members. And, more importantly, that positive growth continues this year. We're going digital and have introduced a digital membership card option as well as making it easier to join and renew membership online at any branch in the country.

As we continue to evolve, we're considering areas of importance. We have a renewed focus on equality, diversity and inclusiveness within the organization. That means overt

efforts to help educate our membership and the public. We're doing it through a dedicated national committee that's looking for organizational and cultural effectiveness and new policies and programs to help us connect with a range of traditionally marginalized groups.

So, what's next? The Royal Canadian Legion will continue to push for change, set standards for psychiatric service dogs and a new national strategy to combat veteran homelessness. We'll help set the direction for the next two years at our biannual convention in 2024.

We also look forward to staying in touch with you, our American Legion friends, sharing ideas and building stronger ties as we work with a commonality of purpose. Each time I've had the privilege to take part in your conventions I meet great people and experience new concepts, ideas I'll share with my comrades back in Canada.

Commander Troiola, I thank you for the invitation. My wife Darlene and I have had a great time. It's a beautiful city, have a great convention and may God bless. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Born and raised in London, Ontario, Canada, the top leader of ANAVETS joined the organization in 1969 and served in various offices. He volunteers with Save the Brave and works to get homeless veterans off the streets and into permanent housing. He advocates for veterans and their families to receive quality health care. Please welcome the dominion president of The Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada, ANAVETS, Paul Hooper.

**Greetings: Paul Hooper, Dominion President
Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada**

Commander Troiola, National Adjutant Wheeler, special guests, comrades all, it gives me great pleasure to join you at this 104th National Convention and bring warm greetings on behalf of the executives and members of The Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans in Canada.

We have as close allies and neighbors fought shoulder to shoulder many times together in deployments around the globe. Our sailors, soldiers and air crew have shared operations experiences and hardships. Our mutual concern for our troops, our veterans and their families continue to join us together.

We know how difficult some of the issues are today. Mental health and suicide continue to be pressing issues. I hope all of you here have heard the call from your national commander and voted for "Be the One" campaign to be highlighted at the South by Southwest festival next year. By bringing the issues of veteran suicide to the front of the larger community, you will be able to reach more people, create support through other industries and help more veterans get the support they need before their thoughts turn to self-harm.

We are pleased in Canada that our Veterans Administration is currently undertaking a veterans national health needs assessment. It will hopefully provide good data as to specific health needs of the veterans' population, which can then shape new policies and programs and ensure better and more equitable health outcome to our veterans.

We also are very pleased with the work of the two centers of excellence the Veterans Affairs has stood up. One relating to mental health, the post-traumatic operation stress injuries and the other dealing with treatment of chronic pain. Both of these centers are involved in research and promoting the best practices and training to serve providers.

We are involving the veterans in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and their families in the development of where they need to focus new advances. The Atlas Institute recently created a website, mindkit.ca, which is filled with youthful friendly tools, strategies and downloadable resources as well as real-life stories from children of veterans.

The website features a web comic, videos, audio clips, interactive tools and hands-on coping strategies to support youth whose lives have been impacted by their family members' mental health injuries.

The Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans is also making strides in developing a network of interdisciplinary clinics to encourage the evidence of base pain management practices. In Canada the veteran's population is twice as likely to suffer from chronic pain than the general population. Through their consultation with the veterans and their families to develop a deeper and more thorough understanding of the day-to-day challenges faced because of their experiences with chronic pain. That understanding is used to shape research to ensure that it will have a genuine and practical positive impact in the well-being of veterans in pain.

With all the ongoing research at both of these centers of excellence, our Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research, which connects military and first responders-based research being done across Canada and the world. It's a network of 46 Canadian universities that have agreed to work together to address the health research requirements of the Canadian military, veterans and their families. They also highlight world-class military and veterans research at its forums each fall, bringing together researchers to network with the industries and government departments looking to fund research. By continuing to share the information and best practices on health care, research benefits and support programs, both our countries who struggle with similar challenges can learn from one another and better serve those who protect us.

As for our association, we continue to make strides in increasing our membership and connecting with younger generations of veterans. Some of the work is paying off. We have chartered three new units since the pandemic hit us, with closures in membership losses, and we have recently created a joint provincial command for the units in Quebec and New Brunswick. And our first international unit in Mexico with a second location in Puerto Vallarta pending.

We work alongside the Royal Canadian Legion in pressing for strategic changes from the government, finding and helping veterans in need in our communities, ensuring that they all get the benefits and services that they're entitled to receive, and by promoting the social support and comradeship that we enjoy and that you have provided me here this week. Thank you for having me here with you and for the wonderful hospitality. God bless. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Taiwan is always vigilant. Because of its proximity to an increasingly aggressive communist China, the Taiwanese military is prepared for an attack that could come at any time. The Taiwanese people also know that taking care of veterans is an important priority when fielding a strong defense. Our bond with its Veterans Affairs Council is unbreakable.

Our next speaker is a graduate of Taiwan's National Defense University and has served as deputy director for the office of the Deputy Chief of the General Staff for Logistics in the Ministry of Defense. Please welcome the secretary general of the Veterans Affairs Council for the Republic of China, Chien Shih-feng. *(Applause)*

**Greetings: Chien Shih-Feng, Secretary General
Veterans Affairs Council, Republic of China**

Good afternoon, National Commander Vincent Troiola, esteemed guests, and all the heroes here today, I'm Secretary General Chien from the Veterans Affairs Council, Republic of China (Taiwan). It is my first-time representing VAC at such a fantastic event, and I'm highly honored to be here. On behalf of VAC, I express our high respect to all the members of The American Legion. The VAC is devoted to caring for our military veterans and fostering a sense of all-out defense and patriotism among the public.

We benefit from engaging with various veterans' organizations, like The American Legion. That's why I invite the national commander to visit Taiwan, to exchange ideas to support our veterans.

I am grateful for your support to the Republic of China (Taiwan) throughout the years, demonstrating your strategic vision. Your resolutions passed at each annual convention, backing our country on diplomatic, political, economic, and defense matters, have left a lasting impact. We will always cherish it. Thank you again for inviting me to speak at this remarkable opening ceremony. I wish you a productive and successful National Convention and may everyone be in good spirits and health.

Lastly, on behalf of Minister Feng, I am honored to present National Commander Vincent Troiola with the First-Class Medal of Honor from VAC. It is in recognition of his tireless efforts to promote international justice and his dedication to our veterans. Felix, please announce the citation. Thank you. *(Applause)*

Certificate of award to accompany the presentation of the Medal of Honor of Veterans Affairs Council. To Vincent J. Troiola, National Commander of The American Legion in recognition of his dedication in upholding the international justice and safeguarding the international status of the Republic of China and improving the welfare of veterans. A Medal of Honor of Veterans Affairs Council, first class, is hereby awarded on this 29th day of August 2023, General Kent Feng, Minister, Veterans Affairs Council, Republic of China. *(Applause)* ...*The delegation viewed a video.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Commissioned from New Mexico Military Institute in 1989, our next guest earned his Bachelor of Science from Cardinal Stritch University. He has had a distinguished Army career which included deployments to Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt and Haiti. Among his many awards and decorations are the Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Meritorious Service Medal. Some of his previous assignments include commanding general of U.S. Army Cadet Command, chief of staff of U.S. Army Futures Command, and C.G. of the Army Joint Modernization Command Futures and Concepts Center at Fort Bliss. He is currently the commanding general of the United States Army Recruiting Command and Fort Knox. Ladies and gentlemen, Major General Johnny K. Davis. *(Applause)*

**Address: Major General Johnny K. Davis
Commanding General, U.S. Army Recruiting Command and Fort Knox**

Well, first of all, good afternoon, everyone. I'm looking for Wisconsin. Where's Wisconsin? *(Cheers)*

That's what I'm talking about. Well, first of all, I'm excited to be here, and I just want to thank everyone for their service. This morning, I departed Fort Knox. I flew to Columbia, South Carolina. I was at Fort Jackson for the Future Soldier Prep Course one-year anniversary, which is a transformational program investing in our nation's youth. Did a media panel there, finished up, spoke to a few soldiers and then jumped in a truck and we drove here to be part of this. After this, I drive to the airport, and I'm flying to New York City tonight. So, to say this job is not high adventure, oh, it's high adventure. And I just want to say I couldn't say no. For many of you, if you remember, I was in Milwaukee last year, my hometown, and I spoke at The American Legion conference there. So, I'm 100 percent focused and all in. And I just want to share a couple things.

First of all, to National Commander Jim Troiola, it's so great to be part of this, sir, and Past National Commander Brett Reistad. And my good friend who I served over the last 30-plus years now, Colonel Retired Adam Rocke. And he and I go back far. So of course, I can't say no.

But what I want to share with you is what's going on on the ground across the nation. And I'm sure many in here are veterans, and I will tell you, thanks for your service. But it is a challenging market to say the least. But we are doing better than what we did last year. It's still tough, but we've already surpassed what we brought in all of last year, and we still have another five weeks to go. So that's good news, and I think we're headed in the right

direction. It's all about this positive momentum, but you know what it's all about? It's your investment as veterans to speak with our educators, to speak with the parents, to speak with all those around and let them know about the value of service.

I would have never known as a 17-year-old kid in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, my father was a high school teacher at Riverside High School for 40 years, that I would go on to serve our nation and I would still be in uniform after 33 years and counting. But I would say that because I was influenced by those veterans when I was a young, late '70s, eight, nine, ten years old, when most of the neighbors or homeowners were all World War II or Korea war vets. And they pulled me aside and spoke with me and they really motivated me to consider service.

And ladies and gentlemen, here I am. And I would ask you to do the same thing. They're out there, those young superstars like yourself, like me, and they need your guidance, your mentorship and your investment. So, I would tell you, you know, if you get an opportunity, recruiting is tough, but let me tell you why I think I need your help.

We have a big storm brewing, and it's going to hit the United States. And no matter what happens, you know it may knock over homes, destroy some vehicles, but the very next day or within hours, who are you going to see on the streets helping other fellow citizens? It's our men and women in uniform. And we need that formation to be full so that when the nation calls, we're there.

And that's where I need your help. I'm always thinking about the future and what we're doing to support our nation. I need your help to visit these young recruiters. When you think about a recruiter in this tough environment, don't assume that they've been in the Army ten or fifteen years. The recruiter in our recruiting station is not unlike the same recruiter that when you served. The recruiter is a 23-year-old sergeant, average, and he came from the 101st or 82nd, wherever base and whatever service, and now he's in a recruiting station in Appleton, Wisconsin. So, when you think about that, that's where I need your help. And I've said this year after year. I think I have one slide of areas I would like your help on.

Of course, I would ask you to register for partnership outreach program, and that's on goArmy.com. We have a download, the U.S. Army Career Navigator app, and you can see the app there. What I love about it is wherever you are, you hit the app, and it will tell you the closest recruiting station to you and how to contact them. You can do that. And also, I just wanted to share with you one of the many things that we're working on, Soldier Referral Program.

Right now, we have soldiers, if you refer someone, your E1 to E3, and they deploy or sign up and depart for basic training, that soldier that referred them is promoted one grade. That's a great deal. Think about that when you're an E1, 19 years old, you get promoted. If you serve 20 years, that's \$120,000 decision.

So, these are all the things that we're doing, of course, to focus on our nation. The nation invests in those that serve. I'm proof. My oldest daughter, West Point, 2013 West Point grad. Second daughter, a Marine. I have one in JROTC. I know the value of service to this nation. And I'll ask each and every one of you for your help.

Never underestimate the power of what you can do when you talk with our nation's young adults. They're thinking right now what to do, and they need to listen. And they're going to listen to you because you're so powerful. So, each and every one of you, I just want to say thank you for your service. You've made an impact on me. That's why I can't say no to support this every year and share what's going on in the Army.

Continue to talk to our youth. Continue to mentor them. Continue to invest in them. They are going to lead our nation, just as was said to me as a 21-year-old lieutenant. I didn't pay attention. But now I can't tell you, I can't stop, I can't pass someone without saying, hey, thanks for what you do. And have you considered service to our wonderful nation? Because our nation will invest in you. So, with that, I just want to stop and say, again, thank you for your service. I love you all. This is so very important. God bless you. Be all you can be. Thanks. *(Applause)* ...*National Vice Commander Harris assumed the Chair.*

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER HARRIS: We are pleased to have with us the current national vice president general for the South Atlantic district of the Sons of The American Revolution. He's a retired senior master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force and a member of The American Legion Department of North Carolina. Please welcome, from the National Society of the Sons of The American Revolution, George Shum.

Greetings: George Shum
National Society of the Sons of The American Revolution

Good afternoon, National Commander Troiola, distinguished guests and fellow Legionnaires. I'm honored to bring greetings from the National Society Sons of The American Revolution on behalf of our President General John Dodd and our over 38,000 members.

The Sons of The American Revolution and The American Legion share a similar mission, to remember those individuals who have served in the cause of liberty and independence. As Sons of The American Revolution, we honor America's first combat veterans who struggled through countless fields, in New York, New Jersey, South Carolina, endured hardships at winter camps in Valley Forge and Moorestown, and achieved success at places such as Trenton, Saratoga and Yorktown. Moreover, we seek to recognize and commemorate every individual whose actions, sacrifice, fortitude and endurance did so much to establish the United States of America and continue its traditions.

Starting this December, the Sons of The American Revolution will be embarking on its own campaign to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. This commemoration coincides with America's 250th anniversary celebration but it's actually much broader. We will commemorate events beginning with the Boston Tea Party to the "shot heard around the world" on Lexington Green, through Evacuation Day in New York City, when the last British troops left America on November 25, 1783.

Along the way, we will be honoring all of those individuals who struggled and sacrificed to turn the Declaration of Independence ideals into reality. We extend our invitation to The American Legion to work with us as we strive to educate today's Americans about our founders' efforts to establish the United States of America.

It also gives me great pleasure to announce that the Sons of The American Revolution has chosen to honor The American Legion with our Distinguished Patriot Leadership Award for the Legion's support for youth education, patriotism, citizenship and assistance to veterans and families. The award will be forwarded at a later date.

Bravo Zulu and keep up the good work. National Commander Troiola, we thank you for inviting the Sons of The American Revolution to bring greetings at your National Convention. It's been a distinct honor. Thank you. *(Applause)*

...National Commander Troiola resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: A veteran of the United States Coast Guard, our next guest patrolled the Persian Gulf on the United States Coast Guard Cutter Chase in 1998. The cutter diverted four vessels that were violating UN sanctions against Iraq. Our guest was awarded the Coast Guard Achievement Medal for de-escalating an incident that could have quickly become a threat to national security. She holds a master's degree in public health from George Washington University and a bachelor's from Temple University. She has been named a 2023 Women Veteran Trailblazer. Please welcome the vice president of government affairs for Student Veterans of America, Tammy Barlet. *(Applause)*

Greetings: Tammy Barlet
Vice President of Government Affairs, Student Veterans of America

Well, good afternoon, everyone. Have to wake you up after this afternoon. Where are my Pennsylvanians? (*Cheers*)

Yes, Keystone State. Well, thank you National Commander Troiola for inviting Student Veterans of America to the 104th American Legion National Convention. I will admit the last time I attended the American Legion Convention was in Indianapolis. So, I'm so glad to be here today. Many of you might have noticed I'm not the frequent SVA speaker, Jared Lyon. He sends his greetings from Washington, D.C. where the Lyon family recently welcomed a new cub to their pride.

Although for some of you in the room I am a familiar face, but more on that soon. As a PUFL and vice president of government affairs for Student Veterans of America, I'm honored to speak before you today on behalf of more than 750,000 student veterans at over 1,600 campus chapters across the nation, U.S. territories and three countries overseas.

And today we celebrate the remarkable journeys of our nation's student veterans, journeys powered by resilience, determination and an unwavering support of organization like Student Veterans of America and The American Legion. These two pillars of advocacy and empowerment have played a pivotal role in shaping the lives of countless veterans who have dedicated themselves to serving our country, pursuing higher education and fulfilling their dreams.

The American Legion, with its rich history spanning over a century has been a beacon of support for veterans and their families. Through its wide range of programs and initiatives, The American Legion addresses the diverse needs of veterans across generations. By advocating for legislative change, providing benefits assistance and fostering a sense of camaraderie, The American Legion ensures the sacrifices made by veterans are not forgotten and their contributions are honored.

It was former American Legion National Commander Harry W. Colmery who drafted what would be the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, which would provide tuition, subsistence, books and supplies, equipment and counseling services for veterans to continue their education in school or college, therefore, supporting veterans as they readjust to civilian life following the return home from war.

At Student Veterans of America, we helped create a transformative platform that bridges the gap between military service and academic pursuits through our programs, research and advocacy. We organize various programs throughout the year. The main event that kicks it off is SVA's National Conference, as we call it NATCON. This is the largest gathering of student veterans anywhere in the world. NATCON serves as a focal point in the academic year to share ideas, best practices and network with student veterans, military connected students, their families, supporters, survivors, allies, as well as corporate, government and our nonprofit partners.

Next is Washington Week, my favorite program. SVA invites student veterans to D.C. to connect with members of Congress. Student veterans also attend and support Jared as he testifies before the Senate and House Committees of Veterans' Affairs. This year's Washington Week had student veterans sitting next to Legionnaires in that room, and I overheard some incredible conversations.

Over the summer break, SVA's regional summits were held in six cities where we equip student veterans with essential tools, strategies and skills required to effectively lead and sustain successful student organizations.

In the fall, we hold SVA's Leadership Institute. This premier student leader experience brings together our country's top chapter leaders through an immersive experience designed to equip tomorrow's leaders to serve and create a lasting community impact. The application process is now open, and the deadline is September 15.

SVA conducts research to better inform the public and policymakers about student veterans, military connected students, their families and survivors. One of those influential

surveys led to awareness and the need to expand the VA VITAL program and highlighted factors in student veteran success.

Understanding the needs, obstacles and challenges student veterans encounter is essential for us to carry out our mission effectively and fuel our advocacy efforts. SVA has been instrumental in advocating for student veterans' rights and benefits, ensuring they receive the support they deserve on the journey to education and beyond. SVA, with its unwavering dedication to student veterans, has been an instrument in fostering a community where these brave individuals can find camaraderie, guidance and resources tailored to their unique needs during that to, through and beyond higher education journey.

And when it comes to my story, that chapter of that beyond, was The American Legion. Even before completing my master's degree at George Washington University, I held the position of health policy associate at The American Legion's D.C. office. Not only did The American Legion provide me with employment and a foundation for my success, but it gave me an opportunity to pursue and ensure veterans who were utilizing VA health care were receiving timely, high-quality care.

I worked on the fantastic program called the System Worth Saving, where I traveled the country visiting and getting to know many of you. During these visits I also met with VA staff, line managers and leadership, carrying your voice, the veterans that they serve. Upon my return to D.C., I continued the conversation with members of Congress and VA to ensure best practices were supported and issues of concern were addressed. I also testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on behalf of The American Legion on military sexual trauma.

Now, a few years later, but earlier this spring, I had the opportunity to sit next to The American Legion staff like Matthew Brennan, who was SVA chapter leader of the University of Massachusetts Amherst. And we testified before Congress on policies like GI Bill restoration, to make whole those veterans who pursue a program or course of education that was ended or terminated due to fraud.

The American Legion has supported SVA since our founding over 15 years ago, and we continue to work together to improve the GI Bill and advance the interests of student veterans. This relationship trickles outside the D.C. Beltway to the department and post levels.

A prime illustration of this is Puerto Rico and American Legion Post 67, where Alex Ortiz is a member. After his military service in the Army, Alex embarked on a path to pursue higher education. In 2022, he attended Rhode Island College. Alex was selected as one of the 10 SVA Student Veteran of the Year finalists. He was recognized for restarting a student veteran chapter on campus, ensuring quarterly meetings with the university and finding funding for the veterans center on campus.

Now, as a law student, Alex is making a difference in Puerto Rico. Upon his arrival, he noticed the veterans voice needed reinforcement. And he soon connected with the department commander of Puerto Rico, Carmen Rosario. And she lended her unwavering commitment to stand shoulder to shoulder with Alex in state advocacy efforts. Today, they're making monumental change for the more than 83,000 veterans on the island through alleviating burden by removing the tax on DoD pension, offering driver's license extension for active duty and recognizing the valor of servicewomen through license plates and driver's licenses. His journey is a testament to the collective resilience and vision of SVA and the powerful partnership with The American Legion.

We share a steadfast commitment to student veterans, amplifying the joy of the spirit of unity, service and dedication that defines one great nation. And together we can achieve this mission together. But I need your help. I need you to engage with local campuses and seek out student veterans. I need you to co-organize a community service project or even sponsor a tailgate, or possibly fund student veterans to attend NATCON.

In fact, I invite you all to attend SVA's 16th National Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, January 4 through 6. This is a prime opportunity to check with student veterans spanning the country. Together we pave the way for countless success stories like mine

and empower the promise with determination, support and collaboration. Our student veterans can achieve greatness no matter the challenges they face. And with Legionnaires like Alex and Carmen, it warms my heart to contemplate the potential what SVA and The American Legion could achieve in the next coming 15 or 104 years. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The American Legion has a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with the organization represented by our next guest. USAA, like The American Legion, cares about financial security for families of current military members and of veterans from previous generations. For the last nine years our next guest has been a member of the USAA Board of Directors. It follows a highly successful military career, in which our speaker rose to be appointed to the highest enlisted rank of the entire U.S. Air Force. Please give a warm welcome to the 14th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Gerald R. Murray. *(Applause)*

**Address: Gerald R. Murray, USAA
14th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force**

Thank you very much, Commander Troiola, for the kind introduction. And thank you, fellow Legionnaires, for your warm welcome as well. It's indeed an honor to be able to be here to represent USAA with you. And also, as I have learned as part of this in preparation is that we have had an affinity relationship with The American Legion since 2010. We just renewed that affinity for another five years, and I certainly hope that it continues to go on and on because how important it is for two organizations, two great organizations that care about our veterans, that care about our servicemembers, their families, to be joined together for the causes that we are.

And for those of you who traveled from outside this area of the state, welcome to our neck of the woods. You see, this is actually home for my wife Sherry and me, or at least close to here, as we hail from west of here in Shelby, North Carolina. And I was raised just a few miles further towards the mountains in Boiling Springs. It's only natural for Sherry and me to come back to North Carolina where we grew up after serving 29 years in the Air Force and another twelve years in the defense industry. Forty-one years from Lackland Air Force Base to the Pentagon, in multiple states, Turkey, the Middle East and Japan. We lived, and like many of you, or I deployed throughout the United States and around the world. But through it all, we always knew sometime that we would return home. So, yes, this is our neck of the woods.

If the feeling of home is more than just a location, for those of us that served often know, you know, here on stage with the 104th National Convention of The American Legion, being among you, 6,000 Legionnaires, spouses and family members, this too feels like home, or more so, as we well know serving in the military, like family.

When I think about what the Legion stands for, it's because you have dedicated your life to selfless service. This organization represents more than 2.3 million veterans, servicemembers who dedicated their lives to our country and who recognize that freedom and prosperity come with a price. You gave years of your life serving as soldiers, Marines, sailors, airmen, guardians and coast guardsmen. And then by joining The American Legion you've declared that you're continuing to serve is a lifelong passion. And together we spent years serving our country and our communities.

Many among us in the Legion, as we know, served in Vietnam. In fact, many of our leaders in the Legion today served during those periods. And this year marks an important anniversary, the 50th year since the Paris Peace Accords were signed and the prisoners of war were returned from captivity. But regardless of when you served, I recognize that it's not just the servicemember who made the sacrifices. Your spouses and families sacrificed as well, holidays, family weekends, family time and the frequent moves that came with that.

I think many of us that served can say, like myself that I talk about Sherry often, that if it was not for Sherry and the ability to maintain the household with three children and all that went on and to be able to support the community, I couldn't have been able to do the things that I do, and I certainly owe her, today, the great debt of gratitude that what she sacrificed in her time as well as other family members have. That's why the American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion still play vital roles in fostering service, patriotism and commitment to our veterans in our communities.

And with all of you, my service continues as well. As mentioned, I have the privilege of representing USAA, serving on their board of directors, the Air and Space Forces Association and the Air Force Enlisted Village on their boards, and as an Air Force Museum Foundation member of the board of trustees. And I'm also a proud member of the Warren F. Hoyle Legion Post 82 in Shelby.

As I mentioned, Shelby, and some of you and certainly I know the leadership here that I had the opportunity, if you were to Google Shelby or look us up in Wikipedia, one of the first community events or activities that you will find listed about Shelby is that we're the proud host of the The American Legion World Series, which just happened just over a week ago.

We show a little bit of Southern hospitality there by hosting that series. But all of that, of course, started with 64 teams and eight regional sites that made their way to the World Series. And we want to congratulate League City, Texas, representing Post 554, that was Texas' first championship, for coming out on top. You know, the World Series is a tradition that dates back to 1925, and the longest-running baseball program in the country. And we sure are proud that Shelby was chosen as the permanent host of the World Series.

But Legion baseball is just a small part of your broad and deep connection to America, its veterans and communities. You're all about enhancing the well-being the great nation's veterans and your vision of veterans strengthening America. And I'm proud of your actions honoring those who came before us by advocating for their health and welfare.

One example is the passage of the PACT Act, which specifically helps veterans who have developed medical conditions related to the exposure of burn pits and toxins during the Gulf wars. This measure is ensuring that many affected veterans are getting the treatment that they need and deserve. And sometimes veterans also need our advocacy, encouragement and friendship.

I mentioned that one of my roles in retirement is serving on this board. And I'm especially proud of one thing that USAA and The American Legion are doing together. But before I talk about it, here's an interesting observation about the Legion and one that I've always found, and as I'm being a part of this Legion, that the Legion is a very independent-minded group. And, in fact, a 1988 Legion resolution proclaimed that this organization doesn't do things as part of other groups when the Legion might not have a full voice. So, the Legion had to pass a special resolution just to participate in a worthy cause with USAA. And this cause is "Face the Fight."

You know better than anyone that suicide is a major problem among our veterans. In fact, the suicide rate among veterans is 1.5 times the rate of the general population in our nation. We've got to do something about this. There are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends and neighbors, and our children. They're brave men and women who have given so much through their service only to end up in a crisis at home.

So, The American Legion, USAA, and a coalition of like-minded corporations, foundations and nonprofit and veteran-focused organizations have come together to "Face the Fight." This group is bounded together with the aspiration to cut veteran suicide in half by the year 2030. So, let's take a look at a video that shows what this commitment means to us. ... *The delegation viewed a video.*

As our great organizations, The American Legion and USAA and others have taken the stand to "Face the Fight," I ask each of you, personally, to join in in doing our best to be able to take and meet the mission, the mission objective that we have in this way. So far, the "Face the Fight" coalition has raised more than \$40 million to help prevent veteran

suicide. The USAA employees alone have made this a central fundraising effort in 2023, and so far, our employees have contributed, out of their pocket, \$670,000 to this cause. I'm pleased to know that the Legion is a leader in this fight right beside of USAA. *(Applause)*

And I'm excited to see what we can achieve by facing the fight together. Legionnaires, again, Sherry and I are happy to have you in our backyard. We truly hope that your time here in the great state of North Carolina and Charlotte has shown you the hospitality that we're so proud of in this area. We want to know that you have enjoyed your time spent with your battle and swim buddies, your shipmates, your wingmen, your guardians and your fellow Coasties.

And thank you, thank you all for all you have done and continue to do. May God continue to bless The American Legion and our great nation. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our next guest is a retired veteran of the United States Coast Guard, formerly a board member of the Exchange Retiree Advisory Council and a director of government affairs for the Non Commissioned Officers Association. He has led the U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association as its national president since 2018. Ladies and gentlemen, senior chief boatswain's mate, retired, Jon Ostrowski. *(Applause)*

**Greetings: Senior Chief Boatswain's Mate Jon Ostrowski, USCG (Ret.)
National President, U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association**

Good afternoon, everybody. Greetings from the Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association and Enlisted Association.

This week we are conducting our 54th annual convention here in Charlotte. Thank you for the invitation of The American Legion asking us to come and partake here in Charlotte so we can take advantage, as well, of your association and all the benefits that you have here in the city this week. We are staying at the Sheraton Hotel up the road, and we appreciate all of the warmth and kindness that all of the members have shown us while we're here.

The Chief Petty Officers Association and Enlisted Association, we have 126 branches and chapters throughout the world, with nearly 11,000 members and about 50 percent of our membership are still wearing the uniform today. Our mission is to support the Coast Guard family in time of need and assist Coast Guard leadership in achieving their goals where possible.

Some of the things that the association does is when natural disasters strike our country and the men and women of the Coast Guard are outperforming their mission and helping the citizens in whatever rescue they may need, the Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association is there to help and support their families. And many times, Coast Guard families are impacted by the disasters themselves, such as hurricanes.

When we come in and try to help with grants and to assist their families if they need the clean-up or do anything, that's part of what we do, as well as community service, which I'm proud to say, as I'm speaking, all of our membership that's here at the convention are out in the community right now at food banks and helping assist the community with cleanup and various tasks that have been given to us.

We want to thank The American Legion, also, for supporting the Pay Our Coast Guard Act. And many of you may remember back in 2019, with the government shutdown, the Coast Guard was not a part of the Department of Defense, and so we were not getting paid. And many of our members were not paid for about four weeks. And right now, we have a bill out there, H.R. 2693, which is the Pay Our Coast Guard Act. And not only was the Coast Guard not getting paid but the Public Health Service and NOAA as well. We need to take care of them. And your support is greatly appreciated.

And right now I'm working diligently to try to push this through as well as getting a Senate bill in kind so they can match up in conference. So, thank you for that. And we, as

well as The American Legion, we're a member of the Military Coalition. So, we sit at the table with you, and we sign on to the bills with the Military Coalition and have input. And we've been a part of that for quite some time.

Our motto: "In respect for those who have gone before us and as a guide for those who follow." I thank you for your hospitality and your kindness and warmth, and we appreciate all of you. And we look forward to doing this again. Thank you very much. Have a fantastic conference, and Semper Paratus. *(Applause)*

...The delegation viewed a video.

National Commander's Report to Convention
Vincent J. Troiola, New York, National Commander

Thank you. American Legion Family, delegates and guests, are you excited yet? *(Cheers)* Doesn't sound like you are. Try again. *(Cheers and Applause)*

Good job. I'm excited because of the amazing guests we've had so far, including our Youth Champions and Spirit of Service winners this morning. Our current military members and the participants of our youth programs are proof to me that America's best days still lie ahead.

I'm also excited about our amazing American Legion Riders and another successful Legacy Run. Year-after-year they set new fundraising records and helped us close in on our goal to make the American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund self-sustaining.

We just passed the anniversary of the enactment of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act. That monumental legislation was the result of years of advocacy and hard work by this organization and other like-minded VSOs.

While our commitment to veterans will never waver, I am excited to see us spread some of that same energy to our armed forces. Our members understand what it means to choose the military way of life. They know the rigors, hazards, and uncertainties of service, as well as issues that can affect health, quality of life, family stability and economic outlook after discharge. We also appreciate the pathways of opportunity made possible only through military service. In short, we've been there. We've lived that. That's why The American Legion National Security Commission launched an initiative built purely on the military experience, specifically to improve it where needed, and assist in whatever form that may take, from support for commissaries, to military spouse employment to understanding VA benefits for those about to separate.

The name of this initiative, and we love our acronyms, is BASE, B-A-S-E. It stands for Base Assessment and Servicemember Experience, and it strives to strengthen connections between The American Legion, the Department of Defense, active-duty installations, and Guard and Reserve centers and armories worldwide. These connections can help address issues such as food insecurity, military family health care, childcare, and career opportunities. Think about the impact that our VA&R Commission had in helping VA go from a System Worth Saving into a System Worth Celebrating. That's what we are hoping to do for our military members still on duty.

Another important way to support our military is to support our allies. That's why I am proud that The American Legion took the lead in calling for Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act. This legislation would provide a pathway to permanent residency for Afghans who have been granted humanitarian parole in the United States and create pathways for continued relocation for those who've been left behind. Our organization, along with several other VSOs, recently drafted a letter to congressional leadership pointing out that American veterans served alongside Afghan allies for two decades. We fought side-by-side with them, and those veterans saw firsthand the courage and dedication displayed by many, especially the interpreters.

When the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 2021, many of our allies were left behind. Since then, it has been veterans who have carried the burden of evacuating some to safety while Congress has delayed meaningful relief. Under the Afghan Adjustment Act,

eligible Afghans in need of protection would undergo the vetting required during the adjustment application process and have their status adjusted so they could rebuild their lives in the relative safety and stability of the United States.

Now there are other bills in Congress that pretend to protect our Afghan allies but do very little. They instead lump the issue in with large-scale immigration reform. Every day we are losing allies and their families to torture and death by a hostile regime that is punishing them for helping us. We owe them special consideration.

I mentioned how VA has gone from a System Worth Saving into a System Worth Celebrating. The Department of Veterans Affairs has come a long way since the Phoenix fiasco of 2014. According to a recent Medicare survey, VA medical centers outperformed others by sizable margins. 72 percent of VA hospitals received four or five-star ratings for overall performance, compared to 48 percent of non-VA facilities.

VA outperformed other hospitals 87 percent to 48 percent in "communication with doctors." In the "Responsiveness of hospital staff" survey, VA wins again 63 percent vs. 34 percent. In fact, 76 percent of veterans speak positively about their willingness to recommend their VA hospital, as opposed to 52 percent of non-VA patients. These are all reasons as to why I am excited to be a veteran in 2023. VA may never be perfect, but it can only get better when we, as Legionnaires, know the issues, set priorities and speak out for a system that is truly worth celebrating.

I am also very excited about a resolution passed by your National Executive Committee in a special vote that just occurred in July. The American Legion has traditionally and by direction of a national resolution, refrained from joining coalitions. We do not want to be part of a committee or group that might commit to a policy contrary to our principles. When it comes to veteran suicide prevention, however, an exception was needed, and an exception was made. Resolution 1 now authorizes The American Legion to join the Face the Fight Coalition led by USAA.

The NEC agreed with our senior legal advisor that preventing veteran suicide will, in fact, advance our resolutions and principles rather than run contrary to our very top priority. I am very excited about this opportunity and believe it will greatly enhance The American Legion Be the One initiative. One of the key strategies of Face the Fight is to identify and support veterans at risk by partnering with and investing in veteran service organizations to implement suicide prevention strategies within their organization, team and membership. By leveraging the resources, talent and expertise of corporations, VSOs, philanthropists and researchers, Face the Fight can achieve its aspirational goal of a significant reduction in the veteran suicide rate by 2030.

We have already lost more than 120,000 veterans to suicide since 2001. The Army and Marines both reported increases in their active-duty suicides during the first quarter of 2023, compared to the same time in 2022.

While you will be seeing much more about Face the Fight in American Legion media, you will not be seeing any less about Be the One. We will continue to Be the One to destigmatize asking for help, to reach out to our brother and sister veterans and raise awareness about the 988-crisis line. The purpose of our buddy checks is to remind veterans that they are not alone. They have friends and allies in the American Legion Family. "Going alone," is not a healthy way to deal with a crisis, we often tell people with suicidal ideations.

It's time that we follow our own advice. The American Legion, with the help of its friends in USAA and other great organizations, has just received some reinforcements. During my travels as commander, I have had conversations with many family members whose veteran attempted to, or, in some cases, committed suicide. The pain those families feel will always be there but our Be the One message is resonating. Just as we advocate for veterans, these families are advocating for us. They want us to continue to make this our top priority. And we are always there as advocates for our military, meaning all military branches, including the United States Coast Guard.

In this era of divided government, the possibility of a federal shutdown is very real, and Congress still has not passed the Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act of 2023. Because the

Coast Guard, unlike the other branches, falls under the Department of Homeland Security, its personnel go unpaid during prolonged shutdowns. The American Legion fully remembers the shutdown of 2019. During that period, we provided more than \$1 million of Temporary Financial Assistance to Coast Guard families in need. We did our job, now Congress needs to do the same!

I have just given you a number of reasons as to why we should all be excited to be Legionnaires. At any given time, we are always working on a number of initiatives, campaigns, stances and programs. But we carry the same message that our founders set forth in 1919: The American Legion will always fight for the respect owed to our military, our veterans and their families! *(Applause)*

God bless you all. God bless our American Legion Family, and I hope you all enjoy the rest of our Convention. Thank you. *(Applause)*

I also hope you have had a chance to visit the 1919 Society booth in the back of the hall. Do so if you get a chance. Thanks again. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I now call on National Adjutant Daniel S. Wheeler of the Department of Virginia to issue the Call for Convention.

Call for Convention
Daniel S. Wheeler, Virginia, National Adjutant

Good afternoon. I know this is the moment you've been waiting for. *(Cheers)*

The 104th Annual National Convention of The American Legion is hereby called to meet in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29-31, 2023.

The convention business sessions will be held in the Charlotte Convention Center starting at 8:00 a.m. each day.

Purpose

The annual National Convention is The American Legion's legislative body. The convention is called for the purpose of setting The American Legion's programs for the ensuing year, amending the National Constitution and By-Laws, and transacting such other business as may be brought before it.

On Thursday, August 31, 2023, by twelve o'clock noon of the final session, or at the conclusion of all other business of the National Convention, whichever first occurs, officers for the ensuing year will be elected, these being the national commander and five national vice commanders, in that sequence.

Representation

Representation in the Convention shall be by department, and in accordance with the provisions of the National Constitution: Article V, Section 3, "Each Department shall be entitled to five delegates and one additional delegate for each one thousand members, or major fraction thereof, whose current dues have been received by the national treasurer 30 days prior to the meeting of said convention, July 31, 2023, and whose registration fees, as fixed by the National Executive Committee, for its total authorized delegate strength, have been paid; and to one alternate for each delegate."

In addition to the above, the members of the National Executive Committee are delegates to the National Convention with vote, which "Shall be exercised with their respective Departments, except that the vote of the National Commander shall be exercised only in his capacity as chairman of the National Convention." Article 7, Section 3. "Each duly registered delegate shall be entitled to one vote." Article V, Section 4. Delegates to the National Convention shall be accredited in writing to the national adjutant in the number and manner prescribed by articles 5, 6 and 7, of our National Constitution. The rights of Departments to make and accredit substitutes for absentee delegates or alternate delegates shall be recognized by the national adjutant, provided that such substitution shall

be officially certified by the department commander or department adjutant at the time of the certification required by the National Constitution or at any time prior to adjournment of the first session of the National Convention.

Alternate Delegates

Alternates shall have the power to vote only in the absence of the regular delegates. The selection of alternates to represent absent delegates is a matter for decision within the respective delegations. The vote of any registered absent delegates who are not represented by an alternate shall be cast by the majority of the registered delegates present from one's department.

National Executive Committee

A meeting of the new National Executive Committee will be held at the call of the national commander within twenty-four hours after the adjournment of the National Convention, as provided by the national by-laws.

Department Officials

Department officials, unless elected as delegates or alternates to the National Convention, have no privileges in the convention except as guests of their respective delegations.

Convention Committees

Americanism, Convention Committee - One Delegate.

Constitutional Amendments Convention Committee - One Delegate.

Credentials & Rules Convention Committee - One Delegate.

Finance Convention Committee – One Delegate.

Internal Affairs Convention Committee - One Delegate.

Legislation Convention Committee – One Delegate.

National Security Convention Committee - One Delegate.

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Convention Committee - One Delegate.

Veterans Employment & Education Convention Committee - One Delegate.

Signed: Vincent J. Troiola, National Commander.

Attest: Daniel S. Wheeler, National Adjutant

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you very much, Mr. Adjutant. I now declare the 104th Annual National Convention of The American Legion to be regularly convened. The Chair recognizes George West of New Hampshire, chairman of the Convention Committee on Credentials and Rules, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Credentials & Rules George West, New Hampshire, Chairman

Good afternoon. Commander and my fellow delegates: Forty-two delegates to the Committee on Credentials and Rules met at 8:30 a.m., August 27, 2023, in the Westin Charlotte, Tryon Room, Second Floor. A quorum was declared. George West (NH) was elected Chairman, and Terry Abdelnour (IL) was elected Secretary.

The Committee proceeded to the business agenda by considering the Rules of the Convention. A motion was unanimously approved by the Committee to adopt the Standing Rules of the Convention as they appear in the revised Uniform Code of Procedure for the Organization of National Conventions of The American Legion as approved by the National Executive Committee on October 12-13, 2022. Each Department Delegate to this committee was provided a copy of the Uniform Code during this meeting.

It was regularly moved, seconded and carried to accept the Delegate Strength Report as reported by the National Adjutant certifying membership 30 days prior to National

Convention. It was regularly moved, seconded and carried that the report be based upon the provisions of Article V, Section 3, of the National Constitution: Five delegates for each Department, plus one additional delegate for each 1,000 members or major fraction thereof, whose current dues have been received by the National Treasurer thirty (30) days prior to the opening of the Convention (July 31, 2023); and one alternate for each delegate. In accordance with Article VII, Section 3, members of the National Executive Committee, which includes the National Commander, who exercises his vote only in the capacity as Chairman of the National Convention, and five (5) National Vice Commanders are delegates as well. In addition to this, Article VI, Section 4, all living Past National Commanders are members of the National Executive Committee without vote and life delegates to the National Convention with vote, which is exercised in their respective Departments for a total of 1,814 delegates to the National Convention.

In accordance with the membership report certified to the Convention Committee on Credentials and Rules by the National Adjutant on August 1, 2023, and in accordance with Article V of the National Constitution, the voting strength of the 53 Departments is 1,814 plus the National Commander allocated as follows:

Alabama	23	Montana	16
Alaska	13	Nebraska	30
Arizona	42	Nevada	13
Arkansas	15	New Hampshire	20
California	80	New Jersey	41
Connecticut	21	New Mexico	15
Delaware	15	New York	86
Dist. Of Col.	7	North Carolina	43
Florida	115	North Dakota	18
France	9	Ohio	81
Georgia	43	Oklahoma	20
Hawaii	8	Oregon	21
Idaho	15	Pennsylvania	129
Illinois	70	Philippines	7
Indiana	71	Puerto Rico	10
Iowa	42	Rhode Island	9
Kansas	26	South Carolina	27
Kentucky	22	South Dakota	22
Louisiana	22	Tennessee	28
Maine	22	Texas	63
Maryland	50	Utah	12
Massachusetts	35	Vermont	15
Mexico	7	Virginia	48
Michigan	64	West Virginia	20
Minnesota	66	Wisconsin	53
Mississippi	15	Wyoming	12
Missouri	36		

The Credentials and Rules Committee did not receive any resolutions for consideration or action to be taken. It was also regularly moved, seconded and carried that the Committee Chairman and Secretary be authorized to sign the report on behalf of the Committee. By unanimous vote, the meeting of the credentials and rules committee was recessed at 9:05 a.m.

Mr. Commander, as a duly elected and registered delegate from the Department of New Hampshire, I move that the report of the Convention Committee on Credentials and Rules to include the aforementioned delegate strength report and the adoption of the Standing Rules of the Convention as they appear in the Uniform Code of Procedures for Organization of National Conventions of The American Legion be approved.*Second.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Any discussion? Hearing none, all in favor, say aye. Opposed? The report of the Convention Committee on Credentials & Rules is adopted. I'll now entertain a motion to adopt the Rules of Convention. ...*Moved and seconded.* Any discussion? Hearing none, all in favor, say aye. Opposed? The Rules of Convention are adopted. The Chair recognizes Gaither M. Keener, Jr. of North Carolina, chairman of the Convention Committee on Finance, for the purpose of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Finance
Gaither M. Keener, Jr., North Carolina, Chairman**

Good afternoon, National Commander, delegates to this convention. Forty-four members met at The Westin Charlotte in Grand Ballroom A at 9 a.m. on Sunday, August 27, 2023, in Charlotte, North Carolina. Brian Ruiz (Indiana), Corporate Financial Controller, opened the meeting as staff liaison and informed the committee that nominations were in order for Chairman and Secretary. Gaither M. Keener, Jr. (North Carolina) was elected chairman, and John D. Monahan (Connecticut) was elected secretary, by unanimous vote.

Vincent Gaughan (Illinois) made a motion to empower the Secretary to deliver the report if the Chairman was unable. The motion was seconded by David Buist (Michigan) and passed by unanimous vote.

Reports were received from Paul Evenson (South Dakota) Chairman of the Marketing Commission and David F. Wallace (Virginia) Chairman of the Media and Communications Commission.

Chairman Keener reported that the 2022 consolidated financial statements were audited by Crowe, LLP who issued an unqualified opinion.

The Chairman introduced the National Treasurer, Shawn Long (Indiana), who updated the committee on the financial position of the National organization. Treasurer Long completed his report with a recommendation for national per capita be set to \$23.50 in membership year 2025. Dan Wiley (Kansas) made a motion to set dues to \$23.50. The motion was seconded by Tim Smith (Oklahoma) and adopted unanimously by the convention committee on finance.

Chairman Keener introduced Brian Ruiz (Indiana) to report on the financial activities of the National organization.

Chairman Keener presented two resolutions to be voted on by the National Convention Committee on Finance. Chairman Keener read the resolve clause of Res. 6.

Resolution No. 6 (NE)

Subject: Advertising in the Men's College World Series Program

A motion was made by Robert Morrill (New York), seconded by Luther Holsonback (Tennessee) to refer to the Finance Commission for further review, which was approved by unanimous vote. Chairman Keener then read the resolve clause of Res. 12.

Resolution No. 12 (MN)

Subject: Expand Availability of Female Uniform and Apparel Items

A motion was made by Vincent Gaughan (Illinois), seconded by Kevin Owens (Oregon) to refer to the Finance Commission for further review, which was approved by unanimous vote.

A motion was made by Paul Morin (Massachusetts) to empower the Chairman and Secretary to write and/or amend the report on behalf of the Convention Committee. It was seconded by Jim Jarvis (South Carolina) and approved unanimously.

As being no further business, the meeting recessed subject to the call of the chair at 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Commander, I, Gaither M. Keener Jr., a duly authorized delegate from North Carolina to the 104th American Legion National Convention, move the adoption of the national Finance Committee report as an action of this convention. ...*Second.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Is there any discussion? Hearing none, all in favor, please signify by saying aye. Opposed? The Report of Finance is adopted. I now call on the national adjutant for any announcements.

Announcements

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: We want to remind everyone that there has been a misprint on the tickets for tonight's National Commander's Banquet. It is not a black-tie event. The attire for those not at the head table is business dress. There are two possible exceptions. Past National Commander Dan Ludwig of Minnesota may wear top hat, white tie and tails. And Past National Commander Paul Morin of Massachusetts may wear shorts and flip-flops. (*Laughter*)

Mr. Commander, that completes the announcements.

Salute to Colors and Recess

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Legionnaires, please join me in a salute to the flag of the United States of America. Please rise. On my count. One. Two. The time is now 3:18 p.m. The Convention will stand in recess until 8:30 tomorrow morning.

... At 3:18 p.m., Tuesday, August 29, 2023, the 104th Annual National Convention of The American Legion was adjourned.

PROCEEDINGS
Second Day

Wednesday, August 30, 2023

... At 8:30 a.m., the members assembled for the 104th Annual National Convention, and the following proceedings were had.

Call to Order
Vincent J. Troiola, New York, National Commander

The Convention will now come to order. Please rise and join me in rendering a hand salute to the flag of the United States of America. On my count. One! Two! For the invocation, I call on National Chaplain Daniel Mark Antal, Sr. of North Dakota. Ladies and gentlemen, please uncover.

Invocation
Daniel Mark Antal, Sr., North Dakota, National Chaplain

Thank you, Mr. Commander. From Psalm 25: In You, Lord, my God, I put my trust. I trust in You. Do not let me be put to shame nor let my enemies' triumph over me. No one who hopes in You will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause. Show me Your ways, Lord, and teach me Your paths. Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You're God, my Savior, and my hope is in You all day long. Remember, Lord, Your great mercy and love, for they are from old.

Eternal God, we turn our hearts to Florida, to Georgia, South and North Carolina, as the hurricane touches in. Guard and protect not only our posts, our Legionnaires, our American Legion Family, but our fellow citizens.

Almighty God, holy in every way, we humbly call upon your holy spirit to come among us. We assemble as the American Legion Family on this second day of the 104th National Convention. We assemble for God and country. We thank You for the memories of fellow veterans and members of the Legion Family who have gone before us. We stand on the four pillars of The American Legion of Americanism, veterans affairs and rehabilitation, children and youth, and national defense.

You, O God, have led us in the past. Guide us to be the people who seek the good of others. Bless the many speakers of this convention with clarity of mind and purposeful messages. Help us then to hear and apply what we hear today. Once again, we pray for the men and women of the United States Armed Forces, those serving on land, on sea, in the air, and in the outer space. Guard, keep and protect them. To You, oh Lord, belong praise, honor and glory. Amen. (*Chorus of "Amen."*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you, Chaplain Antal. Ladies and gentlemen, please remain uncovered as Sergeant-at-Arms Michael T. Byrnes leads us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Pledge of Allegiance
Michael T. Byrnes, New York, National Sergeant-at-Arms

Please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance.
...*The delegation recited the Pledge of Allegiance.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Please be seated. The convention is now in session. Just one announcement this morning. The Western Caucus raised \$4,000 for Maui, Hawaii, thank you so much. (*Applause*)

I would now like to call our national vice commanders to join me on stage for our next presentation, which will be given by retired Navy Captain Louis Cavaliere of the Chapel of the Four Chaplains Foundation.

**Presentation: Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion
Captain Louis Cavaliere, USN (Ret.), Vice Chairman
Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation**

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I give you greetings from the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On stage with me today is the department commander from the state of Vermont, Mark Cloutier, you'll hear about why he's here in a minute. Also on stage with me is John Grouse, a former district commander from the Department of New Jersey. Let's hear it for Vermont, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. *(Applause)*

So, I want to start by telling you about one of the projects that we did this year, and I want to thank you for all your help because without your help we can't do these things. But there's a Gilman United Methodist Church, which was once the center of the Gilman, Vermont community. It has been sitting empty for 12 years. The Methodist Governing Council has deemed it for closure and deconsecrating. But what makes this church so worthy is the fact that it was the church for Rev. George Fox. This was his home church. And the significance of that is that George Fox was one of the Four Chaplains, one of those four who gave up their lives when the Dorchester went down after being hit by a torpedo from a U-boat.

George Fox was from the state of Vermont. He was the chaplain for the state of Vermont in The American Legion. And he was the oldest of the Four Chaplains. He actually served in World War I, and then when World War II came around, he enlisted as a chaplain. He made the ultimate sacrifice on the Dorchester in the North Atlantic on February 3, 1943.

Now, in September of last year, American Legion Post 47, in Canaan, Vermont, and Post 41, the Moore Fox American Legion Post, joined together to save this church from sale to a developer. Over the following months, the two posts started a financial drive to buy the church and rename it the Rev. George L. Fox Memorial Chapel. The Chapel of Four Chaplains used its nationwide reach to join in that campaign, and we helped them raise over \$30,000 to buy that chapel.

As you can see, the goal was exceeded on July 30 of this year. So, the foundation founded by Posts 47 and 41 are the new owners of the George Fox Memorial Chapel in Gilman, Vermont. And we want to congratulate them for doing that great work. *(Applause)*

And in order to add to that, I have a check for Commander Cloutier for an additional \$7,500 that we raised in our campaign in Philadelphia. *(Applause)*

So why did we do this? Did we do this to remember George Fox? Yes, we did. Did we do it to remember the Four Chaplains? Yes, we did. But we really did it because we want that post that works, Post 41, out of that chapel, in Vermont, to be the one, to continue to be the one to help veterans because we know that that is where it is.

The most common question I get asked is, "Why did the Four Chaplains do what they did?" And I cannot answer that. I've read through all the testimonies of the survivors. What I can allude to is this: I think they knew that giving up their life jackets, they knew that they were going to fall into the hands of God and God was going to raise them up, and that's exactly what happened on February 3, 1943.

And in conjunction with that, to uphold that legacy, which many of you do at your posts all over the country, we are now going to induct the executive staff into the Legion of Honor of the Chapel of Four Chaplains. Ordinary people who have done extraordinary things in the legacy of the Four Chaplains.

If they were here today, they would tell you, be the one. And if anyone has stressed that this year, it's been Commander Troiola and his staff. So, let's all stand now and

congratulate them for being inducted into the Legion of Honor of the Chapel of Four Chaplains. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: The Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion of the Chapel of Four Chaplains is granted for extraordinary contributions to the well-being of others at the national or world-level, to world peace, or to interfaith or inter-ethnic understanding. The medallions are being presented by Chapel of the Four Chaplain Foundation Board Chairman Louis Cavaliere. They are being awarded to National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola, National Vice Kenneth C. Hylton, National Vice Commander Patricia A. Harris, National Vice Commander Glenn L. Wahus, National Vice Commander Paul M. Kennedy and National Vice Commander Douglas R. Uhrig. (Applause)

LOUIS CAVALIERE: Please stand and attention to orders. The Chapel of Four Chaplains is pleased to present the Legion of Honor to the national staff of The American Legion on August 30, 2023 in recognition of their lifetime of service to all people regardless of faith. This award symbolizes for all Americans and for all time the unity of this nation founded upon the fatherhood of one God. Thank you very much and hopefully we'll see you between here and New Orleans. Once again, you're all welcome to come visit us in Philadelphia. God bless. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our next guest is a Vietnam veteran and retired lieutenant colonel for the United States Army. Even after a distinguished 26-year military career, our Patriot Award winner continued to keep faith with his Vietnam veterans by beginning a second career with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, where he would valiantly serve until his retirement in December 2022. His expertise on accounting for our missing heroes can be attested to not just by me, but by many of my predecessors and members of our national security staff who have witnessed his passion and advocacy during the many briefings that he has given our organization over the years. He has worked on sites around the world, searching for and recovering remains of American MIAs. A native of Perrin, Texas, he holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to present an American Legion 2023 Patriot Award to Johnie E. Webb, Junior. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion Patriot Award presented to Johnie E. Webb, Jr. for your dedication in locating, identifying and accounting for thousands of American heroes who were missing or killed in action since the Civil War. After a highly distinguished U.S. Army career, which included a tour in Vietnam, you brought your expertise as a retired lieutenant colonel to what is now the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. You served DPAA and its predecessor agencies with great distinction for 28 years, leading excavation and negotiation missions in North Korea, China, Vietnam, Burma, Papua New Guinea and other places where American servicemembers went MIA. You have hosted numerous American Legion delegations led by national commanders at the DPAA laboratory in Hawaii and have often shared your valuable expertise with the American Legion National Security Commission. Your professionalism and tireless advocacy for American MIAs have provided welcome closure for the families of repatriated heroes. Your vital efforts for America's veterans epitomize The American Legion's ideals of public service. On behalf of the more than 2 million members of the American Legion Family, thank you for your patriotism and service to America. Presented this 30th day of August 2023 at the 104th National Convention. (Applause)

Proceedings of Wednesday, August 30, 2023

**Presentation: The American Legion Patriot Award
Lieutenant Colonel Johnie Webb, (Ret.)
Deputy Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency**

Commander, thank you for that award, and to The American Legion, thank you very much. I couldn't be prouder this day and honored to receive this award. During a time when so many people are finding all things to complain about this great nation, the United States of America, I am proud to be called a patriot. I am proud to have worn the uniform of this great nation. It was truly an honor to do so. So, I am really privileged to receive this great honor today.

And I can say, as you heard, I have traveled around the world to various countries, and I can attest to the fact that America is the greatest country in the world and something we should all be proud of that we live in this great nation. This great nation that does not forget its veterans but continues to care for its veterans. And we must remember those thousands of veterans who served on foreign soil and did not return home, the unreturned veterans that are laying on the battlefields where our great nation fought for the freedom that we have and the freedom of other nations. And I am proud to have been a small part of that.

Probably one of the things that I am most proud of was my last opportunity to negotiate with the North Koreans, when we couldn't get back in country, and I was able to negotiate with the North Koreans to bring those 55 boxes of remains back of Americans who died in North Korea. But it's more than just the 55 boxes. In those 55 boxes, there's more than 100 American servicemembers represented in those boxes. Over 80 of them have been identified and returned to their families today. *(Applause)*

Yes, thank you. So, I am proud to have provided but a small part of providing answers to those thousands of family members who lost a loved one, that young man, that young woman that went off to war and did not return home. The family not knowing what happened to that loved one.

And through the work we have done in DPAA and predecessor organizations provided answers to those families to give them peace, to give them a place that they can go honor that loved one. To take their grandkids and tell them about the bravery of their grandfather who gave his life for the freedom that we share today.

And so, as I accept this award, I do it on behalf of so many people. But as I close, I just want to say to each and every one of you, thank you for your service. I am happy to be among you as a veteran of this great country. And to each and every one of you, God bless you and your families and God bless those men and women serving in uniform today. Thank you very much. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Ladies and gentlemen, our next guests come to us from the organization which received a well-deserved Distinguished Service Award yesterday. Four years ago, The American Legion prevailed in one of the most important First Amendment cases in Supreme Court history. Thanks to our friends at the First Liberty Institute, veterans can now enjoy their First Amendment freedom as they memorialize their fallen comrades. First Liberty is also largely responsible for a number of other important Supreme Court victories protecting religious freedom. The award that they are about to present is named in honor of our dearly departed friend, The American Legion's longtime national judge advocate, Philip Onderdonk. With us today to present that award is the senior counsel for First Liberty, Roger Byron.

**Presentation: Philip Onderdonk Religious Liberty Award
Roger Byron, Senior Counsel, First Liberty Institute**

Good morning. First Liberty has worked with The American Legion now, for I guess it's been almost 20 years and maybe a full 20 years, defending some of our country's most

beloved traditions like the Pledge of Allegiance, our national motto, "In God We Trust," and our veterans memorials, specifically those that use religious images or religious texts like a Star of David or a cross. And a lot of stories have come out of those 20 years.

My favorite one actually starts a little over 100 years ago, in the early days of the Legion, Prince George's County, Maryland. Some mothers of some soldiers that fell in the war and some of the veterans of that war who did return home wanted to put up a memorial, a monument to the fallen men in the county. They wanted a free-standing cross, which was a popular choice in those days, and it's a popular choice now. But they weren't quite able to get it done. They couldn't get any traction on the project.

Then The American Legion showed up. American Legion took over the project, erected the memorial after a herculean effort, and what came to be known as the Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial was born. Locals call it the Peace Cross. The Legion did it up right. It stands between 30 and 40 feet tall. You can actually see it on the slide in the corner. Thirty, forty feet tall, right on a roadway outside of Washington, D.C. It stood there as a daily reminder of the fallen and the price of that war for almost a hundred years.

And then a few years back, I think it was 2014, an anti-religion extremist group filed a lawsuit in federal court to have the Peace Cross taken down and removed. They claimed that its cross shape made it a violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The Legion, represented by First Liberty Institute, rolled in again. This time to defend the monument it had put up a hundred years earlier. It was a five-year legal fight. We went all the way to the Supreme Court, as you just heard, and we prevailed. The Legion and First Liberty Institute won the day. *(Applause)*

In that case, not only saved and preserved the legal rights of the Peace Cross, it fundamentally changed the law and provided solid legal protections for veterans memorials all across the country. And not just veterans memorials, also many of our other traditions, like our Pledge of Allegiance, like our national motto, "In God We Trust." And one of the best parts of the story is that the official name of the case is The American Legion versus that extremist group that filed the lawsuit. *(Applause)*

Anytime anybody talks about this case, it's known simply as "The American Legion." But the good news doesn't end there because at the same time that the Legion and First Liberty were fighting to defend the Peace Cross in Maryland, on the other side of the country a similar fight was underway.

There was a high school football coach named Joe Kennedy, who had the conviction that at the end of every football game, when the players were leaving the field and everybody else was doing whatever they wanted to do, he would walk out to the 50-yard line, take a knee and he would give thanks to God for the privilege of coaching those boys. And that became his practice.

And then one day somebody pointed out to the school what he was doing. And the school told him he had to stop. He couldn't do that anymore. He wasn't allowed to pray where people could see him praying. What they may have forgotten is that before Coach Kennedy was Coach Kennedy, he was Gunnery Sergeant Joseph Kennedy, United States Marine Corps. And so, Coach Kennedy he had a choice to make, and he made the right one. He decided he would be true to his convictions. He would continue to pray. He would continue to give thanks in the way he had always done, and he paid the price for it. He lost his coaching position because he continued to pray. First Liberty Institute represented Coach Kennedy in another prolonged, multiyear legal fight that also ended up at the U.S. Supreme Court. And once again, we prevailed. *(Applause)*

The Kennedy case also fundamentally changed the law. It not only secured Coach Kennedy's right to take a knee on the field, it protects the rights of all government employees across the country and, even more interesting, it provides even more protections for some of our basic, most cherished traditions like our veterans memorials, like the Pledge of Allegiance, like our national motto, "In God We Trust."

And what do you think was one of the primary cases that formed the foundation of

Coach Kennedy's victory? What was one of the main cases cited by the Supreme Court in its opinion when it explained why Coach Kennedy was in the right? The American Legion. (Applause)

And a quick update on Coach Kennedy, if you were at the convention last year, you'll know that he received last year's Onderdonk award. But two days from now, this Friday, the day after tomorrow, for the first time since his victory at the U.S. Supreme Court, Coach Kennedy will once again step on the gridiron as part of the coaching staff of Bremerton High School football team. (Applause)

At the end of the game, when everyone else is leaving the field doing whatever they want to do, Coach Kennedy will walk out to the 50-yard line, take a knee, and give thanks to God for the opportunity to coach those boys, and he will do it with the full understanding and the full assurance that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, rightly applied, protects his right to do it. And if you would like to know more about your case, about The American Legion, or about Coach Kennedy, the best way to do it is go to our website at firstliberty.org. I think we have a slide that has that on there.

But now we're going to show you a brief video that explains the Onderdonk award, and we're going to meet this year's awardee. ...*The delegation viewed a video.* (Applause)

And, of course, we want to thank Henry Repeating Arms that donates the rifle for this award every year. Henry has proven to be a real champion of religious freedom and a real friend to The American Legion.

Shields of Strength is a faith-based family-owned, family-run business in Texas that manufactures pro-military merchandise. And the neatest thing they do is to make military replica dog tags with encouraging messages on them. Usually quotes from the Bible or encouraging messages based on something from the Bible. One of their most popular designs has the American flag on one side and the national motto "In God We Trust" and on the other side it will have a soldier's insignia, specific military unit, and a quote from the Bible.

One of the most popular ones is based on the Book of Joshua or part of the Book of Joshua: "I will be strong and courageous. I will not be terrified or discouraged, for the Lord my God is with me wherever I go. Joshua 1:9." They have donated literally millions. Well, over a million of these to the military personnel, to our servicemen and women in units over the last 20 years, and they've really resonated with military servicemen and women. At one point, 20,000 a year were going to the Marine Corps, to give to the Marine Corps boot camp graduates. Entire graduating classes of West Point received them. Commanding officers of entire units were requesting them for their unit personnel.

Like, for example, then General Lloyd Austin, now Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, requested thousands of them for the 3rd Infantry Division and 10th Mountain Division. The 10th Mountain Division loved them so much, it became a tradition at one point to receive a Shield of Strength commemorative dog tag. One historian said that, with the exception of the insignia on their uniforms, the emblem most often carried by American military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan was a Shield of Strength dog tag.

So, there's no overstating the positive impact that Shields of Strength has had on our military personnel. And they continued year after year to produce these and to get them in the hands of our servicemen and women.

And then one day, the Department of Defense adopted a new policy. It was a policy hostile to religious expression, and it severely limited and severely curtailed what Shields of Strength was able to make and put on its dog tags and provided to military personnel. And then various offices of the DoD received a complaint letter from another anti-religion extremist group, complaining about Shields of Strength dog tags and asking the DoD, or demanding the DoD do something about it, all because Shields of Strength had the audacity to use bible quotes on their dog tags. And tragically, the DoD gave into the demands. And at this point the restrictions have been placed on Shields of Strength effectively making it impossible for them to continue to produce these dog tags and get them to our military personnel. That is an unnecessary tragedy. It's outrageous. But it's not the end of the story.

First Liberty Institute represents Shields of Strength, and we filed a lawsuit on their behalf to turn this around and to fix this mess. So hopefully one day very soon Shields of Strength will once again be making these dog tags to encourage our military personnel and get them into their hands. *(Applause)*

But for now, because of their championing of religious freedom, because of their many, many years of dedication and service to our military personnel, it's my privilege and my honor to award this year's Philip B. Onderdonk Jr. Religious Liberty Award to Shields of Strength and to its founder Kenny Vaughn. *(Applause)*

KENNY VAUGHN: Wow! We're probably the only people here that haven't served our country, my family and I. My father was a soldier, and we love our nation, and we love our military, and I was just a scared athlete.

My wife started writing scriptures on my equipment. God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. A couple of scriptures helped me overcome fear in my life, and my dreams came true. And then I see us in a war, and we're battling. And I was looking for a way, a personal reminder, and I went to a surplus store, bought a blank dog tag, put the scriptures on there, just one for myself. I shared them, and they ended up in a gift shop in Sierra Vista, Arizona, and some of the first troops deployed to Afghanistan took some of those dog tags with them.

And then the requests just went crazy. I couldn't believe it. We really have given a couple million of them to our troops. But during that time, just so you all have a picture, we were sending these packages out nonstop, but we never got to see who was getting them. We never got to meet you. But we got the gifts. We got the little flags that were flown over the Pentagon, the White House, the battlefields. And the most beautiful thing about it all was that my children, my oldest is in her early 20s now, so this has been going on for 20 years, they got to grow up giving and then seeing the fruit of giving. They got to grow up doing something so special, and then seeing the difference that it made and being told that it was so right. What they did was so right.

I remember Faith, one time we had some kind of software update. I don't know anything about software. We had 400 requests that evening. We were trying to get them out. She was 10 years old and worked through the night with us and got our software problem fixed. My daughter, Grace, she was so small, she couldn't work at our table, so she had a little Barbie plastic table she worked at. Kennedy, my son, five years old, he would cut up like summer sausage and cheese and make us snacks. They got to grow up in all of this.

But the worst part to me about what's been going on is that they've been told that what they did that was so right was somehow wrong. And then they've watched us be told to stop doing it. And so, this is really special to us because they're here today. My family, would you please stand up, quickly. *(Applause)*

And so, what they are reminded of today that what they did so right really was. And we're so grateful for First Liberty. There's a lot of people do a lot of things, but I think nothing can be more valuable than what they're doing. And so, thank you so much. Thanks for the gift and thank you all so much for your service.

I'm going to leave you with this: The most valuable thing I ever learned in my life was that love was not a feeling, it was a choice. It was a decision to do what was truly best for someone else without regard for yourself. It's what you do. And that love's greatest enemy is fear. So, love always does what's best for others without regard for itself, and fear will do what's best for itself without regard for others. And so, I encourage you to keep living a loving life. You're an example for our nation, and we love you. God bless you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The Chair recognizes Robert Newman of Indiana, chairman of the Convention Committee on Internal Affairs, for the purpose of making a report.

Report: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs
Robert E. Newman, Indiana, Chairman

Commander, Delegates, National Officers, and friends, we had 51 delegates who attended the Internal Affairs Convention Committee meeting and a quorum was declared. Robert E. Newman (IN) was elected chairman and John F. Debisschop, III (CT) was elected secretary for the purpose of reporting to the Convention.

The Internal Affairs Convention Committee acted on two motions. It was regularly moved, seconded and carried that the committee chairman and secretary be authorized to accept and sign the report of the Internal Affairs Convention Committee on behalf of its delegates.

It was also regularly moved, seconded and carried that the chairman and secretary may make technical corrections to the resolutions reported out of this committee to ensure proper wording and form without changing the substance or meaning of the resolutions.

The committee considered eight resolutions that originated from the Departments of the American Legion. Of these, one was approved, one was consolidated, two were referred and four were received and recorded.

The following resolution was recommended for approval:

Recommended for Approval

Resolution No. 47: Commendation of the Bedford Boys Tribute Center

Origin: Virginia

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Internal Affairs

WHEREAS, The American Legion's value principles include:

- the principle of honoring military service,
- the principle of educating new generations of Americans, and
- the principle of paying respect for past military sacrifices to ensure they are never forgotten by new generations; and

WHEREAS, World War II was one of the most challenging wars for America; and

WHEREAS, D-Day, June 6, 1944, was a watershed event in the course of Allied victory in World War II; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion has, by resolution, recognized and supported the National D-Day Memorial, located in Bedford, Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Bedford County, Virginia, was the home of the famed Bedford Boys, Company A, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, which was deployed in the first wave onto Omaha Beach on D-Day (Company A was and continues to be a National Guard unit based in Bedford); and

WHEREAS, Company A, which on D-Day had a nucleus of 38 men from Bedford County as part of its over 200-man complement, suffered the loss of 19 men from Bedford County on D-Day, which with the loss on one other Bedford County man from a sister company for a total loss of 20 men from the Bedford community, makes Bedford County's loss of 20 men the highest loss per capita on D-Day of any community in America; and

WHEREAS, The Bedford Boys Tribute Center is a specialized, historical education center, with charitable education status, opened in 2019 to memorialize the WWII Bedford Boys of Company and to educate the public, both present and new generations, on the sacrifice of the Bedford Boys and the love and esteem in which they have been held by their families and the Bedford community; and

WHEREAS, The Bedford Boys Tribute Center, located in what was the Bedford drug store which housed the Western Union terminal where the messages came to Bedford in WWII reporting the deaths and injuries of Bedford service members, is open to the public

seven days a week and is home to the largest and most comprehensive collection of the personal effects of the Bedford Boys, along with other displays of WWII and a classroom and auditorium; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023 That The American Legion recognizes the Bedford Boys Tribute Center for making a meaningful contribution to the honoring and remembering of the Bedford Boys of Company A and preserving for the education of present and new generations the sacrifices these men made on D-Day.

Consolidated with Resolution No. 32 (MX)

Resolution No: 27 (NM): Change name of the Department of Mexico to the Department of Latin America.

Referred to the Standing Internal Affairs Commission

Resolution No: 29 (IA): Loose-Leaf Operational Manuals

Resolution No: 32 (MX): Change name of the Department of Mexico to the Department of Latin America

Received and Recorded

Resolution No: 5 (OR): Designate U.S. Highway 20 as the National Medal of Honor Highway.

Resolution No. 24 (SD): Endorsement of Casey Hanson for National Commander of the Sons of the American Legion

Resolution No. 33 (ID): Endorsement of Robert Skinner for National Vice Commander.

Resolution No: 34 (ID): Endorsement of James Blanton for National Chaplain

At this time, the 2023 National American Legion College selectees will be displayed on the Screens. After convention, each Department will receive written correspondence on these selections.

Commander, thank you for allowing me the time to make this report, and as a duly elected and registered delegate from the Department of Indiana, I move for the adoption of this report. ...*Second*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Any discussion? Hearing none, all those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed. The report of Internal Affairs is adopted.

America is blessed to have so many amazing and dedicated police officers and firefighters. Their split-second decisions can mean life or death and often invite intense scrutiny. Bad officers dominate news coverage, while good officers are often not given the same attention nor the recognition that they deserve. These next two awards are given to first responders who represent the best of the best.

Our 2023 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year is a lifesaver. An officer with the Crete, Nebraska Police Department, she was notified of an accident at a local park. Upon discovering an injured teenager, she immediately applied a tourniquet to the victim's arm, stopping massive bleeding. Unknown at the time was that a major artery had been torn and if not for her quick actions, the teenager would have bled out. A graduate of Midland University in Freemont, Nebraska, she has served her department as a field training officer, canine handler and senior patrol officer. Please welcome, our National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year, Patrol Officer Audrey Arbuckle. (*Applause*)

ANNOUNCER: This is to certify that The American Legion has bestowed the title of National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year upon Audrey Arbuckle for outstanding selfless service over and above normal duties through heroic acts, community service and professional achievement thereby exemplifying the meaning of the phrase: America's

Finest. You reflect great credit upon yourself, the Crete Police Department and law enforcement officers everywhere.

**Presentation: 2023 National Law Enforcement Officer of Year
Patrol Officer Audrey Arbuckle, Crete Police Department, Crete, Nebraska**

Thank you, everybody, so much. Thank you, Commander Troiola. My name is Officer Audrey Arbuckle. I want to say thank you to The American Legion, to the Crete Post in Crete, Nebraska, to the Auxiliary, Legion, as well as the Sons of The American Legion. I'm very humbled. It's been amazing to see the support of law enforcement from this end of it. I want to say thank you to my agency as a whole who supports officers in their continued excellence. I believe this award is a great representation of every single officer that I work for, not only in Crete but the state of Nebraska and across the United States. Thank you so much. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our next award winner is a U.S. Navy veteran, active Legionnaire and a 2006 graduate of American Legion National College. Today, he is being recognized for his dedicated service as a firefighter with the Naugatuck, Connecticut Fire Department. During his 16 years of service to his department, he filled roles as a firefighter I and II, fire officer III, health & safety officer, tanker operator, vehicle & machinery rescue technician and EMT, just to name a few. He has also served as a scout leader for his four sons, and is himself, an Eagle Scout. Please welcome our 2023 National Firefighter of the Year, Firefighter John DeBisschop. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: This is to certify that The American Legion has bestowed the title of National Firefighter of the Year upon John DeBisschop III for outstanding selfless service over and above normal duties through community service and professional achievement thereby exemplifying the meaning of the phrase: America's Bravest. You reflect great credit upon yourself, the Naugatuck Fire Department and firefighters everywhere.

**2023 National Firefighter of Year
John DeBisschop III, Naugatuck Fire Department, Naugatuck, Connecticut**

Commander Troiola, Adjutant Wheeler, national officers, distinguished guests and delegates to the 104th National Convention, I stand before you both honored and humbled to have been selected as the 2023 National American Legion Firefighter of the Year. On this stage, I now have the responsibility of representing approximately 1.2 million brother and sister firefighters throughout the United States. Only a little bit of pressure.

I must begin by thanking Naugatuck Post 17, the Department of Connecticut, The American Legion national organization for selecting me for this great honor. I also have to thank the firefighters and officers of the Naugatuck Fire Department, especially my crew on the A shift, who frequently get brought along to many of my various activities as well as Fire Chief Paul Russell, who greatly supported this nomination.

I've been a member of the first responder community for over 30 years. Got my start while still in high school, and I became a certified EMT as a member of the explorer post, what was then the Naugatuck Volunteer Ambulance Corps. This was followed by four years in the Navy as a damage controlman. After receiving my honorable discharge, I was fortunate enough to be hired first by the city of Waterbury Fire Department, before I left after seven years to accept a position in my hometown, Naugatuck Fire Department, where I spent the past 18 years. I'm also a 30-year member of The American Legion. *(Applause)*

There are many similarities between the first responder community and the veteran community. This is probably because there's so much crossover between the two. While just six percent of the U.S. population has served in the military, veterans make up 10 percent of EMTs, 19 percent of firefighters and 25 percent of police officers, according to a 2015 Department of Labor survey. Unfortunately, one of the most notable similarities

between veterans and first responders is in our mental health and suicide crisis.

In a June 2022 U.S.A. Today article about first responder suicide rates, researcher Dr. Hanna Shau Bar Nissim said the following. "Like many who encounter trauma in their line of work, first responders can struggle with dropping work from their minds when they get home. These characteristics and traits in the role don't take away when they take off the uniform. Being heroic, being brave, identifying mental health as a sign of weakness, it's something that stays with them even as they take off the uniform." She could easily have been making that comment about our military servicemembers and veterans.

My community saw this firsthand in 2017 when one of our local police officers, who was also an Army veteran, died by suicide. I worry about this now more than ever since one of my sons has followed in my footsteps, first into military service as a medic with the Connecticut Army National Guard and now as a career firefighter paramedic.

In his brief time in the military and as a first responder, he's already experienced several calls which will undoubtedly remain with him forever. However, I'm comforted to know that organizations are working to destigmatize seeking help for mental health concerns, which is why initiatives such as The American Legion's "Be the One" are so very important to keep more of my fellow first responders and our fellow veterans from becoming statistics.

I'll get off my soapbox now and finish with some final acknowledgments. None of this would have been possible without the support of my family. My fire chief has dubbed my family "Team DeBisschop" because in whatever I'm doing some or all of my family is alongside me.

My parents, John and Joyce, made the trip down here and are a physical symbol of the support that my family constantly provides for me. My parents and my sister, Rev. Jennifer Whipple, have always been by my side to lend an ear or lend a hand.

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the contributions of my own family, my children, James, Jeff, Jack and JJ, and my wife, JoAnn. They're the ones that sometimes have to look at pictures to remember what dad looks like when I'm bouncing between work and various meetings or events. Truly, JoAnn should be recognized right here next to me because, for everything I do, she has some sort of hand in it. Whether it's to help planning, organizing or shopping I wouldn't be able to do any of it without her assistance.

Thank you again for this great honor. I look forward to many more years serving alongside you as fellow veterans strengthening America. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Since The American Legion is the biggest, and in my opinion best, veterans organization in the country, it only makes sense that we are represented by the biggest names and best team in the INDYCAR Series.

Team owner Chip Ganassi is himself a former racer and a member of the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America. He is the first team owner in history to have won the Indianapolis 500, the Daytona 500, the Brickyard 400, the Rolex 24 at Daytona, the 12 Hours of Sebring and the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Overall, his teams have won 21 championships since 1990. We are proud to have his team driving The American Legion Honda this year. One of Chip's drivers, Alex Palou, is once again dominating the series this year.

Joining Chip Ganassi for today's discussion is another giant in the race industry, J. Douglas Boles. A Butler University graduate with a law degree from Indiana University, he started his career as director of governmental and corporate affairs for Indianapolis Mayor Steve Goldsmith. He was a founding partner of Panther Racing, which won 15 races and two INDYCAR championships. In 2013, he was named president of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Corporation and is responsible for its daily operations and world-class racing events.

Today, Chip and Doug are joined by an NBC sports pit reporter for the NASCAR Cup, INDYCAR Series and Xfinity Series. Marty Snider previously worked on assignments for Football Night in America and the 2008 Beijing Olympics. He co-

produced HBO's Emmy-winning series "24/7." Ladies and gentlemen let's welcome Chip Ganassi, Doug Boles and Marty Snider. ... *The delegation viewed a video. (Applause)*

**Fireside Chat with Chip Ganassi Racing
Chip Ganassi, Doug Boles, Marty Snider**

MARTY SNIDER: Very cool. Hi, everyone. It's great to be here. It's an honor to be here. Marty Snider from NBC Sports, along with Chip Ganassi, the team owner at Ganassi Racing, and Doug Boles, president of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Chip, it was so cool to watch you watch that. It was almost as if you were getting emotional as you watched not only all the tributes to the "Be the One" program but also watching your race team's success this year. It is emotional, isn't it, when you're involved with an organization like The American Legion?

CHIP GANASSI: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here. I said a year ago at this conference what an honor it was for me to represent the Legion and take them to the races and help understand what "Be the One" was all about. And when you have success like we've had, it means that much more.

You know, I can't tell you how many veterans I've met at these events and how many are at the kiosks, the mobile kiosks, talking about "Be the One" and obviously having the performance on the track is my job, but seeing the effect of that is something very special in any sponsor relationship. And to physically see it with your eyes is incredible, to see the impact this program's having.

MARTY SNIDER: And Doug, a lot of what we showed there with our broadcast, Mike Tirico was from the Indianapolis 500, I go back to the preface of the Indianapolis 500, and the presence felt there from not only from the military, the veterans as well, it's incredible. That's one of the most overwhelming days of the year. Describe for the folks in the audience here who maybe aren't there for the Indy 500, what that day and morning is like.

DOUG BOLES: Thanks for asking the question, and a little where Chip was on the importance of the sponsorship side. We're 270 days away from the 108th running of the Indianapolis 500, which means we're 271 days away from Memorial Day. And really from the beginning of the Indy 500 in 1911, when it was called Decoration Day, before we really had Memorial Day, we were there to celebrate the men and women who served the country. And more importantly, on Memorial Day weekend, it's to remind ourselves that the sacrifice that the men and women of this country have made to keep us free is the ultimate sacrifice and that is what Memorial Day is about.

When you can connect somebody like The American Legion with an Indy 500 who has roots in the history of our military in supporting those men and women, and with a winning team like Chip Ganassi and you can celebrate like that, it's more than a sponsorship, it really elevates what that weekend is supposed do to and it's to thank you men and women who have served our country but, more importantly, remind everybody that watches the Indy 500, that we don't get to watch the Indy 500 without those military men and women who have served and those who are currently serving and, more importantly, supporting those men and women, the families who have lost men and women fighting for our country.

And it really all just ties together on that weekend, and the most important part of the day, he might think it's drinking a bottle of milk in Victory Lane. At the end of the day, it's that military march that happens with a flyover, reminding the 330,000 people on the grounds that they don't get to do it without all of you who served our country. *(Applause)*

MARTY SNIDER: To that point, Chip, it's more than just a sponsorship, it's a partnership, and it's about bringing awareness to "Be the One," that sustains this program for an entire year.

CHIP GANASSI: Marty, I've been in racing for over 30 years, and I've never been involved in a program that touches so many people. Every city we go to throughout the

country, you know, we'll go by a post. Our team goes by the post and tells us what's going on there, connects with what we're doing at the racetrack. But more importantly than that, just to have these veterans come up and just talk, and they know they can come up to me anytime and just start talking about what the program's about, where they're from, where we're from, what they did, how they served, where they served and what it meant to serve.

It's not your normal sponsorship where you have a product and we're trying to sell beers or retail goods or cars or something. It's a program that touches people and touches so many honorable people.

MARTY SNIDER: And I think, I'll brag on you, Doug, you're feet on the ground all the time at the racetrack. Are you amazed at how many veterans you run into when you're walking around the track, whether it be a race day at Indianapolis where there's 300,000 people there or it could be a practice day where there's a couple thousand people there? Are you amazed at the veterans that you run into that recognize this program and it's a touchpoint.

DOUG BOLES: Especially this year. I think people have really seen the program, what it does, the activation at all the races, and how you're taking care of those veterans that are at the racetrack, when they walk up and they get a free bottle of water, have somebody to help them with some of the issues they've got, works through that, doing that at the racetrack.

We get a ton of veterans that come to all of the INDYCAR races, and in particular the Indy 500. I am amazed, but I think it fits into the DNA of what Chip's all about and what our series is all about and The American Legion is all about.

We've got American Legion Post 500 is literally right outside, behind the Yard of Bricks, called 500, which is really cool. So, we partner with them throughout the year, and then when you go on the road and you've got The American Legion activation on the road, it really does make a difference because there are so many veterans who not just watch but are at the racetracks.

MARTY SNIDER: Let's talk about some fun stuff. I think you might be in the midst of a championship battle, Mr. Ganassi. Your driver and the driver for The American Legion, Alex Palou, you saw there earlier, has a 74-point lead over your other driver, Scott Dixon. So, you're in a pretty good spot to win a championship here in about two weeks.

CHIP GANASSI: Thanks, Marty. We are in a good spot to win the championship, ladies and gentlemen. And I think it's going to be the 10 car. I think it's going to be The American Legion car. *(Applause)*

And I was watching that video earlier, and I think to myself, you know, there were no other cars in the video. *(Laughter)*

I don't want you to think we're not out there racing anybody. We're racing 25, 30 other cars, week in, week out. It's just that American Legion is so damn far ahead of everyone else, there's no one else on the TV. And, oftentimes, they don't even stay with our car because it's so far in the lead that there's no action. They want to go back where the action is. So, whoever put that video together, find some other cars, next time, you know. We are actually racing other cars, believe me.

MARTY SNIDER: But to that point, have you ever seen a streak like Alex went on in The American Legion car earlier this year, winning four in a row? He was untouchable for a stretch of time. I don't know that I've ever seen a month like that with that much success and that dominant, to that point it was hard to find other cars to put in that video.

CHIP GANASSI: Right. And the guy is just so special. And every once in a while you run into one of these athletes that, look, at this level of sports, they're all good. They're all good. But every once in a while, one of these athletes come along that's just in that last little, he's got that last little one or two percent that no one else has. And Alex is one of those. You can be very proud of that.

MARTY SNIDER: And so, we watched pole day there for the Indianapolis 500. Is there a more nerve-racking day, Doug, on the schedule than pole day? I know the owner

thinks there is but is there? It takes a lot of guts to do 240 miles an hour around the speedway, which is what The American Legion driver does.

DOUG BOLES: I don't think people understand that. You watch it on TV. You don't see how on edge those cars are. To win the pole at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, you have to be perfect for 10 miles and you have to be totally on the edge, just a millisecond from being over the edge and in the fence.

And that qualifying day, what I do on qualifying day, for the very end, I sit in the grandstands with the fans, and when Alex went out and did his run, the entire place exploded with excitement because they know how much of an edge that that car was put on and how Alex does have that one or two percent that just allows him to go so much faster. It was the second-fastest qualifying run in the history of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The track record was set with a car long ago with a whole bunch more horsepower and a whole bunch more downforce. In a lot of ways, that American Legion run by Alex Palou and Chip Ganassi was maybe the best qualifying run in our 107 runnings of Indy 500. It was pretty special. (*Applause*)

CHIP GANASSI: I just want to go back one step, ladies and gentlemen, to what Doug said. And I want everyone to understand this. Qualifying at Indianapolis is 10 miles. Okay. It's four laps at two and a half miles per lap. And it's the average of those four laps, your average speed.

Now, I want each of you to think about, where is ten miles from your home? Think about, in your mind, think about where ten miles is. Okay. And over that ten-mile distance, with Alex, calculating his speed versus the second-place speed, he got to the finish line 18 inches ahead of second place. 18 inches. After 10 miles. That's how close it is. When they say we're fighting for every little inch, believe me, we are.

MARTY SNIDER: You think about that, Doug, that's not lifting. That's staying in the gas. That's going into the corner at 240 miles an hour and saying, yeah, I'm going to stay wide open, why not? That's the amount of bravery it takes to qualify at Indianapolis on the pole.

DOUG BOLES: It takes bravery and also takes teamwork and trust, which you all are about. You understand teamwork and trust. Chip has built a group of people, you have a driver that has to drive the car. He's got engineers and mechanics who say, okay, we're going to take a little of these things off the car that make it feel more comfortable for you, but it's going to make it faster. Trust us, it's going to be fine. And Alex has to get in that car and believe that the team behind him that put that car together is going to do what they said.

That starts at the top. You know it. You've been with commanders and folks, when you trust the people at the top you can get a lot done, and it really starts with Chip and his team. It wasn't just the bravery of Alex, it's the team and together being able to convince Alex that what we've done to your car is going to make you super-fast and you're going to be fine, just hang it out there. The kid is special.

MARTY SNIDER: To that point, Chip, let's talk about championships. You've won six with Scott Dixon. On the cusp of winning your second with The American Legion team and Alex Palou. What does that teamwork take to win a championship in INDYCAR? Obviously, you guys at Chip Ganassi Racing, clearly have that down pat to some extent. What's the teamwork level look like on the sport side and in an INDYCAR team?

CHIP GANASSI: Thanks, Marty. I think, ladies and gentlemen, I think the important thing you need to understand is there are probably 25 people whose sole job is to work on The American Legion car. Twenty-five people on that car. That doesn't count engineers that are feeding information. Probably another 10 to 12 engineers. Another three or four managers. And these people all come together for two or three hours on Sunday, and we get to go through practice, qualifying, pit stops, getting through the first lap. Getting into a rhythm. Getting into a cadence, if you will, throughout that race.

Understanding, in every race there are different strategies. You hear about strategy a lot in a race. And in every race, you know, there's a strategy for every single car out there

that could win. And right now, we're in a situation, in INDYCAR racing, where 15 or 16 cars can win the race. And you have to make sure your strategy is the one that's going to get you to winner's circle first. It takes every one of those people involved to make that happen.

Yes, Alex gets all the accolades as the driver, but we have people doing pit stops. People putting the car together. People building the engines. Pressuring the tires. The tires are within a tenth of a pound of air pressure. They're sensitive to a tenth of a pound of air pressure. We're constantly monitoring the tire pressure during a weekend just because of the air temperature outside, just the ambient temperature can change the pressure in the tires. So, we're down to the small things that make a big difference in this sport.

MARTY SNIDER: Back in the shop, in Indianapolis, what do the next two weeks look like as, in essence, you have The American Legion team kind of in command of the championship, but you have the master, Scott Dixon, with six championships chasing him. That's an internal battle. So, what does that look like inside the walls of Chip Ganassi Racing over the next two weeks?

CHIP GANASSI: We all know that, first of all, Alex has a big lead. So that's almost insurmountable, number one. But number two, inside our building, it's open book. Everybody works with all the information of everybody else. So, nobody sits there and plays God and says you're in front of him or you're going to win and you're not going to win. We don't do that. We like to say we don't have No. 1 drivers and a No. 2 driver. We have all No. 1s. But the fact of the matter is, Alex has built a lead that's pretty much insurmountable.

MARTY SNIDER: He's built that insurmountable lead because of his success this year. I want to go back to the teamwork thing from your side, Doug. How does Indianapolis Motor Speedway get ready to host 350,000 people in one day, the largest sporting event in the world, which The American Legion team gets to play in, obviously, with Alex Palou, but how does the IMS group get ready to host 350,000 people in one day?

DOUG BOLES: Just like every other business, it's a full-time job. The question I get more than any is, what do you do the rest of the year? When the Indy 500 is over, do you go on vacation?

We've got about 200 full-time employees. The campus is a thousand-acre campus. We start planning next year's Indy 500 basically 18 months ago. So, we are already planning the 108th running as well as starting to plan the 109th running. It's a significant amount of people. On race day itself, there are a little over 10,000 people that literally are working for the Indianapolis Motor Speedway to make sure we can execute that event.

It's really an issue of managing the people, making sure you have the right people in the right spots. Like Chip said, you want to make sure everybody has all the information so they can help execute those programs. We have done it 107 times, so that's helpful. A lot of things are there.

It takes more than just our people. If you've come to the Indy 500 before, you know traffic can be a problem. So you work with all the law enforcement and federal agencies and working with the airport because they're bringing airplanes, people and guests that come in, and it's even beyond our gates that we have to start planning to make sure that when you leave your house to come to the Indy 500, it's as smooth as possible until you get back to your home at your house, wherever you started from.

MARTY SNIDER: One of the great things about this convention is there's people from all over the country here, Doug. There are races all over the country. And they may watch their car, go, why are we involved? Tell them why they should try and come to an INDYCAR race. What will the experience be like at any track around the country? Still two races left this year, Portland and Laguna Seca in California.

DOUG BOLES: So, the NTT INDYCAR SERIES, The American Legion is our official charity partner. We do run 17 races a year. Biggest one, obviously, is the Indy 500. We run a couple other races at Indy. But everything else is outside and around the country.

Chip will be leaving for Portland soon, they're racing in Portland this weekend, and then they go to California to end the season.

The reason you should come is not just for the racing, especially if you're in The American Legion, you should come see how your activation works and how it makes a difference every day at the tracks open with veterans who come through. Many of them are surprised when they see a "Be the One" and American Legion activation there and walk in and begin to figure out all of the services that they can take advantage of, or when they're just there, if they don't need a service, just a bottle of water and a thank you from our fans. And as you walk around, especially if you have a hat on that says you're a veteran, you will be surprised at how our fans and our people that come to our races understand we don't get to do it without each of you.

But I would encourage you to come. Come watch Alex Palou win a championship. I know he said "I think." I will tell you, Alex Palou is going to win the INDYCAR championship here by the end of the year, and you guys can celebrate that. So that will be really cool. *(Applause)*

The other thing, come and watch how your activation works, how that activation at racetracks is truly making a difference. It's fascinating to sit and watch and watch the smiles of people when they see it and then to watch the smiles of people when they have a chance to interact and understand some of the veteran services that are available to them. It really is a special moment to see at the INDYCAR races.

CHIP GANASSI: And what Doug said about understanding the veterans services that are available to them. I can't tell you, ladies and gentlemen, how many people come up to me that I know, and I've been in this sport 30 plus years, I can't tell you how many people come up to me and say, hey, by the way, I'm a veteran, can I have one of those hats? Can I get one of those hats?

And this is really special what the Legion's doing, and I never knew they cared about us, and so it's something that is somewhat of a surprise to a lot of veterans, that people that are in the everyday life of motor racing, suddenly they're coming up to me, and I say, I didn't know that, Joe. I didn't know you were, they say, oh, yeah. That's the kind of impact the program has. It's bringing people out and talking about it that otherwise had never been.

MARTY SNIDER: And to that point, it's way more than a logo on the car, right? Like you've got a local post. Talk about all the little things that happen with the program beyond it just being, Chip, a logo on the car.

CHIP GANASSI: We all have that stereotype in our head of what the local post is, but we're talking now about having a post just for people in the sport and the people that are there week in, week out. Let's have that traveling post so veterans can come at the track and be at a post at the same time and interact with the people in the sport. *(Applause)*

MARTY SNIDER: I love that. A traveling post. That's a good way to put it, isn't it, Doug? It's amazing how active the activation is at the track. You commented on that as well.

DOUG BOLES: When I first saw it at the first time at St. Pete, every day I went over and just watched, watched the interaction of the fans who came in, surprised to see it there and the excitement of just connecting with somebody and talking. It really is. You guys have done a really effective job of helping talk about "Be the One," helping reach out to veterans, thank them, but reach out to them and give them that beginning opportunity to start talking about the things that they need.

So, it's been one of my more favorite activations to see throughout the year. And it's a great partnership, for me, obviously, because it connects really well with Memorial Day weekend and all of you who have served our country and connecting that together. It's really, really powerful.

MARTY SNIDER: All right. How are you going to be the next two weeks? Do you get nervous before races still, 30 years, do you still get nervous when there's a lot on the line like a championship?

CHIP GANASSI: You know, every one of these races is big. I have to tell you, though, knowing that one of our two cars is going to win the championship takes a lot of weight off my shoulders, and I was pretty nervous, and I felt a little bit of weight off of my shoulders after this last weekend. And so, both cars extended their lead. So, I look forward to it. I look forward to the last couple of races, ladies and gentlemen, and I look forward to seeing you at a race sometime soon. Please come join us.

MARTY SNIDER: Give them real quick some insight into Alex as a person. Former coffee shop owner. Young man who worked hard to get to this point.

CHIP GANASSI: Worked very, very hard. You probably have seen his name in the press. A lot of teams chase him around. But he wants to be on our team. He's a great young man from Spain. He's just married this summer. His wife's pregnant. They're going to have a child now. And they want to make the United States their home. And we're very fortunate to have him on our team.

MARTY SNIDER: Are you excited to get to Portland and get to Laguna?

CHIP GANASSI: I'm excited to go win another championship and win one for the Legion. *(Applause)*

MARTY SNIDER: There you go. Chip Ganassi, everyone and Doug Boles, president of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. You're not done, by the way. I don't know if you know this, but you have to walk up on stage now. Yes, I believe you're getting some sort of an award, Mr. Ganassi. Chip Ganassi, president of Chip Ganassi Racing, and Doug Boles, president of Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Thank you, guys.

Presentation: The American Legion Patriot Award

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you, Gentlemen. Let's give another round of applause for our panelists. *(Applause)*

I now call on Chip Ganassi to join me at the lectern so I can make a special presentation. As Chip is making his way to the stage, I'd like to say a few additional words about him. If you ever watched a single professional auto race, you understand the importance of sponsorships and selling products. You could tell that Chip is passionate about "Be the One" much more so than he would be about selling merchandise. When he signed our partnership agreement in December, he said, quote, "We are humbled to continue supporting The American Legion's mission in ending veteran suicide. We will do absolutely everything we can to help veterans gets the help they need while raising public awareness of "Be the One."

We are not just a client or business partner to Chip. It is personal for him. His father was a World War II veteran and Chip is a member of the Sons of The American Legion. *(Applause)*

It is my pleasure to recognize his dedication by presenting him with an American Legion Patriot Award. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: The Patriot Award presented to Chip Ganassi Racing for its dedication in promoting the values of The American Legion through a strategic partnership, which has resulted in new members and wide exposure of the nation's largest veterans organization to mass audiences. The standing of Chip Ganassi Racing in motorsports is legendary. Chip Ganassi is the first team owner in history to have won the Indianapolis 500, the Daytona 500, the Brickyard 400, the Rolex 24 at Daytona, the 12 Hours of Sebring and the 24 Hours of Le Mans collectively.

Most importantly raising awareness of The American Legion "Be the One" initiative, Chip Ganassi Racing has elevated the discussion of veterans suicide and has likely saved lives. Personal contributions from the owner and team members combined with the increase in our other corporate partnerships and merchandising revenue has enhanced The American Legion's ability to serve veterans. On behalf of the more than 2 million members of the American Legion Family, thank you for your patriotism and service to

America. Presented this 30th day of August, 2023, at the 104th National Convention.

CHIP GANASSI: As the commander said, this goes way beyond a sponsorship for me. It is personal. My father drove a tank in the 3rd Infantry. And he went with me to, when you heard up there that we raced in France, he went with me up to Normandy. Just to understand all the stories from that place, and it really brought home the meaning of what the Legion means and what the Legion's about. And I just want to say from a personal point of view thank you very much. I'm honored. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Tomorrow morning we'll have the honor of inducting new members into The American Legion 1919 Society. These are the top donors to the Veterans & Children Foundation. They make an incredible difference in improving the lives of veterans, young people and their families. Right now, I'd like to recognize those who have already been inducted into the 1919 Society. Would our platinum donors, those who have given \$10,000 or more to this outstanding program, please stand and be recognized. *(Applause)*

Please remain standing as I ask all gold 1919 Society members to also stand. These generous people have given \$5,000 or more to be part of this elite group. *(Applause)*

Now would all silver and bronze 1919 Society members also join in by standing. Ladies and gentlemen let's give every one of our 1919 Society members another hearty round of applause. *(Applause)*

So many of the great things that The American Legion is able to accomplish is because of the generosity of our donors. Our booth is still open in the back of this hall if you want to learn more about the 1919 Society and how you can be part of it. Thank you. The Chair recognizes James LaCoursiere of Connecticut, chairman of the Convention Committee on Legislation, for the purposes of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Legislation
James A. LaCoursiere, Jr., Connecticut, Chairman**

Good morning, Commander Troiola, Adjutant Wheeler, Past National Commanders, Distinguished Guests, Legionnaires, and my friends. I'm truly honored to stand before you on the stage of the 104th National Convention.

The National Convention Committee on Legislation met on Sunday, August 27, 2023, at the Charlotte Convention Center, Room 217.

There were 44 delegates to the Committee present, and the Legislative Council Chairman, Rick Oertel from the Department of Virginia. Following the preliminary activities to officially organize the committee, the Chairman and Secretary were duly elected.

I, Chairman Lacoursiere, a delegate from the Department of Connecticut, was elected Chairman following a motion from Al Richards, a delegate from the Department of Wisconsin. Michael Taylor, a delegate from the Department of Oklahoma, was elected Secretary following a motion from Devell Durham, a delegate from the Department of North Carolina.

There was no business to discussed whatsoever. The Legislative Convention Committee received no resolutions for consideration.

A motion by Devell Durham, a delegate from the Department of North Carolina, was initiated to authorize the Chairman and Secretary to make technical correction to the committee report, as necessary and appropriate.

This motion was unanimously approved and adopted by the Legislative Convention Committee. A motion by Juan A. Cruz-Rodriguez, a delegate from the Department of Puerto Rico, was initiated to authorize the Chairman and Secretary to sign the report on behalf of the Convention Committee on Legislation. This motion was unanimously approved and adopted by the Legislative Convention Committee. National Commander

Troiola, as a duly authorized Delegate to this Convention from the Department of Connecticut, I move for the adoption of this report. ...*Second.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Any discussion? Hearing none, all those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? The report of Legislation is adopted.

I call on Past National Commander Paul E. Dillard of Texas to present the Plaque of Appreciation to National Convention Corporation of Wisconsin Vice President Robert Batte, for the outstanding job that Wisconsin did in hosting the 2022 Convention in Milwaukee.

**Presentation: Plaque to the City Milwaukee
Paul E. Dillard, Texas, Past National Commander**

Thank you commander. Good morning Legionnaires from all over the country and around the globe. It's really a pleasure of mine this morning to present the plaque to Wisconsin and receiving it will be the department vice president of the National Convention Corporation, Bob Batte. Bob, would you come up? We want to thank Wisconsin for their great hospitality and all your volunteers for the work and hours you put in to put on such a great convention, and I really enjoyed it because a few days later I got to go home. And we do want to let you know that we look forward to coming again whenever you all so desire to ask us and go through the process. But we want to present this plaque so you can take it back.

BOB BATTE: Good morning, Commander Troiola and national officers and distinguished guests, fellow Legionnaires. On behalf of the City of Milwaukee, the Department of Wisconsin National Convention Corporation and corporation President Ted Demicci, who was unable to be here this morning, and all the wonderful Wisconsin Legionnaires who made the 103rd American Legion National Convention a huge success, I am, therefore, honored to accept this accolade. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

Presentation: Department Membership Awards

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: It is now time for the membership awards. The departments and individuals who will be joining me on stage are being recognized today for their outstanding membership efforts for the 2023 membership year.

Membership is the lifeblood of our great organization, and our members define who we are and what we stand for on a daily basis. We are The American Legion, made up of veterans, by veterans, and for veterans. We have a solemn responsibility to be the one and extend a helping hand and embrace our fellow veterans. Through our comradeship and devotion to mutual helpfulness, they will become aware of who we are and what we do.

This past year, I set a recruiting goal of 75,000 new members at the post level. We met this challenge head on. We adapted. We overcame and exceeded this goal. As we all know, recruiting brings in fresh talent with bold ideas and a fun spirit. It is about growing an organization that is worth belonging to and when we recruit new members, we are communicating the organization's promise of what we can do for them. With that being said, I would like for all the Gold, Silver, and Bronze Brigade recruiters to please stand up. These men and women recruited over 5,000 members into our organization. (*Applause*)

Thank you on a job well done! Now retention is every bit as important as recruiting. When we retain new and existing members, we are delivering on the promise we made when we recruited them. Retaining members is easy when we show them the value of their membership. Retention is a measure of effective leadership.

When we are visible in the communities we serve, when we showcase our great programs, when we fulfill our promise of taking care of veterans, then and only then, will our members stay and new veterans join us. This is why personal contact is critical. We have a great message, and it must be communicated.

Now, more than ever, it is so important to conduct Buddy Checks. We need to reach out to every member to see how they are doing and if there is anything we can do to help. It is our sacred duty to take care of our fellow veterans. Posts with active Buddy Check programs experience growth. Just ask the Department of Puerto Rico. This is the second year in a row they grew their department by conducting Buddy Checks.

Our members need to know The American Legion has their back and that we care. So, this is my call to action to each one of you, let's grow our membership so we can continue to be an asset to our communities. Now let's recognize all the departments on stage and a few individuals for their outstanding efforts in membership this year.

...National Vice Commander Wahus assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER WAHUS: The first award being presented for the 2023 membership year is the 100 percent membership award for exceeding the membership goal. Two departments exceeded their goal for the 2023 membership year. A shadow box is being presented to the following departments: Department of Puerto Rico and the Department of Mexico. Congratulations to these departments on exceeding their membership goal. This is a great accomplishment. *(Applause)*

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER ROSARIO (PR): Good morning, everyone. My name is Carmen Rosario. I'm the department commander for the Department of Puerto Rico. They asked me to say a couple of words. I just want to emphasize the importance of the Buddy Checks. That's how we've been able to achieve our goals, and also we have been able to reach out to this younger generation by actually being mentors to them, and also we've been working with the social media and we've been working with the TV stations, and we have a radio station in Puerto Rico every Saturday where we get the message out to all those veterans in Puerto Rico and let them know what's happening. So also, I'm encouraging everybody that they should look into social media because that's how we're going to be able to bring this younger generation on board. And we're going for our third year this time. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER WAHUS: The next award being presented is the Department Commander of the Year Award. This award is given to any department commander who meets or exceeds their 100 percent goal by the May target date. This award is being presented to the following department commanders: Carmen I. Rosario, Department of Puerto Rico; Peter P. Cruz, Department of Mexico.

The next award being presented is the Culture of Growth Award. This award recognizes departments for their hard work and dedication to growing their departments over the previous year. These outstanding accomplishments are a testament to the motivation of their members and their ability to implement their strategic plan. By implementing and working the five priorities within the strategic plan, these departments saw their membership growth over the last year. These departments are receiving a Culture of Growth plaque. They're awarded to the: the Department of Puerto Rico, the Department of Mexico, the Department of Alabama and the Department of Tennessee. Even though these departments did not receive 100 percent for the year, they did grow their departments. Congratulations, commanders. Your members should take pride in knowing their hard work paid off this year.

The All-Target Date Award is given to those departments who meet every target date throughout the year. This year the Department of Puerto Rico and the Department of Mexico met every target date. They are being presented a plaque and a \$1,000 check.

In 2019, the Membership & Post Activities Committee created the Second Century All-Time High Award. This award established a new baseline on membership in our second century of existence. For the first time we have two winners. This plaque is being presented for the first time to the Department of Alaska and for the second time to the Department of Mexico. Congratulations on a job well done.

The Henry D. Lindsley Trophy is awarded to those departments who by March 31 have attained the highest percentage of membership over its previous year. This year the Henry D. Lindsley Trophy Award is presented to: Department of Puerto Rico Please. Help

me in congratulating this fine department!

The Jerry L. Hedrick Membership Award is presented to those departments outside the 50 state departments and District of Columbia who, by March 31, have attained the percentage of membership over its previous year. Final membership this year, the Jerry L. Hedrick Membership Award is presented to: the Department of Puerto Rico. Congratulations.

The O.L. Bodenhamer Trophy is presented to the department who led The American Legion in traditional membership for the Flag Day report of June 14 and is limited to the 52 departments within the United States, including the Departments of D.C. and Puerto Rico. This plaque is being presented to the Department of Puerto Rico. Don't go too far, Team Puerto Rico.

The General Henri Gouraud Trophy is awarded to these departments who are first to exceed their national membership goal in their respective Big Twelve categories. This year there is one winner, and they are, in Category 6, Department of Puerto Rico.

The next presentation is The American Legion Race to the Top Award. It is given to district commanders who attain at least 100 percent of their district's assigned membership objective by March 31. This is the most prestigious award a district commander can earn, and as always, this contest is very competitive. The separation between qualifying for the award and the first, second and third place winners at times comes down to just one-hundredth of a percentage point in some categories. This year's district commanders are receiving a new cap, a polo shirt, and a shadowbox plaque for their efforts. And the winners are: Hector Rodriguez, Puerto Rico, Category 1, District 2. This is the first time Puerto Rico has ever won this district award. Casey R. Nash of Georgia, Category 2, District 1.

DELEGATE NASH (GA): Good morning. I think he introduced me, but my name is Casey Nash. I'm from Georgia. Go Team Georgia! I just want to thank my district for making this possible. Team Georgia for making this possible, God and all my friends and my amazing person. Just when you get out there and be a district commander, it's hard, but it's worth the work. Boots on ground, Be the One, and let's go American Legion. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER WAHUS: Joyce A. Hannum, Ohio, Category 3, District 9. Even though she's not a back-to-back winner, Ohio and this district have won this two years in a row. Category 4, District 3, Billy J. Hill, Maryland It's been a very long time since Maryland has won the award. They just wanted to let everybody know that they've won before, but it's been a while. Thank you for your leadership, commanders, and the dedication in motivating your districts to achieving the goal.

Presentation: National Membership Recruiter of the Year

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER WAHUS: Now we are going to present the National Membership Recruiter of the Year Award. This award is given to the individual certified with the highest number of new members recruited from all the departments. This year we have an individual who has won this award two times. This year is her third time earning the title of Recruiter of the Year. From the Department of Georgia, recruiting 231 members, please join me in recognizing this dedicated Legionnaire and the 2023 National Membership Recruiter of the Year, from the Eddie L. Roberts American Legion Post 333, Patricia E. Liddell. *(Applause)*

Patricia, this is but a small token of our appreciation for the job that you have done. She is receiving a new cap, polo shirt, shadowbox, and a \$1,000 check. Without a doubt, you are one outstanding recruiter who shares a passion for supporting veterans. Congratulations on a job well done!

DELEGATE LIDDELL (GA): Good morning. Thank you, Commander Troiola, Adjutant Wheeler, past and national commanders, my Legion Family, my post, Eddie L. Roberts, American Legion Post 333, triple threat, and my family, Niccy, who's here with me, Nichelle, I thank all of you all for all that you've done.

Commander Troiola says we need to be the one. Okay. We got a whole lot of posts

out here, and we got states, and we got everybody else. We need to challenge. You need to be a challenger and don't let just one department take all the awards. I like a challenge, and I'm going to challenge everybody out here to compete with me. I need somebody to compete with me. I won four times national recruiter. We need some competition. If each one of you all do at least two, we're going to do it. We're going to do exactly what we're supposed to do for membership.

You've got to compete. You've got to be the one. Be the one to save a life. Be the one to do the Buddy Checks. Be the one to go out and talk about The American Legion. Did you recruit any members while you were here in North Carolina? Nobody's raising hands? I recruited three while I was downstairs at Emblem Sales. Come on now, I need some competition. You all have got to recruit. Send out newsletters. Talk to people about The American Legion. Go out and talk to them. I bet you know what a veteran looks like. In Walmart, walk up to them and tell them, "Thank you for your service." Then they're going to ask you, "How do you know I'm a veteran?"

You all know how to pick out the veterans. Tell them we need them so that Congress knows we're not playing. We cannot let Legionnaires or let veterans know don't have the information about The American Legion. We're the largest. We want to remain the largest. Come on, give me some competition. Indiana challenged my commander, Melvin Weaver. Indiana, where are you? Come on. Come on. Go Georgia!

...National Commander Troiola resumed the Chair.

Presentation: Consolidated Post Reporting

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The Consolidated Post Report is a summary of what The American Legion posts have accomplished in their communities. It's an opportunity to tell the story of your post on an easy-to-fill-out form. This past year I challenged all departments to attain a 100 percent response rate for the Consolidated Post Report. We did not make it, but our response rate increased to 67.3 percent with 8,156 posts reporting out of 12,125. Good news, but as you can see, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Those department commanders that met my challenge of 100 percent response rate were Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska and New Mexico. They all deserve a round of applause. *(Applause)*

Now, I have asked to join me onstage today for special recognition those departments that exceeded my challenge and had a response rate of 100 percent or better. At this time, we will present their plaques to the department commanders.

...National Vice Commander Harris assumed the Chair.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER PATRICIA HARRIS (NC): This year the winners are: Dwight D. Lacey, Department of Delaware; Matthew J. Wrobel, Department of Idaho; James L. Daube, Department of Indiana; Ronald L. Holcombe, Department of Maryland; Lowell E. Long, Jr., Department of Montana; Donald L. Suchy, Department of Nebraska; Robert L. Casados, Department of New Mexico. Once again, congratulations to these seven Departments that went above and beyond the call of duty. Please do not stop the hard work. We have a long way to go before we get our reporting numbers up. And with your help, we will. *(Applause)*

DELEGATE OWENS (IN): Good morning. I'm Gina Owens from the great state of Indiana. Go Team Indiana. I'm going to let out our secret, how we did this this year. We sent out our annual forms in March to all the post, and then about the middle of May, I had the opportunity to go to the department and help with membership. I just started calling the post over and over until I got the data that was required, and we submitted all the forms in time at the Geiger Center. So, I challenge each department to do that next year. Thank you.

DELEGATE SUCHY (NE): I would just like to say this is a team effort. I would like to thank the staff at our headquarters in Nebraska. They do a tremendous job for us. It's not just one person, it's your whole state. *...National Commander Troiola resumed the Chair.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our next guest twice served as a pilot with the world-famous Blue Angels and was deployed to combat three separate times, including to Iraq and Afghanistan. The retired Navy commander and Naval Academy graduate flew in the front seat as a pilot in the film "Top Gun: Maverick," including the scenes in which Tom Cruise blisters through a twisted canyon at lightning speeds, close to rocky cliffs. In 2009 he earned a master's in systems analysis from the Naval Postgraduate School. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome, Commander Frank Weisser, United States Navy, retired. *(Applause)*

**Address: Commander Frank Weisser, USN (Ret.)
2-Tour Blue Angels Pilot**

It's bright up here, but quick show of hands, who here has seen the Blue Angels perform? Awesome. And then who by chance happened to see a movie last summer at the theaters when we got back to going to the movies after COVID? Anybody see "Top Gun: Maverick?" All right. So, I appreciate the introduction. I would like to take the opportunity today to take you inside the cockpit of the Blue Angels and behind the scenes of "Top Gun: Maverick" and share some of the same lessons that I've learned in the military that, being we're cut from the same cloth, you've learned as well. So, let's start with this.

...Video clips were shown throughout the presentation.

So, my question for you: Is that real or fake? I'm hearing mostly real. The answer is both. And it can be both because, when you see this picture, that is Tom Cruise in a Navy F-18. He's in the backseat of an airplane I'm piloting, but it's fake because it's not an F-14. In the movie it appears to be an F-14, and at the same time we weren't in an actual dogfight with a fifth-gen fighter from the country that we like to call Chiran. And as you look at that picture, the reason that matters is because this is one of the very few movies where the actual U.S. military participated.

So, the individuals flying these airplanes are not actors from Hollywood. They are Navy and Marine Corps pilots, men, women, young, old, the whole shebang. That's what makes this movie exceptional is what you see on the big screen is real. It was, in fact, filmed. Because Paramount's perception was the actors can act. They're good at doing that. What they cannot do is act like they're in a fighter, but they can act while in a fighter.

So, we did that. They filmed 800 hours in our Navy airplanes to make that movie come to life. So, I'd like to share behind the scenes with the movie, but first what I want to share with you is why I was involved.

For me it started with the Blue Angels. I did two separate tours as a solo pilot and ultimately flew with eleven of the Blue Angels teams. I'll give you a little background on the Blue Angels even if you have seen them before. We take our squadron all around the country, and we fly for hundreds of thousands of people. When we go to these shows, it's an opportunity for us to meet young men and women and to share with them, not what we do on the Blue Angels, we don't talk about flying loops to music, we talk about why we joined the military, what our call was to serve, because flying that airshow gives us the credibility to do so. We also like to share with our veterans. We give back to the men and women that put us in these airplanes, that put us in those seats to do that job.

Finally, we get an opportunity to speak all over the various cities we're in. We talk to civic groups. We talk to schools. One of the things I do, when I have this opportunity to meet with the young men and women, is I share with them why I joined the military. And I'll use an example of flying. I'll give them this case where, if you've ever been in an airplane before, you recognize that, there's this old joke, you're supposed to have the same number of takeoffs as you have landings in your logbook. That's critical.

When you take off, it's relatively easy for anyone who's done that before. The bigger challenge is landing. Once you're already in the sky, how do you land? Well, the scenario you see here is the perfect case to land an airplane: nice, long, concrete runway, beautiful

weather. Almost anybody could do it. Right?

If you make it dark, it's a little bit harder, just like driving at night. You lose some of the visual cues, you lose your ability to judge your speed rate, your descent rate, that sort of thing. But if I take it one step harder, we go to an aircraft carrier at sea, and this is more challenging, even though it's daytime, because your runway is moving. It's moving away from you in the distance category, it's moving left and right, and it's moving up and down. So, this is an F-18 coming aboard an aircraft carrier at 165 miles per hour. The airplane stops in 200 feet.

So, the first time you do it, you're told, the minute you land, you're going to think you've crashed. You haven't. You've had a successful and safe carrier landing. It's just the first time you've ever been in anything so violent. So that's what it looks like daytime. What I would tell you, and my personal experience, is the most difficult aspect of all aviation is doing that same thing but at night. So what you're looking at on the screen is not a blank screen. That's the aircraft carrier three miles away at night. If you look in the bottom left corner, you'll see a tiny little light, and that's what the pilots see as they get ready to come aboard.

I'm going to fast forward you to the last 15 seconds so you can see what happens at sea. If you look at the center of the screen, you'll start to see the carrier landing area, the lights become visible. Once again, you're doing 165 miles per hour. The carrier is moving left and right and up and down. And as you come aboard, you're going from 165 down to 0 in just two seconds.

What you see there is exactly what you see as you're coming aboard that aircraft carrier. And the challenge is there's no ambient lighting. There are no cities nearby, as you can see. There's no sun/moon. The clouds usually obscure that off of the north Arabian Sea. So, it's really hard to tell up or down, which direction you're going, and so you rely on your instruments.

What's most important about this, and when speaking to a group of veterans, this will ring true, I'm sure, is that it has nothing to do with the pilot in this case. The pilot is flying the airplane, I get that, but there's 6,000 people on that aircraft carrier making this whole thing work. It takes the controllers that bring you aboard, it takes the men and women on the bridge to drive that ship, it takes the landing signal officers. It's a massive team effort.

When I go and fly Blue Angel airshows, when we land and we have this opportunity to talk to these young men and women about why we chose to serve, I explain it's like a football team. We're not six pilots. We're 130 Blue Angels that go around the country to perform and share our love for service, but every single member of that team is absolutely critical.

I was at an airshow in Wisconsin, and a lady walked up to me, and she said, "I'm so excited the Blue Angels are in town. How many of you are there?" I said, "Well, we're 130, but we usually bring 50 to 60 to every airshow." She said, "Well, how many real Blue Angels are there?" I said, "Well, we're 130 real Blue Angels, but we only bring 50 to 60 real Blue Angels to the show." And she said, "Well, how many pilots?" And I said, "See, you've misunderstood. It has nothing to do with the pilots. If our youngest enlisted maintainer doesn't do his or her job that day, our team doesn't fly the airshow."

And so, it truly is a team where every member is equally valuable, just like on the aircraft carrier. So, when you see that happen, my story for these people at all these show sites is not the fact that we just did a bunch of loops to music in a beautiful city. We'll land, and I'll get a chance to talk, and I'll say, "At this exact moment, it's perfect weather," wherever we are, Sheboygan, Wisconsin or San Francisco, California "but at this exact second, my brothers and sisters are flying off an aircraft carrier into harm's way at night."

And that's the really cool story. That's the story I'm here to share. It's not what we're doing with these blue and gold airplanes, it's what our men and women of the armed services are doing day in and day out overseas to protect our interests at home, right? And that's the really cool part about why we do what we do. (*Applause*)

So, there are a couple of key aspects of my military service I want to share with you.

I know it will resonate. You will feel the same way about these particular things. The first is focus. For those who have deployed, especially overseas and/or in combat, you recognize what it means to focus. There are times in your life, there are times during your activities, that you're thinking about nothing other than the task at hand.

For me in the airplane, focus looks like this. This is flying as a Blue Angel solo pilot. You'll hear the engine spooling, and then you'll hear me run them up to full power. I'll look over my engine instruments, make sure my instruments are good, and then I'll look at my wingman who is next to me. I'll pass the thumbs up. That indicates that I like his configuration: his flaps are correct, his power setting is correct, his nozzles are programmed. And then we'll advance throttles to full afterburn, 32,000 pounds of thrust.

What you'll notice as the aircraft accelerates is that I'm not looking forward. Typically, when you take off, you're only looking forward, but I'm looking mostly left because I'm modulating my throttles to fly in formation on the ground before we even take off.

But as I look straight ahead right here, what you're going to notice is the aircraft is already flying. The gears come up and the flaps are up, so the aircraft is accelerating very rapidly. We're at 250 knots by the middle of the field, 300 knots at the end of the runway, and at 350, both hands on the stick, seven times the force of gravity into vertical. And that's the takeoff maneuver. And you see the diamond smoke overhead, if you've seen this airshow with the Blue Angel diamond and the solos.

Now, what you might not know if you just came to watch an airshow is the modifications we do to our airplanes. Clearly, they're blue and gold, not gray like a typical Hornet is. We're putting out this smoke, which normal airplanes don't want to do. An F-18 doesn't want to be spotted. But Blue Angels do want to be seen. The other thing we do is we add a spring. The spring is very much like the 1980s with Arnold Schwarzenegger trying to expand his chest. But the spring comes out of the floorboards of our airplane, and it attaches mechanically to our stick. What that means is we're doing a 40-pound curl with our right hand just to maintain level flight. If you want to climb, if you want to turn, you end up doing a 50- or 60-pound curl.

And that's not terribly hard for just a few minutes. But after 45 minutes or an hour, it's quite physically taxing. As it relates to that specific maneuver that you just saw, the challenge for us, when it comes to focus, is that if you relax that stick for less than half an ounce, for a millisecond, literally an eighth of a second, you've crashed immediately because you're so low. So that's that level of focus. The same focus that you can remember when you were deployed overseas, that same focus exists in every aspect of the military today.

Now, the next aspect is perspective. So, you just saw my perspective flying the airplane. But if you were in the crowd that day, this is what you would have seen. Perspective is absolutely critical in the Blue Angels. I'll explain that more in a second. The reason I bring it up is because my wife and I call it the gift of perspective. What that means to us is 25 years in the military and appreciating a very different perspective than what our civilian counterparts, our civilian friends and family knew. We learned it in college. We learned it when we were deployed. We learned it as a family when I was gone. This perspective allows you to tackle all the challenges in your life in a different manner, in an easier manner, because you appreciate the perspective.

In this case, the perspective of a young airman, thousands of feet underground, with his finger on a button that could start World War III is a very unique perspective, one most people don't know. Or perhaps that perspective is in a faraway land, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the only people you can count on and depend on are the ones by side your side in that moment. That's a very unique perspective.

Or you could be so far away from civilization that you can only rely on the equipment the government has provided you and your brothers and sisters who are deployed with you. This is this perspective that really matters, one that we learn in the military, one that we take with us into our future lives, in the additional chapters.

The perspective for me in the airplane is this. I'm five miles away from show center.

I'm at 5,000 feet. As I descend, I accelerate from 250 to 400 knots. What you're going to notice is my head looks to the right because I'm looking for checkpoints. As I descend, the center of our airshow site, which happens to be NAS Pensacola, is straight ahead. So, I'm looking for a dock at three miles. And then at two miles, that's the bridge going onto NAS Pensacola, for anyone who's been there. I have a stop sign right at that first entrance. That's my two-mile checkpoint. And I'm adjusting my speed constantly from 401 knots to 398 to make sure we cross exactly over center point.

But as you see, as I approach my wingman, who's coming with 1,000 miles per hour of closure, I'll start to look left to try to find him, and then we're also challenged by the smoke as we come in for the first maneuver, the knife-edge pass.

Did you guys see him go by? 1,000 miles of closure, it happens almost instantly. I'm going to slow down, 1/20 speed here. Just approaching center point, I pull back on the stick, and I push it forward. That puts the aircraft into a ballistic flight regime. We roll up on our wing so that the aircraft don't hit at center point. You'll see my wingman go by.

So, it happens really, really fast. What you might have noticed there is that my aircraft is slightly stepped up. I'm a little bit higher than he was. And the reason is the crowd is 1,200 feet away looking at our aircraft. The perspective we're looking for is this. If we do our job just right, the crowd sees that.

That's what's unique about the Blue Angels. I can come back to our debrief and say I flew it exactly right. Or that particular maneuver, I was really satisfied with how I did it. But if the crowd saw it differently, then I failed. Because it's not about my perspective, it's the crowd's perspective. We're flying for the crowd. That's what matters.

If I carry on this maneuver, we'll finish that knife-edge pass, I'll accelerate, we go away to 10 miles apart from one another again. We do a bunch of loops and rolls because it's the Blue Angels and that's what we do. We turn in. We come back to center point one more time for the same maneuver, except this time we do it upside down.

Now, in this case, instead of positive g, you have negative gs. The blood is rushing to your head. As we cross, we push up to negative 3 gs, so you're forcing yourself to red out. All the blood is rushing into your eyes. The world starts to get red instead of gray.

One of the trickiest things we do on the Blue Angels is what you're seeing right here. It's not the maneuvers the crowd sees. It's how we rejoin to get ready for the next maneuver so we can keep the airshow very tight. We're in a 7 g turn behind the crowd. We rendezvous quickly. As we get set up here, you're going to notice we're in the carrier landing configuration. The reason you know that is because you're going to see my wingman's gear down as if he's landing and the tail hook down as if he's landing on the aircraft carrier. We're doing this to showcase the incredible capabilities of the F-18. The fact that this airplane, when it's least maneuverable because it's landing, is also still highly maneuverable. Because it's the Blue Angels, nothing is quite normal. Someone is always inverted. We fly a very awkward position here to give a very specific perspective to the crowd. So, if you want to see the perspective of the crowd now that you've seen mine, the crowd sees this.

My last job in the Navy was teaching our pilots how to fly a new airplane. I was responsible for moving us from the legacy F-18 to the Super Hornet, which is the airplane they fly now and that we used for "Top Gun: Maverick." As I'm teaching them, I would fly with them to try to show them the new checkpoints, what had changed. My perspective, when teaching them, was this: That perspective, that angle down from the lead to the wingman, gives the crowd the perspective that you just saw.

The final item I want to talk about is trust. This is one I'm sure that rings true with everyone in this room. Clearly, we trust people on a daily basis. Trust in the military is something quite different. I like to call it high trust. What I mean by that is when you trust someone not just in general but with your life and they in turn trust you with their life, not just one time, not a singular effort, but day in, day out, over and over and over again. To experience that trust, you have to be vulnerable enough to trust someone and also honest enough that there in turn, they give you their trust.

That level of trust exists throughout all the different services. One example is right here, for those who served in the Air Force. This one I love because clearly anytime you get on an airplane, whether it's Delta or U.S. Air Force, the people in the airplane are trusting the pilots. They're trusting them to keep them safe.

But in this example the pilots have a great deal of trust in their loadmaster because that airplane might have tanks, it might have 10,000-pound cargo boxes, any number of things loaded that if they're not properly loaded, they're not properly secured on takeoff, everyone dies. That high trust exists on takeoff right here.

It also exists right here. This is a great one because you're watching a Coast Guard vessel at sea with a captain of a ship, a conning officer maintaining course and speed, a landing signals officer directing the airplane down, but also the pilots of this helicopter and the crew members who are trusting them to do their job but also to land safely on that ship. So, the amount of high trust that exists in there is supreme.

If I took you inside my airplane one more time, you'd see this. This is another opposing pass, except this time we don't roll up on our wings, we cross wing tip to wing tip. You're going to see how fast this happens. And if I rewind it one more time, because we're level, my wing tip extends almost 25 feet from my head, as does my wingman. So, our wing tips are literally crossing single-digit feet from one another. So that level of trust exists in us flying our brief; that I'm exactly on the line I promise that my wingman is as well, and that we hold the right speed, the right position so that we cross literally feet from one another.

After we have that cross, we do a split S, we come back again, and we do it one more time. And following this cross, I'm going to speed this up because we're going behind the crowd to rendezvous. And what you're going to see is all six Blue Angels aircraft all together. In the top left of my screen, you see Blue Angel 2. And if I'm doing my job just right, you don't see Blue Angel No. 1 because I should be covering No. 1's helmet with No. 2's helmet. That's a balanced formation.

But we're coming in here to land, once again, at NAS Pensacola, and so this maneuver is in a descending left-hand accelerating turn. We're going from about 1,000 feet down to 200 feet as we prepare for a pitch-up break, which is our final maneuver to land. You're going to see the smokestacks and the trees, but as you watch this video, there's one particular thing I want you to notice. So, every aircraft in numbered order does a 7 to 8 g turn downwind. Now, we typically don't fly with cameras inside our airplanes for the obvious risk of them coming undone and bouncing around. In a few unique cases, Boeing, who makes our airplane, will come to us and install their own cameras so that they can get this footage for their own purposes. This was taken a few years ago. I watched it after the flight. It was remarkable to me, one particular aspect, which I didn't appreciate until I saw a video from inside my own cockpit. That was the fact that, throughout that entire maneuver, never once did I look straight ahead.

When you're taught to land an airplane, the only place you look is straight ahead. So, despite all of your spidey senses saying, I feel buildings, I feel trees, I know birds are going by, I want to look ahead to see where the dangers are, where the obstructions are, not a single time do I look forward. And I'm not the only one. There are five other aircraft in this formation, four of them are wingman, and they're all looking at the flight leader. So that flight leader is now entrusted by five other airplanes and five other pilots to put that aircraft at the exact right position, altitude and airspeed to set us up for a safe landing. That's this level of high trust.

That same maneuver happens with the Thunderbirds. If you've heard about the mishap at Creech Air Force Base, it was a remarkable aviation mishap where four airplanes all in tight formation are doing a loop, and they all fly into the ground at the same second because the three wingmen are trusting the flight lead to finish out that loop carefully.

That level of trust exists. It exists in the formation you just saw. It exists all around us. But because you've had the opportunity to experience that trust, especially while deployed, you recognize it when you see it.

So, all of these different aspects came together in the summer of 2018 because that's

when they started filming "Top Gun: Maverick." The reason I was involved was specifically because of the Blue Angels. They were trying to use Top Gun instructors to fly the majority of that movie. Moreover, something that you guys will all appreciate is the fact that we were deliberately flying the most junior pilots we could in the U.S. Navy, and we were doing it as a very direct message to countries like China and Russia.

We wanted them to watch this movie on the big screen. We wanted them to see it and see that it was real and know that it wasn't our most experienced aviators doing it. It was our youngest and most junior pilots who were flying some of the most extreme scenes that have ever made it to the big screen.

And so, they filmed that movie. And a few of the particular scenes where the aircraft was inverted or really, really low to the ground, they came to the Blue Angels because we do that regularly. To the sense that we can mitigate the risk, that's what we do. So, I was asked to be a part of it. And as we jump into it, I'll show you one of the scenes from the movie. I promise there are no spoilers in this movie if you haven't seen it yet.

So, the question again is: Is that real or is it fake? In this particular case, once again, it's both. The reason is because they film that. There were truly actors on that set. That's at Point Loma in San Diego. There were extras, Navy-enlisted personnel that were out there. And an airplane did fly overhead, except it was just me. I did it over and over and over again until they had the shot they wanted. Some of the times I popped up as a missing man formation would. Sometimes I went straight ahead.

I show you that scene because the amount of trust involved for me was intense. I say that because Point Loma is a little bit of a chocolate drop. It's a 500-foot mountain right off the coast. But I was ingressing at sunset, so the sun is setting behind me. I'm travelling east and all I could see ahead of me was dark. I have controllers on the ground saying come left, come right, up or down. And each time I wouldn't know where I was in terms of the trees and the mountain until I was already overhead. You can see this side shot. There's very little clearance over those trees, so there's a great deal of trust in these individuals that are controlling the aircraft.

Another scene. This is one of my very favorite scenes. I won't even ask you. I'll tell you once again that it's both. Here's why. We actually filmed that scene just like you saw it. The only thing that wasn't real is we didn't fly that mach-10 spaceship. We flew it in a Blue Angel F-18. And so, to set that scene up, I took a Blue Angel aircraft out to China Lake, if you've ever been there. That's Ridgecrest, California, near the Death Valley. The camera crew is set up down there where that's zoomed in. You can tell there's not much to see down there, but we were looking for a way to get the desired effect on the set.

So, they wanted this admiral, who was out there on the ramp to shut down the project, to get dusted by Tom Cruise taking off. We tried a different technique to see what would bring the most dramatic effect to the camera. So, we tried low and fast. That's pretty cool, right? It leads to great pictures, but it didn't do the damage we wanted to the set. So, we tried something a little bit different. I tried flying higher and then directing the energy of the throttles and the nozzles down to the ground. That looked like this. We tried a couple different variations. There was a light pole in the way that I will tell you, when you're flying that low, it very much felt like I was going to hit it.

So, the F-18 has a cool ability to get rid of light poles, so if you look on the left side there, by the way, it's not destruction of government property. So, we did all that with this in mind: What you're seeing there, the roof being ripped off the building, it was a one-shot take because it destroyed the set to such a degree that we only had one opportunity. And the roof did, in fact, come off the building. If you look closely at that picture, the only reason it didn't end up on top of the entire crew was because a bunch of conduit was running through each of the walls into the roof and then back down the other side. That kept it from ending up somewhere far, far away.

What's unique about this is the fact that the director, when he saw that, almost didn't use it in the movie because he thought it looked fake. Imagine that in this day and age, where so much digital enhancement is done to these movies, so much computer graphics,

we did it for real, and it looked fake enough that they almost didn't use it.

So, if I take you all the way behind the scenes, this is the one-shot take. So, you saw what showed up on the big screen just a second ago, but this is how it looked in real life the day we filmed it. The actor was Ed Harris. He's standing by the black SUV. And he stood there and took the entire brunt of 32,000 pounds of afterburner right in his face from about five feet overhead.

100 percent real. That shot right there was taken with an IMAX camera on the wing. I'll zoom in there. They installed IMAX cameras and the ballast behind it on the same weapon station we'd normally put a 500,000 or 2,000-pound bomb. First time, to my knowledge, that we put IMAX cameras on the wings of these airplanes. But it allowed us to get the shot you just saw.

This particular shot was done outside of Fallon, Nevada, in the salt flats of Bravo-20. To set it up just right, Tom Cruise and Jerry Bruckheimer were looking for a scene they call Lawrence of Arabia, and they were looking for this to sort of intro the movie. And the idea was rather than a dot in the distance turn into a man on horseback, it was a dot in the distance that turned into a cloud of dust that turned into a fighter doing 1,000 miles an hour. But to do it just right, my airplane had to be down and set at that low altitude eight to ten miles away.

So, the challenge on my end was finding them because I'm running a downwind pattern away from them. I have a rough idea of where they are based on a GPS coordinate, but as you can see in that picture, there's nothing out there. There's no roads. There's no checkpoints. There's no buildings. It's just a bleak salt flat. So, I set up, I turned in, I descended, got the aircraft fast and low directly to a spot that I thought was where they were, and this is what happened.

So, here's a unique part about this and the gift of perspective. I will tell you my perspective; at that moment I was elated to have found them because I didn't think I would. The director, who's in the puffy coat and the black hat, comes on the radio and says, "We really liked it. Next time come one foot to the right." (*Laughter*)

And that's his perspective. He needed the camera lens filled up perfectly. What he didn't know, because he doesn't fly F-18s for a living, is that at that altitude, at that speed, you cannot turn the airplane. If I turned it, the wings would literally burrow through the ground. If I stepped on the rudder pedal to make it yaw, it would translate hundreds of feet instantly. So, you truly can't do anything. So, all I could do was say I'm going to keep trying, and hopefully I'll do one that exactly fills up your camera lens. Because when you're flying that airplane at this speed, there's very, very little time to make any corrections to adjust for that.

One more scene here. When you see that scene and any of the rest of the movie, if you see the actors in the plane, it's because they were, in fact, in the airplane. They were flying through that canyon with Navy pilots in the front seat, and they're in the backseat. When you see a shot like this, anytime you see a pilot from the back, that is the actual Navy or Marine Corps pilot flying with that actor's helmet on. I'm showing you this so you can be justifiably proud, when you watch this movie again, to know that it's our Navy and Marine Corps pilots flying those airplanes to make this movie happen.

And I show you this because in that particular scene Hangman and I are flying together, and the director told me, "I want you to fly through this canyon. You don't have to get too low yet. Get comfortable with it, learn the checkpoints, because for the rest of the week you and Tom are going to do this canyon over and over again."

And what I really especially liked about Glen, who plays the character of Hangman, is that he's an incredibly genuinely nice guy. And he's also really, really tough. We come out of that canyon, and it's hard work even if you've done this for your whole career, like it was in my case, but we come out of this canyon, two minutes of just high-octane flying, and Glen starts throwing up, and he throws up violently. And the other actor was in a different airplane came out behind us. And he finishes throwing up. So, anyone who's ever been airsick or seasick knows how miserable that experience is. He bags it up, and says,

"Let's go." And we did it again. And we finished that, another two-minute round, and he threw up again. And he said, "I'm done. Let's go."

And we did it six to eight times, that same flight, and every time he flew up, and every time he said, "Let's do it." And that takes guts, and it's hard. And because he was willing to do it, we got these scenes from this shot.

So, to set that up right for the rest of the week, my direction was to fly as low as I possibly can safely, but with Tom in my backseat. So, I take what amounts to a variety of precise coordinates. These are the coordinates for that route you just saw. I type them into Google Earth because this is the friend of all the Navy pilots. I'm using satellite study here. The yellow pin is the entry. I'll show you where NAS Fallon is. This is the airport we took off from. It's about an hour and a half east of Reno. This route is about 80 miles east-southeast from the base.

So, I used this satellite study to prepare for this flight. I'll zoom in on the first point. I'll get it to an eye height that I intend to enter at, and I'll know that my very next turn point is five miles away. It's going to take me this many seconds, and at that point it's going to take 6 gs to make that 30-degree check turn, and then it's going to be only 3-and-a-half seconds to the next turn. And then my airplane can't hack that turn, so I've got to pop up. I have to climb over the mountain range and then descend down. When I'm descending down, I have to figure out the right flight path angle for the descent, the right trajectory, the right time to pull back up and level off so I don't hit the mountain walls.

And so, I'm doing this satellite study. And the reason it's incredibly critical at this point is because, when you fly Navy airplanes, the lowest you're allowed to fly in a fighter is 500 feet. If you're proficient and experienced, after a few flights in the same week, you can go down to 200 feet. But at 200-foot altitude, you're allowed a mission cross-check time of one second.

What that means is you're only allowed to look inside to change the radio channel, update your weapons system, your navigational system for one second. Otherwise, your eyes are out. They're on the horizon, they're searching for other aircraft, for birds, for obstructions. Because that's how critical the threat of the low terrain is. So, to put an airplane at 10 or 20 feet requires a good bit of study. And so, I went through that, and this is the scene we filmed.

Once again, real or fake? 100 percent real. Everything you see in that scene was filmed with their in-cockpit and out-cockpit IMAX cameras. When you see this shot, there are two things I want you to know. One, that's a Navy or Marine Corps pilot, like I mentioned. In this particular case, it's me because I was flying this scene with Tom. However, the thing you might notice is, for those of us who have been in the military, in my 25 years, never once did my hair get that long. *(Laughter)*

Paramount, though, goes to great lengths to make sure everything we do is realistic. So, it reminds me of this quote that you might be familiar with: "It's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit." Because I will tell you: Navy and Marine Corps pilots are not getting credit for "Top Gun: Maverick." The actors for sure are. But to make sure they did it just right, they glued Tom's hairline to the back of my head. *(Laughter)*

So, let me close with this slide, and I use this slide specifically because that low-altitude pass that I shared with you earlier, to set that up, there was a great deal of risk because the aircraft is so low. The risk was so high that the three-star admiral in charge of all of aviation, our air boss that owns every single airplane in the Navy, was calling me before and after every flight to debrief and brief. That's his level of risk. With all the things going on in his world, he was most concerned that we were putting an airplane down at 10 feet for "Top Gun: Maverick."

What was ironic to me is, after I landed after that filming session, I'm curious to hear if we got the shot right. What I found out was, yes, they definitely got the shot they wanted, but then we did that same pass over and over and over again so everyone on the Paramount crew could take selfies. *(Laughter)*

So I'll wrap up with that, but what I would like to say, what I hope resonates with this group, is I have had the privilege, because of this movie and because of Blue Angels, to speak to a variety of businesses, aero clubs, schools, churches, you name it, but the group that I most enjoy speaking to are veterans because we all are cut from the same cloth and we all can appreciate what went into this. We all recognize that, in this particular movie, it wasn't made possible because of great actors, it was made possible by a great military that allowed itself and put the expertise of the men and women involved to go forth.

So, as I shared when I was speaking to the Coast Guard Academy just a few weeks ago, I said: In my mind as someone who has served and doesn't get the opportunity to serve again, the choice to serve, the opportunity to serve, it's not required, it's not an obligation, it's a privilege. I do believe everyone in this room understands that. I believe you join me in understanding that we've all been privileged to serve, and what we gained from it is probably more than we put into it. I would like to thank you for your service, tell you that I'm grateful for being here, and wish you all the very best. Thank you. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: From one commander to the other, I'd like to sign you up for The American Legion. I trust that you'll fill that application out. I'm going to give you a diamond lapel pin, but you've got to remember, once you get in The American Legion, there's no rank among us. (*Applause*)

Ladies and gentlemen, before we proceed, please turn your attention to the monitors for a video you won't want to miss. ...*The delegation viewed the video: "Ragged Old Flag"*

If that video seems familiar to you, it's because it was previously played as part of FOX Sports Super Bowl broadcast this year. As we all know, commercial advertising during the Super Bowl is sold for many millions of dollars for even the briefest spots. But FOX Sports decided that this patriotic message was worth transmitting to the world, sacrificing time that could be used to pitch commercial products. Normally, we present our 100 Percent Americanism Award at the Americanism Commission meeting. This year, we felt that our award recipient deserved to be acknowledged here on the big stage.

With us today is the chief executive officer and executive producer of FOX Sports. He was named Sport Business Journal's 2023 Sports Executive of the Year and is a member of its prestigious "40 Under 40" Hall of Fame. He is a winner of more than 20 Sports Emmy Awards. He flew here from Los Angeles to accept this prestigious award. Ladies and gentlemen, accepting The American Legion 100 Percent Americanism Award is FOX Sports CEO & Executive Producer Eric Shanks. (*Applause*)

**Presentation: 100 Percent Americanism Award
Eric Shanks, CEO and Executive Producer, FOX Sports**

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for having me. This is quite an honor for all of us at FOX Sports, so we want to say thank you, but above all we want to say thank you all for your service to this country. It's something that we strive to do with every broadcast that we do, which is say thank you, whether it's showing the national anthem or creating pieces like that.

This honor really reflects our commitment to the servicemen and women and the veterans that have served. It really is part of our DNA. We're only 30 years old. We're actually the youngest sports network of all. And this year, coming up this month, we're actually celebrating our 30th year of doing the NFL, which means we're basically a baby compared to The American Legion. Our most proud day every year is when we take our NFL pregame show on the road to celebrate Veterans Day. (*Applause*)

Thank you very much. Some of the places that we get to go to show our support for those that are serving are most recently last year, when we were doing the World Cup in Qatar, we did a Veterans Day show from Al Udeid Air Base. Before that we were at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. We've been to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego. And I can't believe you made me follow a Top Gun pilot up here. (*Laughter*)

I don't have any footage anywhere near that. Before that we were at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, which was some of the greatest four days of my life. We were at Fort Benning, Georgia; Naval Station Norfolk; we were at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam for the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. We were at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan in 2009, and we started at the USS Harry Truman in the Mediterranean in 2000.

This is our longest-standing tradition at FOX Sports, and it's not going to end any time soon, and we love celebrating everything that makes our country so strong. Since our very first Super Bowl, how many people watched the Super Bowl this year? Just so you know, you would be an outlier if you didn't because we set the all-time record for viewership at 115.2 million people watching that broadcast that you guys saw with Johnny Cash.

Our very first Super Bowl was back in 1997 in New Orleans, and back then FOX Sports was run by a guy named David Hill. To celebrate America that year, we did a piece on the Declaration of Independence. We literally read the Declaration of Independence right before kickoff of the Super Bowl. We did that up until 2017 when we decided that we need to refresh, and I'll tell you a story about how the Johnny Cash "Ragged Old Flag" came to be.

It was serendipity, like most great ideas. I was driving home on the 405 in Los Angeles, I was parked on the 405, probably, listening to my favorite radio host Tim Conway Jr. on AM 640. Yes, he is the son of the actual Tim Conway, most of us know as Dorf on Golf. And he doesn't normally play music on his show, but something struck him, and he had found this song that I had never heard before, and he played Johnny Cash's "Ragged Old Flag" in 2016.

At the moment, I was looking for something to replace the Declaration of Independence. And I'm good buddies with Tim, and as soon as he played that song, I said, "Buddy, you just played a song that 100 million people are going to get to see before the Super Bowl in Houston in 2017."

So that very next morning, I put the team to work. We had a great producer named Jen Pransky, and she put together the very first version of "Ragged Old Flag" that we played in 2017. What you just saw was actually the third version of "Ragged Old Flag," and it is now our tradition before kickoff.

A little bit about some of the things that you saw in that piece. We had Kyle Carpenter in that piece, the youngest living Medal of Honor winner in the country. Kyle's an amazing, obviously, an amazing individual, and he lives here in North Carolina. We wanted to be as convenient to him, and we scouted courthouses. The best courthouse that we found was in Sylva, North Carolina, the Jackson County Courthouse, built in 1914. Kyle drove three hours to be a part of that shoot.

He received the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama on June 19, 2014, for his actions in Afghanistan in 2010. He's a really soft-spoken guy but wanted to be a part of this piece. And he also came out with a book around that time. One of the interesting things about it was, because of Kyle's injuries, he can't be out in the sunlight for very long. So, we had to shoot around his ability to be out in the sun.

The woman that you saw in the piece, Christie Ennis, she's a helicopter door gunner and mechanic. I know Christie, and I do choke up every time. She lost her leg in Afghanistan in a helicopter crash. Ever since then, she's been climbing the world's highest peaks. She's failed to reach the top of Everest a few times, but she keeps trying, and she's going to reach Everest.

Also in that is a good buddy of ours, Nate Boyer, and obviously the a cappella band. You listen to the words to that song, and I think it was written in 1973, it could have been written today. The lyrics to that song actually hold up. If that was written in 2023, I don't think any of us would question it.

So, on behalf of FOX Sports, we are extremely honored that you like the piece, and we hope that you continue to enjoy our work in honoring our servicemen and women and the veterans that sacrifice to keep us safe and free. On a personal note, I grew up in Brazil, Indiana. Where is Brazil, Indiana, out there? All right. I played baseball for three years for

American Legion Post 2 in Brazil, Indiana. *(Applause)*

We never made it to the World Series. And almost every time I'm back home we run up a pretty good tab at The American Legion. We reconnect with old friends. Actually, the last time that I was back there, it was for a memorial service this past winter, for a memorial service for one of my best friend's dad. His name is Tom Wilson. I was sitting at the bar with some of his old buddies that I know really well. They said that Tom was the smartest guy they knew, he knew everything about everything, and that they were so impressed that a guy from Brazil, Indiana, could know so much. But then they invented Google, and they found out he was completely full of s***. *(Laughter)*

That's the kind of wisdom that I usually pick up at The American Legion. *(Laughter)*

So, I had dinner last night with Chip Ganassi, who was up here earlier. He's a good buddy of mine. I said that my American Legion, Post 2, was the second oldest post in the country because was No. 2. And then I Googled it. And I found out that, just like Tom Wilson, I have been full of s*** since high school. There's a lot of Post 2s in this country, which I just found out.

Both professionally and personally, we are so honored to have this connection with The American Legion and accept this prestigious honor. On behalf of FOX Sports, it just means the world to us. You believe me, we will keep celebrating America and everyone that supports her. Thank you very much. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Now that you know the backstory, let's watch that video one more time. ...*Video shown: "Ragged Old Flag." (Applause)*

Ladies and gentlemen, I now call on Gaither Keener, chairman of the Convention Committee on Finance, for the purpose of a clarification.

CHAIRMAN GAITHER KEENER: Thank you, Mr. Commander. After a review of the minutes of the Convention Committee on Finance, a clarification is in order. The motion was made for the national per capita to be set at \$23.50, effective membership year 2025, of which collection begins on July 1, 2024.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Nothing is more important to The American Legion than preventing veteran suicide. I am excited about this next panel because this is a discussion that we need to have and continue to have as long as there is one veteran contemplating taking his or her life. We need to hear ideas, and we need to always listen. With us today is Chip Ganassi team manager for the Extreme E Program, David Berkenfield. Dave is a veteran of the Navy SEALs, with more than 25 years serving in the United States military special operations community, retiring as special operations senior chief. As every member of the Navy knows, if you want straight answers, ask a chief. Ladies and gentlemen let's give a warm welcome to Dave Berkenfield.

Fireside Chat on Veteran Suicide

Dave Berkenfield, Team Manager, Chip Ganassi Racing Extreme E Program

Senior Chief Petty Officer Mark Tangey, USN (Ret.)

Master Chief Petty Officer Shawn Dowling, USN (Ret.)

DAVE BERKENFIELD: Thank you, commander. Thank you. I'm going to call two additional teammates up here, and we're going to get this really critical conversation started. Master Chief Retired Shawn Dowling. Shawn and I were teammates for a long time. We're really grateful to have him up here. He drove down from Virginia Beach last night to take part in this. Thanks, Shawn.

SHAWN DOWLING: You're welcome.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: And Mark Tangey. Mark is a great friend. That's why we're here. We're going to tell the story of our friendship, Shawn and I's friendship and Mark and his wife Elena, who is also here. Senior Chief Retired Mark Tangey please come up as well. Have a seat, guys.

This is one of those conversations that you will not likely hear again. This is one of

those conversations where I ask you to take a breath, be quiet, put your phone away, act like this is the most important conversation in the room right now because it is.

I apologize in advance for some colorful sailor language on the stage right here. You have 80-plus years of senior-enlisted leadership, and we're just going to tell it how it is because that's what we need to do now. We need to tell this story exactly how it is in its raw form, and we need to create action behind that.

You as members of The Legion are that action. We're in every state. We're in every county. We're in every little, small town. This is how we make a difference, right here, by telling this story and then you taking it home. You taking it home into each post. You taking it home to your friends, your teammates, your fellow Legionnaires, your family members. We do that one at a time. We do that as individuals and as a group. I'm going to start this by reading a text thread between Shawn, Mark, and myself one year ago.

Mark, "I'm done. Leaving hospital. I don't give a s***. Not a f***ing person is listening to anything I'm saying. Trust me, Dave, if I was good before, I am not now. I don't give a f*** about anything right now."

My response, "Buddy, we love you. We want to see you succeed and thrive. We want to help you find that."

Mark, "Death is better than this. I don't say that lightly."

My response, "Dude, don't go there. My older brother committed suicide, and I miss him every f***ng day. His son misses him like crazy. That void will never heal. Remember when we were in the bathroom in Indy trying to figure out the deal with your arm. That was you. This is not."

Shawn, "Don't do this, Mark. You're not a quitter. Don't quit on us or your family. You're going to get through this, and you'll be a better person for it. Stay focused on what you need right now. Everything is going to be fine. This is all fixable. These challenges will make you stronger."

24 hours later, I got this from Mark: "I'm sorry, guys. You are the best friends I have. I've seen that time and time again. I don't deserve you all as my friends. I am really having a rough time, and it's hit and miss. I am sorry. I'm trying. I'm trying really, really f***ing hard."

That was one year ago. It's been a little bit of a journey before that and a little bit of a journey after that. The fact we have this group here with me, in fact, we have Mark sitting next to me, willing to be here on this stage, is monumental. It's simply how we have this conversation. Shawn, Mark, it's a little bit of a jaw-dropper opening. I would like to know 12 months later how thinking through that dialogue in that moment, 12 months ago, makes you feel now. Let me start with Shawn.

SHAWN DOWLING: I think we've come extremely far from the man where he was to where he is right now. It's a process. It's not an easy button that you have that you can just press, and you fix it.

Mark, knowing who he was and how he dealt with issues and problems and challenges, to see him get to that point, we kind of saw him going in that direction two or three years prior to that.

You know, me and Dave didn't really have training in this. All we did was just what came natural, is like a buddy is down, and you need to help him in any way we thought we could do it. Getting on him immediately was like, it seemed like collectively, it's like, hey, we need to figure out what this is. Because we weren't trained coming out of it to go, okay, suicide, tell a person. So, there's a lot, the mechanics to all this, which me and Dave learned over the time.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: So, Mark, we're going to talk a little bit about how we got there, but looking back on that text thread and going back and forth there for 24 hours with you, how does that make you feel at this point?

MARK TANGEY: Well, I feel like, if I didn't have that phone number to call you and call him, I don't know what I would have done. I don't think I'd have any kind of outlet to get anything done if I didn't have the connection that I had with these two guys. I don't

know what to say about it. I kind of was looking around for I'd say over a year, kind of mixed up with a TBI, or several of them. It mixed my brain up past where I remember it being before, and it caught me off guard. I didn't notice.

I got in a lot of trouble with the family and law, friends, everything. And then I'm fortunate that I know these two guys, and I called them up, and several times, actually, and it got me started to where I'm at now, which is not perfect, but it's a work in progress.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: So that moment is a moment in time. All right? What you're seeing here 12-plus months later is not Mark. I think it's important here to understand the Mark that Shawn and I knew, the Mark that we relied on as leaders, the Mark that we saw as a mentor, the Mark that we saw as the guy we went to to mentor younger sailors.

So if I was to tell you that Mark was at the Navy Safety Center in a division LCPO traveling around the country doing some of the Navy's most important aviation safety work, trusted to lead that for the country; if I was to tell you that he was on the Chief's Initiation Board, that he was the guy leading that effort; if I was to tell you that his title with us was SME, subject matter expert, jokingly, that's of everything; that this entire life was focused on purpose, on leadership and on bringing up the next generation for 30 years of government service, including ten-plus years with the SEAL teams helping us out all over the nation, deploying to Afghanistan, missing his family, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, like many in this room. I would like to ask you, Shawn, what do you remember of Mark in Bagram leading that group every day?

SHAWN DOWLING: So, Mark, what was great about Mark was there was no babysitting. He was like the glue that kept the young guys together. He kept the morale up. It's like a leader that you want underneath you because there's not a lot to it. It's like the fire and forget. You just let him go and he manages it fine, which is what you want in a guy. That's the greatest thing I remember about Mark, is keeping the morale up, because it sucks really bad, and making it happen. And this is a guy that if he didn't know it, he would learn it. And the younger guys watching him and how he problem solved, he made it work. He made things work. He would burn it down at the end of the day, bring the team together, and when things got really bad, you know, he had the ability to keep the morale up. So, when you have somebody like that working for you, you let him do it. He had the magic. He could do it.

So, he was stellar. When we started seeing him go. We kind of saw a little bit of the writing on the wall, with the decisions he was making, slowly going down, like that camaraderie he was looking for, that team mentality, you know, getting together with the boys and having a good time, he was all about the team. Nothing was more important than the mission and the team. Those were the two most important things in his life.

And money was something that came along with that, and it made it happen. But truly that is what was important, and me and Dave saw that in him. And that is why this is something, when he was going down, that we had to do something about it. This is too much of a good guy to let go. That's what that text was, was, you know, a cry for help. We buried a lot of our buddies. We buried a lot of them. And if you can save one, then, you know, it makes everything worth it.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: So, I wrote: "Mark on deployment. Circled up the young guys, always laughing, pressing them hard, Skyping with Elaina and his daughters, with the group, proud of his family. Totally connected."

When you look back at Afghanistan, Bagram, going back in time here, what do you remember of those glimpses, the few deployments we made? What are things that are highlights for you, being with the guys, working late hours, what are things that are highlighted.

MARK TANGEY: Working for days at a time and then sitting down and shooting the s***. *(Laughs)*

DAVE BERKENFIELD: There's moments there, I think, as every soldier, sailor or airman knows, especially on deployment, is life is short on deployment, and full of high risk, many times, full of long days and long hours, separated by amazing laughs,

surrounded by your best friends, and we definitely had that in Mark. I'm going to start jumping forward here a little bit because I think that's the important part of this conversation.

So, fast-forward a few years. Mark had prior retired, and we hired him as a contractor. He had left that contract of no fault of his own, just downsized in the group, and had lost a little bit of that tribe. And Shawn and I started getting notifications through our teammates, through our friends, through Mark's friends, that Mark was losing the bubble a little bit; that was not connected, disassociated, not prioritizing the important things in his life.

At the time I was in Indianapolis. Shawn was in Virginia Beach. We both spoke about it a little bit, but the question was, is what do I do? What do I do from Indianapolis? What does Shawn do from VB when Mark's in North Carolina? How do we do this? Right? And looking back on it, I wonder then if maybe we would have been a little bit more involved, if we wouldn't have got to some of the red lines that we got to later.

And so, I want to pause there for a minute and ask you, Shawn, retrospectively, you know, before you and I got a phone call and were acting as immediate reaction force there later on and going to meet Elaina and Mark, is there something that we should have done?

SHAWN DOWLING: Something we should have done? I guess the thing is, like what I always default to, is I guess it just wasn't knowledge of how to navigate through this. Like some type of maybe education of what we should have at least make an initiative to start. So, like a plan would probably be, if we had a plan, immediate plan, which we kind of did, it kind of evolved as me and Dave were kind of figuring this out. One was basically make sure everybody knows, you know, everything is going to be okay and then come up with a plan. It's hard to execute that plan because people have lives, and they work, and they've got responsibilities. But I think bottom line is the plan.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: I threw that one at you as a hot softball. I did that because it's something we've spoken about a lot. Be committed. If you're going to commit to this and say I want to make a difference in another veteran's life, in another teammate's life, that's it. That's where it starts.

The next step is education. The next step is making a plan, knowing where you are going to start. Those are things we did not have. We did not have them. What we had is step one. Step one was we're going to do this. Whatever it takes, we're going to figure it out.

So how do we get here? Mark had a love for motorcycles. He has a massive love for motorcycles. Maybe more than any other man I know. Actually, I'll say more than any other person on the planet. Okay. Probably to his detriment now. And I will tell you this, this is the depth of that love. 40- to 50-minute commute to work each direction. It's December. It's snowing. Mark's riding his bike. Back and forth.

Mark, what do you have got going on? I'm going on a bike ride. What day is it? Saturday and Sunday and Monday and Tuesday. It was something that he was so passionate about that, to all of us who also owned bikes at the time, we couldn't keep up. There's not a chance that we could keep up. But what also happens with that, is, in my opinion here, is you start being in traffic a lot. Right? Every day. For hours on a bike. In the twilight. In the dusk. In the country roads.

What happened to Mark, multiple times, is Mark had a series of motorcycle accidents that did some significant trauma to Mark's brain. We are still chasing that now. Some of these accidents are a little awkward, and I'm going to let Mark talk about a couple of the funny ones. They're funny now because he's here and we're talking about it, but this is what Mark was dealing with. So, talk about the owl.

MARK TANGEY: It's just one of the crashes, an owl hit me in the face and knocked me out on my bike.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: Yes, an owl hit him on the bike and knocked him out. All right. How about the deer?

MARK TANGEY: I've hit three deer. Five, actually. Gone down on the bike on three deer. I got an owl that knocked me out, and some road hazards, and then one collision on

64 in Virginia.

SHAWN DOWLING: That's when we started calling him "Crash."

DAVE BERKENFIELD: Literally, "Crash." We can joke about that now, and I'm grateful that you're still here. We were always worried about you when we heard that you had another crash, but the fact is, on one of these crashes, he was on the side of the road for 45 minutes without help.

If you know anything about concussion and concussion issues, follow-on issues, repeated concussive trauma is huge. Multiple concussions back-to-back-to-back are an indicator of significant TBI. All right.

The symptoms of TBI here: Impulsivity, loss of rational decision-making, aggressive anger, short-fused, pulled back, feeling of remote and distance, uninterested in life, dangerous inhibitions. That is a clinical description of what we saw in Mark. All right. Those are things that we recognized. Those are things that we didn't know exactly what to do until, frankly, it was too late.

That too late happened about 18 months ago when I received a phone call from Elaina, and it said, "Mark, we're in deep trouble. We need help. You're the only person that I know who to call."

The story of that night I'll leave for another day, but the fact is, upon further investigation, I flew to Virginia immediately, circled Shawn up. Mark was very close to what I would call a suicide by cop with a local sheriff's department. And I'm super proud of both you and Elaina for stepping through that moment and realizing that life is better. Shawn and I went to court with both Mark and Elaina and in that moment said we need to make a plan here. And that was what Shawn was getting at.

We had no guidance. We didn't have a clinical psychologist to call that said do this. We were navigating murky waters. And what we realized, between the three of us, sitting after a court date, talking about what's next, was we need to focus on the simple s***. And that simple s*** has got us through every single day and every single week, and now we're looking at the big picture.

Now we're looking at brain clinics. Now we're looking at finances. Now we're looking at families. Now we're looking at how we don't do this again. This moment here is a part of that. But it didn't start here. It started in the back of the truck, with a couple very small, simple actionable items. Shawn, you want to sort of talk through that a little bit.

SHAWN DOWLING: In the back of a truck?

DAVE BERKENFIELD: With a notepad and location.

SHAWN DOWLING: Yes, and Mark was on board. It wasn't like he was resisting. He trusted us. We were, like, hey, we started sharing, sharing location. We opened up the notes, and we shared notes. And there was daily just checking in and seeing how everything's going and communicating, making sure everybody was getting what they needed.

And I know dealing with the VA is very taxing. So it was that constant just doing those simple things that need to get done. And I know finances was a big one. Just that simple task to-do list.

And maybe there was somewhere where we could help or help him, assist or we had some background or knowledge about, but we would just navigating that basically bottom line is the to-do list and sharing location and making sure everything's okay.

There would be ups and downs. We would hang out and kind of get a reassessment of where we're at, but it seems like that was working. It wasn't picture-perfect, but we kind of just fumbled through it as we went on. And it seemed like it was working out well.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: Mark, in my sort of tactical mind here, we were an IRF. We were an Immediate Response Force coming into a situation that we had very little control over that we needed to create action on, and we needed to put some protections in place, for you, for Elaina. And that was really, Shawn and I, you know, showing up that day for both you and Elaina at court and saying, hey, we are here. It doesn't matter what happened. It doesn't matter where we're at now, but we're here, right? And part of that was a long

history of trust between the three of us, but part of it was also your family believing in you and not just giving up.

How do you feel when I say, like, we are part of your tribe and we were there? Like, how does it make you feel to know when you called, when Elaina called, we dropped everything, and we showed up there?

MARK TANGEY: Well, first off, I want to apologize because I'm not good at speaking in front of crowds, and I'm from Massachusetts and I see Massachusetts down there. But the hardest thing, I lost you on that, but the hardest thing for me, I would say is that I run into all my old friends, my family back home, all these people I run into daily, and all I hear is, like, we miss the old Mark. And I constantly hear that.

I'm just not the same person I was. I can remember where I was. I remember what it feels like and everything, and I can see myself just not able to get back to where I was. So, after knowing that, you're very limited to being able to trust people or even talk to people. This is by far the biggest crowd I've been in since my accident.

But I knew, from my past, just like they knew the old Mark, I knew from my past how much I trust these guys and love them and the same with my family. And pretty much that is what made me be able to reach out or even open up and trust them. Like, in my head, my head didn't want to trust anybody, including them, and it would constantly mess with me, and it still does, but I just have to focus on the fact that I know my family loves me and I know these guys love me and that's all that matters to me. If they ask me to do something, I'll always do it. But that's a big part of it is you've got no place to go when you're a different person after a TBI.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: I think where we are here is in a place where I need to tell the story of that text and what happened right before it.

So, after a court date, Shawn and I went to Chesapeake, supported Mark and his family there, made some plans. Start getting connected. Start figuring out what we need to do. Mark was dealing with some significant issues due to a motorcycle accident with his arm. He had a bone infection. A really, really gnarly bone infection.

But we needed to get him out of Virginia Beach. And so, I brought him to our home in Indianapolis, and he stayed with us for a few weeks, but his arm wasn't getting better, and we were fighting to get him into some clinics in Indianapolis. That was challenging. Eventually, hey, we need to get you back to Virginia Beach to see the specialist that did your surgery initially.

And so, we got him back to Virginia Beach, frankly, right in time, I think, and they did another surgery on his arm, a massive antibiotic regimen, every day, IV antibiotics, for a long period of time. And during that multiple period there is when Mark was in the hospital and, frankly, struggling, right?

I'm in Atlanta at an INDYCAR race. Shawn's in Virginia Beach, and we start having this conversation, because that wasn't the first conversation that we had. This was months after we created our group text, right? At this point, for me, I'm sitting with the rest of the Chip Ganassi Racing leadership team and I'm reading these texts, and I'm thinking: This is not happening right now. And so, I showed one of these texts to Chip, and I said I might need to leave like now.

And if you want to know who that man was that was up on the stage earlier, our team owner, Chip Ganassi, who represents The American Legion and "Be the One." He basically threw me the figurative keys to our corporate jet and said, "Go get him."

Fortunately, we didn't have to get there, but we came real close. Okay. And what happened was a moment that made me realize how hard it is to be on the other end of this. And so, Mark is in the hospital. Shawn and the three of us are on texts. I'm concerned for Mark. I figure out what hospital he's in. I start making phone calls.

I make phone calls to the hospital, 800 number, to their reception, trying to get in touch with an administrator. It was incredibly challenging for me to get anywhere into the, to navigate the hospital system to talk to a charge nurse that knew where Mark was. It took me over an hour and a half to get in touch with the right person.

Finally, it took me screen shooting the text thread that Mark and Shawn and I had and sending it to the charge nurse for the charge nurse to actually admit that they had Mark in the hospital, and then have a conversation with me.

As someone jumping into this in a moment of trying to help, you are going to hit roadblocks. All right. And those roadblocks will be seemingly insurmountable, for sure. After an hour of being on the phone, I had a moment of: Is this worth it? And that lasted about one millisecond. And then I said, "Yes, this is worth it."

And I stayed on the phone, and eventually we got Mark's charge nurse. They came in. Doctor spoke to you a little bit. And then Mark called me, a different version of Mark called me, super appreciative of looking out for him, for caring and stepping up. That was that moment. That was the moment that we needed someone to jump in and also needed Mark to ask for a little bit of help.

So today we are 18-plus months away from that. Life's a journey. Every day, I think, is still challenging. We're still fighting, you know, health-care bills. 100 grand-plus in health-care bills, which I'm still trying to figure out why we can't get them covered here. It's just one thing after another, but we're going to keep fighting. Shawn and I are going to keep fighting. Elaina is going to keep fighting here. Mark's going to keep fighting. And today, I think, is a really important moment because Mark is sitting on the stage. *(Applause)*

If we look at this conversation 18 months ago, he wouldn't have volunteered for it. Not a chance. Last week, Mark, you mentioned to me how hard it was and how hard this fight has been and how hard it has been for Elaina and your two daughters. And your hope that your family doesn't give up on you. Knowing that Elaina is here with you today, been through this wild ride, what do you want to say to that? *(Applause)*

MARK TANGEY: That I have an insanely awesome wife that has, not just that, my two daughters. Because, like, I'm not the guy she married. You know? I'm just trying to live up to it. But I just have an amazing group of people around me.

My family is amazing. My friends are amazing. My best friends and brothers. I'm just super appreciative because a lot of this stuff I can't figure out for myself anymore. Organizing the garage for me is a challenge. And even keeping my cool, that's a challenge, too. And my motorcycle's broken. I'm not too happy. *(Laughter)*

DAVE BERKENFIELD: Shawn, I'm going to close this up here in one minute, Shawn, but I want to give you an opportunity to sort of close up from your perspective here.

SHAWN DOWLING: One is thank you for having me, inviting me down here to kind of help contribute to this issue of suicide. It's nothing to take lightly, and if you can prevent one, you know, it makes everything worth it. So, one is thank you, and never give up. And I know you hear it, everybody hears it, keep an ear open for it. It comes subtle, you know.

And then talking to people that maybe know him, know them more closely. I could say is just be aware of it. That's the takeaway from today, is just care, just care about it.

Especially the guy, not everyone, everyone you should care, but the guys serving this country and unfortunately had some issues and just take care of your brother.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: So, I'm going to finish this up with a couple things. Very simply: Be involved. Right? Be involved.

You're here today. You're part of The American Legion. The American Legion's number one mission for this generation, for our generation, for you, for the next generation, needs to be veteran suicide. It's clear. Right?

The numbers don't lie. We are making action. We are making headway. We are doing it every day, but this is an individual thing. You've got to look at yourself in the mirror and say "I want to be involved."

Number two, get educated. Right? Being here right now, having these conversations, is part of that. Next year come to the "Be the One" symposium. It's 100 yards away. Spend an hour in there listening to the scientists, listening to the human stories. If you had an opportunity and you came this year, thank you. If you didn't come this year, I challenge you to come next year.

And lastly here, I want to say to Elaina and Mark, thank you, thank you for being willing to do this. Thank you for being willing to do this and be part of this story. Every veteran in this country should be thanking you right now, and I'm looking forward to whatever we've got next, because it's going to be great, right? *(Applause)*

FROM THE FLOOR: Let's start right here. Mark, thank you for sharing. Mark, your brothers and sisters are here for you. *(Applause)*

MARK TANGEY: Thank you.

DAVE BERKENFIELD: Thank you. Let's go ahead and stand up here, please, and give Mark and Elaina a huge round of applause. *(Applause)*

DELEGATE GRAHAM (VT): May I have the floor? I'm Louie Graham from the state of Vermont, past southern area commander. I make a challenge to everybody in here, I started it with my post, our department. Pass the hat around in each section you are and we'll turn it over to Mark towards his medical bills. Montana and Vermont have already started it. So, please, let's get this department behind him in our own little way. Thank you very much. *(Applause)*

Presentation: Certificate of Appreciation

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Remember, you can be the one. Just care enough to try. The man who has served as our national chaplain the last year has been both a spiritual leader for The American Legion and previously served as a military chaplain. A 26-year veteran of the U.S. Army, Army Reserve and National Guard, he graduated from Valley City State College in North Dakota and Association Free Lutheran Bible School and Seminary in Plymouth, Minnesota. He is also an American Legion Rider with more than 250,000 miles traveled by motorcycle. It is an honor for me to present a Certificate of Appreciation marking his service as national chaplain to Daniel Mark Antal.

ANNOUNCER: Certificate of Appreciation presented to Daniel Mark Antal, Senior, national chaplain of The American Legion, 2022-2023. Given in recognition of faithful and honorable service to The American Legion. Signed Daniel S. Wheeler, National Adjutant. Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola, National Commander. (Applause)

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN ANTAL: It has been an extreme honor and what an exciting year, just a privilege to serve as your national chaplain, to meet several of you. And the commander knows this, he's been on the top of my prayer list every day for the last year. And I continue to pray for our national leadership. What a privilege. I'm thankful to have been able to serve you all. Thanks so much. *(Applause)*

Presentation: Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Daniel J. O'Connor was the chairman of the national Americanism Commission from 1962 to 1983. He was chairman emeritus from 1984 until his passing in 2004. The Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy is given to the department that achieves the most outstanding results in conducting Americanism programs. These programs advance patriotism among the citizens of this nation and participation in our youth activities. Ladies and gentlemen, the winner of the Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy is the Department of Virginia. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: Daniel J. O'Connor Americanism Trophy awarded to The American Legion Department of Virginia in recognition of the most outstanding Americanism program. Presented at the 104th National Convention of The American Legion, Charlotte, North Carolina. Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola, National Commander and Mark Avis chairman the American Legion national Americanism Commission. (Applause)

DELEGATE OERTEL (VA): I'm Rick Oertel, immediate past commander from the Department of Virginia. With me on stage today I have our NEC Linden Dixon, Alternate NEC Les Clevinger, Adjutant Dave Stein and past department commander and former Americanism chairman Tom Quick. I would also like to acknowledge our current Americanism chairman John Schenk. John did an outstanding job this year, as evident by receipt of this award. He communicated with all of our posts and districts at least a couple times a week. He coordinated all the efforts of those posts, and he was responsible for the creation of the report that actually got us this award. So, I certainly thank you all for the honor. We thank you all for the honor because it's a great honor to receive the award. Thank you very much.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The Chair recognizes Mark A. Avis of Massachusetts, chairman of the Convention Committee on Americanism, for the purpose of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Americanism
Mark A. Avis, Massachusetts, Chairman**

Thank you, Commander. At 8:30 am, Sunday, August 27, 2023, the Convention Committee on Americanism met in the Charlotte Convention Center for the purpose of electing a chairman and secretary for Americanism. Roll call was taken and a quorum declared present.

Mark Avis (MA) was elected chairman and Michael Donnelly (NC) was elected secretary for the purpose of reporting to the Convention.

It was regularly moved, seconded and carried that the committee chairman and secretary be authorized to accept and sign the report of the Convention Committee on Americanism on behalf of its delegates.

It was also regularly moved, seconded and carried that the chairman and secretary may make technical corrections to the resolutions reported out of this convention committee to ensure proper wording and form without changing the substance or meaning of this resolution.

The Americanism Convention Committee was recessed at this point, subject to recall by the chairman if required.

The Convention Committee met and considered their assigned resolutions as follows:

Referred to the Standing Commission on Americanism

Resolution No. 1 (AR): Black Ribbon Indicate Half-staff on Fixed and Wall-Mounted U.S. Flags

Resolution No. 7 (FL): Civil Air Patrol

Resolution No. 8 (FL): Civil Air Patrol Cadets

Resolution No. 36 (NY): Change Date of Oratorical National Finals to the First Weekend in May

As a duly elected and registered delegate from the Department of Massachusetts, I move for the adoption of this report. ...*Second.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Any discussion? All those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed. The Americanism report is adopted.

Special Presentation: Gold Brigade

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our American Legion programs offer excellent opportunities to recruit and grow our American Legion Family. At the American Legion World Series, Past National Commander John P. "Jake" Comer signed up 61 new

Members. I am hereby making Past National Commander Comer a member of the Gold Brigade. Commander Comer, please come forward to receive your regalia. *(Applause)*

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER COMER: Thank you very much, Commander Troiola. For 12 years, I attended the World Series in Shelby, North Carolina and serving as one of the members of the board of directors.

With last year being 132,000 people in attendance, I always felt that there's something wrong here with so many in the audience and many of them were veterans. So, I asked to have included in the remarks that all veterans up there would please come forward and sign up for The American Legion. And 61 individuals did. So, I'm proud to be part of this operation. Thank you very much. *(Applause)*

Presentation: Frank N. Belgrano, Jr., Trophy

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Having completed the adoption of the Americanism report earlier, it is appropriate to announce the winners of two Americanism awards. Frank Belgrano Jr. was national commander from 1934-1935. He was a founder of the Galileo Post in San Francisco and was the department commander of California during a peak year for membership and activity in the Golden State. The Frank Belgrano, Jr., Trophy is given annually to the department rendering the most outstanding service to the Boy Scouts of America program during the 12-month period beginning August 1. This year's winner is the Department of Missouri. *(Applause)*

Presentation: Ralph T. O'Neil Education Trophy

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: It is only fitting that an education award be named after a national commander who graduated from Harvard Law School and interrupted his term as a county attorney in Kansas so he could serve in World War I. The Ralph T. O'Neil Education Award is given to the department within the United States documenting the greatest activity in operating The American Legion School Medal Program. The winning department shows what can be accomplished by an active and involved American Legion. The winner is the Department of Tennessee. *(Applause)*

Presentation: Garland D. Murphy, Jr. Award

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: In 1952, Department Commander Dr. Garland D. Murphy, Jr. of Arkansas, came to The American Legion with an offer to provide a valuable contribution to be used solely for children. After much study and discussion, the idea of a foundation was adopted. Eventually, on October 15, 1953, the National Executive Committee approved the establishment of the foundation and entered into a trust agreement with Dr. Murphy. Legal work was completed, and on July 9, 1954, the foundation was duly incorporated under the laws of the State of Indiana. At that time, Dr. Murphy assigned to the foundation deeds to the fractional mineral rights on nearly 10,000 acres of land in the oil-rich Williston Basin in Montana and North Dakota. To date, more than \$20 million has been awarded to nonprofit organizations to assist the children of this country from the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc. Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to present the first of these two awards to the Department of Maryland.

ANNOUNCER: The Garland D. Murphy, Jr. Award is presented by the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation to The American Legion Department of Maryland for the program year 2022-2023. In recognition of their designation as the number one department, in total contributions received from their volunteers, in support of our annual program designed to meet the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of our nation's children through productive and meaningful grants.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The second Garland D. Murphy, Jr. Award goes to The American Legion Riders, Department of Florida.

ANNOUNCER: The Garland D. Murphy Jr. award is presented by The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation to The American Legion Riders Department of Florida for their program year 2022-2023 in recognition of their designation as the number one department in total contributions received from their volunteers in support of our annual program designed to meet the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of our nation's children through productive and meaningful grants.

Presentation: U.S. "Udie" Grant Legacy Award

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: It is now time for me to present the U.S. "Udie" Grant Legacy Awards. Udie was a member of the National Executive Committee for 38 years. From the Department of Kansas, he also served as a longtime director and later president of our national Child Welfare Foundation until he joined Post Everlasting in 2004. The U.S. "Udie" Grant Legacy Awards recognize the collective efforts of the American Legion Family, the Child Welfare Foundation, and affiliated Eight & Forty in a department or American Legion Riders group. It goes to the departments that collectively raise the most money for the Child Welfare Foundation during the past program year. The first winner of this prestigious award is the Department of Florida.

ANNOUNCER: The U.S. "Udie" Grant Legacy Award presented by the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation to the Department of Florida for the program year 2022-23 in recognition of outstanding support for the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. We thank you.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our next Udie Grant Legacy Award goes to the Department of Florida American Legion Riders.

Presentation: Child Welfare Foundation Meritorious Achievement Award

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Next, we are presenting the Child Welfare Foundation Meritorious Achievement Award for the highest increase in per capita giving for the past program year. And the winner is the Department of Washington.

ANNOUNCER: Meritorious Achievement Award: Achieving the highest increase in per capita giving for 2022-2023 - The American Legion Department of Washington. The Board of Directors gratefully recognizes your outstanding support of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. Service to the critical needs of America's children is made possible through your caring and generosity.

Presentation: Child Welfare Foundation Excellence Award

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: We just recognized the department that had the highest increase in per capita giving for the Child Welfare Foundation. Now it's time for the Child Welfare Foundation Excellence Award given to the department which has the highest per capita giving to the Child Welfare Foundation during the past program year. Again, the winner is the Department of Washington.

ANNOUNCER: Excellence Award. Achieving the highest in per capita giving for 2022-2023 - The American Legion Department of Washington. The Board of Directors gratefully recognizes your outstanding support of the American Legion Child Welfare

Foundation. Service to the critical needs of America's children is made possible through your caring and generosity.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I now call upon the president of the Child Welfare Foundation, Robert Morrill of New York, for the purposes of a presentation.

Presentation: Child Welfare Foundation Presentation to the National Commander

CHILD WELFARE FOUNDATION PRESIDENT MORRILL (NY): Mr. Commander, on behalf of the board of directors of the Child Welfare Foundation, I have the great honor to present to you this five-diamond gold lapel pin for your dedicated service to the Child Welfare Foundation.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you so much for this. I appreciate it very much.

Collection of Donations

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: If anyone has donations for the Child Welfare Foundation, I will now accept those on stage. Those presenting checks should proceed to the microphone, announce the amount and the donor. Then go to the front, on the floor, for a photograph. ...*National Vice Commander Harris assumed the Chair.*

DELEGATE STUVENGEN (WI): Karl Stuvengen, commander, Department of Wisconsin, Wisconsin donates \$1,231 to Child Welfare Foundation.

DELEGATE DAVIS (MA) From the Department of Massachusetts, I'm Department Commander Sandra Davis. Joining me is NEC Mike Davis, ANEC Jodie Pajak, Past Department Commander Sally May, we're donating an additional \$1,235 today.

DELEGATE MOHLMAN (MI): I'm Brian Mohlman, privileged to serve my fellow Michigan Legionnaires as their commander this year. I have with me Brett Holt, our alternate National Executive Committeeman, who will make a check presentation.

DELEGATE HOLT (MI): Department of Michigan is proud to present the Child Welfare Foundation \$2,000.

DELEGATE ROBINSON (CT): Good afternoon. Louie Robinson, past department commander, Department of Connecticut, proudly presents a check for \$1,000. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NE): Good afternoon. I have with me our Department Commander John Henry Percy; our NECman Fred Craigie; our Alternate Jim Costello, and the home of Past National Commander Michael Helm, we are donating \$8,975 towards Child Welfare Foundation.

DELEGATE STENNIS (OH): Good afternoon. My name is Charles Stennis. I'm the immediate past commander of Department of Ohio. With me I have NECman Steve Masowick and Department Adjutant J.D. Robinson. On behalf of the Department of Ohio, we graciously donate \$10,000 to Child Welfare. O-H – (*Chorus of "i-o."*)

DELEGATE AUCOIN (LA): Good afternoon. I'm Charlie Aucoin, NEC from Louisiana, representing the southern block this afternoon as vice chairman. The great Department of Puerto Rico always donates some rum, and all the sailors at the breakfast this morning donated some money, and we're going to donate this bottle of rum to our national commander, Mr. Jim Troiola. He was a boatswain mate in the Navy and we're really proud of him. Besides that, we picked up a tidy sum of \$15,000 for the National Emergency Fund.

DELEGATE MARCHINKE (MD): James Marchinke, delegate for this convention. Again, somebody handed me \$20 they found on the sidewalk. If you know your serial number, you'll get credit for this donation. Thank you.

...National Commander Troiola resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Total donations so far, Child Welfare Foundation, \$798,948.55. Thank you so much. (*Applause*)

The Chair recognizes Matthew J. Shuman, Arizona, chairman of the national Convention Committee on National Security, for the purposes of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on National Security
Matthew J. Shuman, Arizona, Chairman**

On Sunday, August 27, 2023, at 9:00 a.m., 48 delegates and alternates convened in Room 207, Section A-D of the Charlotte Convention Center for the Convention Committee on National Security.

I, Matthew Shuman, from Arizona was elected as the Chairman during the meeting, and Mike Cooke (WY) was elected as the Secretary.

The same 48 delegates and alternates were assigned to the National Security Committee. The convention committee met in Room 207, Section A-D, on the first floor of the Charlotte Convention Center. They reviewed and discussed recommended actions on resolutions.

Eleven resolutions were assigned to the Convention Committee on National Security or prepared by the Committee to address The American Legion's principles and objectives.

The Convention Committee authorized the Chairman to sign the report on behalf of its delegates and make technical and administrative corrections to the resolutions reported by the Committee.

Resolutions Approved (1), Resolutions Approved with amendments (2), Resolutions Received and Recorded (1), and Resolutions Referred to Standing Commission or Committee on National Security (7.)

Approved

Resolution No. 48: Rebuilding the U.S. Defense Industrial Base

Origin: Virginia

Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

WHEREAS, The United States is facing growing threats from near-peer adversaries like China, and history shows wars between major powers often expand into protracted conflicts; and

WHEREAS, Current U.S. military planning focuses too much on short, sharp battles instead of the demands of an enduring war; and

WHEREAS, The defense industrial base (DIB) resiliency required to sustain the U.S. in great power conflict was sacrificed as part of the 1990s peace dividend; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. can no longer rely on mobilizing the "Arsenal of Democracy" like in WWII due to decades of deindustrialization and globalization, with 75 percent fewer defense companies today compared to 1993; and

WHEREAS, Small business participation, including those owned and controlled by veterans and service-disabled veterans, in defense procurements as prime and subcontractors is vital to the defense mission, competition, and health of the DIB; and

WHEREAS, The powerhouses of industrial readiness – stable and predictable budgets, an experienced and specialized workforce, diversified and modern infrastructure, manufacturing innovation; and sufficient, including idle, capacity – have all atrophied under the combined transition to a services-based economy with a premium on just-in-time commercial supply chains; and

WHEREAS, The advanced technologies and weapons platforms that underpin American military superiority depend on fragile global supply chains vulnerable to disruption; and

WHEREAS, Critical industries like machine tools, forging, and foundries have seen 50 percent or more of businesses disappear, and manufacturing employment has declined by 75 percent since 1950; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. share of global rare earth production and refining capacity has declined precipitously, posing risks for advanced systems like hypersonic missiles; and

WHEREAS, The war in Ukraine demonstrates the continued importance of industrial capacity, production, and logistics for victory in modern warfare; and

WHEREAS, The United States must rebuild its industrial base and make sustained investments to prepare for the possibility of a protracted conflict with a near-peer adversary; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion recommends the U.S. government should map industrial capabilities against long war scenarios, wargame with industry, and invest in expanding capacity; and, be it further

RESOLVED, Congress should fund programs to re-shore and expand key defense industries, including rare earths production, while developing synergies between the U.S. industrial base and that of its allies; and, be it further

RESOLVED, Congress should consider measures to diversify the domestic defense industrial base, including increased oversight of mergers, changes to intellectual property provisions in defense contracting, acquisition reform, and strengthening incentives for small businesses and new defense industrial base entrants, including those owned and controlled by veterans and service-disabled veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, Public-private partnerships should be strengthened to enable rapid industrial mobilization; and, be it further

RESOLVED, Congress should modernize the Defense Production Act for the 21st Century to enable holistic solutions for critical manufacturing facilities, such as targeted visa approvals for STEM talent, direct project financing, and automatic fast-tracking of permits; and, be it further

RESOLVED, Congress should scale up workforce development programs to credential more workers and veterans for high-demand trades; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That educating the public about the importance of a robust, secure industrial base is a critical homeland security issue.

Approved with Amendments

Resolution No. 17: Policy on Taiwan

Origin: Texas

Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

(As Amended)

WHEREAS, The Republic of China (Taiwan) is a long-time friend, ally, and key partner of the United States; and

WHEREAS, Taiwan closely cooperated with the United States against Japanese imperialism during World War II and in the fight against communism during the Cold War; and

WHEREAS, The United States and Taiwan share democratic values, deep commercial and economic ties, and strong people-to-people connections, which serve as the impetus for expanding engagement by the United States with Taiwan; and

WHEREAS, Taiwan is strategically located and is extremely important to the peace, prosperity, and stability of the Indo-Pacific Region; and

WHEREAS, The People's Republic of China (PRC) is consistently building up its military capabilities and flexing its muscles in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and most aggressively in the Taiwan Strait; and

WHEREAS, The PRC is continuously blocking Taiwan's participation in international affairs; and

WHEREAS, It is in the best interests of all parties on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to resolve political differences peacefully; and

WHEREAS, Taiwan is the eighth-largest trading partner of the United States, and the United States is the second-largest trading partner of Taiwan; and

WHEREAS, The United States and Taiwan initiated trade negotiations in August 2022 called the U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st-Century Trade with the goal being to create trade agreements that will strengthen and deepen economic and trade ties between the United States and Taiwan; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion encourages the creation of new trade agreements that will strengthen and deepen economic and trade ties between the United States and Taiwan; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the United States strongly advocate for the full membership of Taiwan in the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and other international organizations; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the United States should continue to take all necessary measures to boost Taiwan's self-defense capabilities to deter possible aggression by the People's Republic of China; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the United States should encourage the parties on both sides of the Taiwan Strait: the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People's Republic of China, to promote peaceful dialogue and avoid any unilateral change of the status quo which might lead to military conflict.

Resolution No. 30: Modernization of the Armed Forces

Origin: Michigan

Submitted by: Convention Committee on National Security

(As Amended)

WHEREAS, The American Legion has a longstanding commitment to supporting our military and advocating for policies and programs that enhance our national security; and WHEREAS, The international rules-based order that has kept great power peace since the end of World War II is under stress, and the United States is facing growing rivalry with China, Russia, and other authoritarian states whose national security interests are in competition with the United States; and

WHEREAS, The national security environment is undergoing a profound transformation, and new technologies and strategies are necessary to ensure that our military remains prepared to dominate and, if necessary, defeat emerging threats; and

WHEREAS, The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has stated that the United States Joint Forces is at an inflection point and must balance current operations' readiness with future modernization; and

WHEREAS, Modernization is a continuous process that is based on understanding emerging and evolving threats, the changing character of warfare, the rapid proliferation of technology, and the missions the U.S. military will be ordered to undertake while ensuring a warfighting advantage over adversaries; and

WHEREAS, Modernization of the armed forces is essential to maintaining the readiness and effectiveness of our military and requires sustained investment in research, development, testing, engineering, acquisition, recruiting, training; and

WHEREAS, The joint force must fully integrate emerging technologies, including precision long-range fires, hypersonic weapons, quantum computing, artificial intelligence, robotics, and pervasive all-domain sensors, assured all-domain command and control to maintain its position as the most lethal and capable military in the world; and

WHEREAS, The Army of 2030 vision aims to transform into a multi-domain force capable of conducting large-scale combat operations and engaging in sustained

competition through modernization efforts such as soldier lethality, future vertical lift, air and missile defense, long-range precision fires, network-enabled mission command, and robotic and autonomous systems; and

WHEREAS, The Marine Corps Force Design 2030 seeks to create a more lethal, agile, and distributed naval expeditionary crisis response force through prioritization of stand-in forces, expeditionary advanced base operations, all-domain command, control and fires capabilities, training, and talent management to deny an adversary its immediate objectives and enable other joint forces; and

WHEREAS, The Navy's Force Design 2045 modernization efforts seek to maintain open sea lanes through distributed maritime operations, integration of additional unmanned vessels in a hybrid fleet, installation of ungradable higher-power weapons and sensors, ensuring delivery of support/logistics, and generating advantage for making decisions to decisively win our nation's wars when called upon; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Air Force and Space Force are modernizing their ability to protect and maintain supremacy in air and space through improving airborne battle management, electronic warfare, tactical air dominance, resilient forward basing, agile combat employment, increased global strike capacity, and high readiness levels to deploy and win; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion supports the modernization of the United States Armed Forces to ensure that it is ready to fight and win in all domains of conflict, taking into account the evolving character of modern warfare; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion calls upon Congress to provide adequate funding to support the joint warfighting modernization efforts and ensure the U.S. military retains its lethality and capability advantages around the world; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion reaffirms its commitment to the defense of the United States and its allies and supports efforts to maintain high states of current readiness while simultaneously modernizing for the future operating environment and taking care of our servicemembers and their families.

Received and Recorded

Resolution No. 21 (TX): Immigration Policy

Referred To The Standing Commission on National Security

Resolution No. 2 (AR): Permitting concealed carry Of Privately Owned Firearms on Department of Defense Installations.

Resolution No. 11 (MN): Expand Law Enforcement Officer of The Year eligibility Criteria to Include Corrections Officers.

Resolution No. 25 (VA): North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) Assessment

Resolution No. 31 (MI): Artificial Intelligence

Resolution No. 35 (NY): Support Legislation on The Importance Of Veterans Service Organizations

Resolution No. 43 (NY): Artificial Intelligence

Resolution No. 46 (IL): Investigation of United states Airspace Security

Mr. Commander, national officers, and fellow delegates. I am pleased to announce the National Blood Donor Awards winners this past year.

Category I - Departments with 100,000 or more members

Post Participation: Pennsylvania

Individual Participation: Pennsylvania

Category II - 70,000 to 99,999 members.

Post Participation: New York

Individual Participation: New York

Category III - 40,000 to 69,999 members

Post Participation: Minnesota

Individual Participation: Minnesota

Category IV - 25,000 to 39,999 members

Post Participation: Virginia.

Individual Participation: Virginia

Category V - 10,000 to 24,999 members

Post Participation: Alabama

Individual Participation: Maine

Category VI - less than 10,000 members

Post Participation: Vermont

Individual Participation: Vermont

Many of our Departments participated in the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) Awards Program this year. 6,501 medals were awarded to deserving cadets in Senior ROTC and Junior ROTC Units. The winning departments for 2023 were Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina. (*Applause*)

On behalf of The American Legion and its nearly 1.6 million members, job well done to all the departments and the youth of The American Legion enrolled in the ROTC programs. Mr. Commander, as a delegate to this Convention from the Department of Arizona, I move to adopt this report. ...*Second.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Any discussion? Hearing none, all those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? The report of National Security is adopted. The Chair recognizes Brian Ring from Iowa, chairman of the Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education, for the purposes of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education
Brian Ring, Iowa, Chairman**

On Sunday, August 27, 2023, Fifty (50) members of your Committees on Employment and Veterans' Preference and on Veterans' Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness met at 9:00 am at the Westin Charlotte, Providence Ballroom, Section III, First Floor and agreed on the following report, which is respectfully submitted for your consideration.

The Committees were called to order by Joseph C. Sharpe, Jr. (DC), Director appointed by the National Adjutant to act as temporary chairman. Adam Treece and Ricardo D. Gomez (DC), Employment & Education Policy Associates for the National Veterans' Employment & Education Commission, acted as staff liaisons and called the roll.

A quorum being present, nominations were received and elected: Brian D. Ring from Iowa was elected Chairman, and Lloyd H. Woods from Maine was elected secretary.

Eight (8) resolutions were presented for this Convention's consideration. The Convention Committees took the following actions on the resolutions: Six resolutions were approved, and two were referred to the standing commission.

A motion was made and seconded to authorize the chairman and secretary to sign and deliver the report on the Convention Committees' behalf.

A report of action taken on the resolution referred to the standing national Veterans Employment & Education Commission will be made to the National Executive Committee and to the adjutant of the department concerned.

At this time, I would like to turn the podium over to Eric Measles, Chairman, for the purpose of reading the resolutions.

ERIC MEASLES (CA): Good afternoon, all. The following resolutions were approved:

Approved

Resolution No. 13: Option to Provide Contact Information to Veterans Service Organizations at Discharge or Retirement

Origin: Minnesota

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

(As Amended)

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a congressionally chartered organization directed to safeguard the interests and welfare of servicemembers and veterans; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion is only open to membership by qualified veterans of the United States military; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion is mindful of protecting all private information of servicemembers and veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That the American Legion requests the Congress of the United States, in its next session, pass a bill requiring all active duty that are retiring or ending their term of service be given paperwork at the time of their out-processing that allows them to volunteer their contact information to the national office of The American Legion.

Resolution No. 28: Accelerated Training in Defense Manufacturing

Origin: Iowa

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, A strong national defense industrial base is critical to providing the weapons and weapons systems essential for our national security; and

WHEREAS, Shortfalls in the highly skilled workforce needed by the national defense industrial base are becoming increasingly evident, especially in the shipbuilding industry; and

WHEREAS, Senior leaders within the Department of Defense and industry have become increasingly concerned about the national defense industrial base having the capability to meet national security demands in a timely manner; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Navy has determined that a shortage of skilled workers in five critical disciplines, welding, computer numerical control (CNC) machining, metrology/quality control, non-destructive testing (NDT) and additive manufacturing, are causing submarine production to fall behind schedule; and

WHEREAS, A collaborative effort between a collective group comprised of government and civilian organizations known as Team Submarine, the Submarine Industrial Base Program and the Office of the Secretary of Defense Industrial Analysis and Sustainment (IBAS) Program Office have partnered to establish a program known as the Accelerated Training in Defense Manufacturing (ATDM) program, specifically to train workers in these critical areas for the submarine industrial base (SIB); and

WHEREAS, Since the first group of students was admitted into the ATDM program in March 2021 more than 150 students have been graduated with 72 currently enrolled; and

WHEREAS, By 2025 it is planned that ATDM will train 800-1,000 skilled workers per year with each receiving 600+ hours of training over 16 weeks with training costs for current and near-term students funded by the government; and

WHEREAS, Longer term, a cost-share model is being developed that will reduce the training burden and costs for participating companies and provide the numbers of skilled workers in critical areas to allow production of submarines needed to fill national security requirements; and

WHEREAS, Programs like ATDM provide an opportunity for training and employment for not only recently discharged veterans but veterans in general, providing a workforce who not only have shown dedication to this country but also understand the need for a strong national defense while at the same time training that skilled workforce at reduced cost to the veterans enrolled; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion applaud and support the Department of the Navy and submarine industrial base for the creation of the Accelerated Training in Defense Manufacturing (ATDM) program to ensure that a skilled workforce is available to build and maintain our submarine force; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion wholeheartedly support the efforts to identify and recruit individuals for participation in the ATDM program and encourage the collaborating companies participating in that program ensure the recruiting for prospective enrollees be a priority for the program; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That the Department of Defense and the other service branches partner with the members of the national defense industrial base to develop similar programs in support of their critical needs for a specialized workforce that provides employment opportunities for our veterans and is essential to our industrial base to provide the manufacturing capability in support of our national security.

Resolution No. 14: Preserve Housing Benefits for Online Education

Origin: Minnesota

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

(As Amended)

WHEREAS, Chapter 33 of the GI Bill, also known as the post-9/11 GI Bill, is a vital piece of legislation that provides education benefits to eligible veterans and their dependents, assisting them in their transition to civilian life and supporting their pursuit of higher education; and

WHEREAS, Online education has become increasingly popular and accessible, offering flexible learning options for individuals facing various barriers to attending traditional brick-and-mortar institutions; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans, due to their unique circumstances, such as disabilities, family responsibilities, or geographic limitations, find online education particularly suitable for their needs; and

WHEREAS, Restricting housing benefits solely to veterans attending in-person classes would place an unnecessary burden on those who opt for online courses, limiting their access to educational opportunities and hindering their ability to make progress toward their academic and career goals; and

WHEREAS, Online education allows student veterans to customize their learning experience around unique challenges such as physical disabilities, mental health concerns, or family obligations, enabling them to balance their education with other responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, Veterans residing in remote areas with limited or no nearby educational institutions can access quality education regardless of their location through online courses, eliminating the need for costly relocations; and

WHEREAS, Pursuing higher education is often a vital part of veterans' reintegration and career transition; and

WHEREAS, Housing benefits for online education support their successful transition by providing necessary financial assistance and reducing potential financial stressors; and

WHEREAS, Online education offers a wide range of specialized programs that may not be available locally. Veterans with specific career goals or interests that require specialized training can pursue those options through online courses; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion strongly advocates for the preservation of housing benefits for student veterans pursuing online education under Chapter 33 of the GI Bill and the national organization urges policymakers at the federal level to recognize the importance of inclusive policies that encompass both in-person and online learning, to better support student veterans in achieving their academic and career aspirations, and to remove unnecessary barriers that hinder their educational and professional development.

Resolution No. 18: Support 199A Qualified Business Income Deduction

Origin: Texas

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, The 199A Qualified Business Income (QBI) deduction allows "pass-through" small businesses, such as sole proprietors, partnerships, and S-Corps, to deduct up to 20% of their QBI each year before normal taxation; and

WHEREAS, Many businesses owned by veterans, servicemembers, or their families, are structured as pass-through businesses; and

WHEREAS, The 199A QBI deduction expires in 2025, and will result in an increase of taxes on these businesses; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion supports reauthorizing, enhancing, and permanently authorizing the 199A QBI deduction.

Resolution No. 19: Enhancing the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) for Veteran Workers and Families

Origin: Texas

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education

WHEREAS, Some veterans experience difficulty transitioning to the private sector workforce after they exit the military; and

WHEREAS, The United States government has recognized that veteran employment security is a national responsibility and alleviating veteran underemployment is a national priority; and

WHEREAS, The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), issued by the federal government, is designed to incentivize private-sector employers to hire and retain employees among target groups that consistently face difficulty in finding stable employment; and

WHEREAS, Qualified unemployed veterans are one of the ten groups eligible for the WOTC program; and

WHEREAS, The WOTC incentivizes private-sector employers to hire and retain qualified veterans, which minimizes veteran unemployment; and

WHEREAS, The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Section 113 of Division EE PL 116-260) authorized the extension of the WOTC until December 31, 2025; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion supports reauthorizing and enhancing the Work Opportunity Tax Credit for the benefit of veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

Resolution No. 20: Tax Relief for Veterans and Military Families**Origin: Texas****Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Employment & Education**

WHEREAS, Lawmakers often suggest policy revisions which directly affect the tax liabilities of veterans, servicemembers, and their families; and

WHEREAS, Tax policy is complex and constantly changing; and

WHEREAS, It is critical that The American Legion be nimble and empowered to swiftly act to support or oppose various tax policies; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion supports tax reducing policies and opposes tax increases that cause financial strain to veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

Referred to the Standing Commission on Veterans Employment & Education

Resolution No. 16 (MN): Expansion of Joint Application Eligibility for Loans from the Department of Veterans Affairs

Resolution No. 37 (NY): Increase the Grant Amounts Authorized in the Adaptive Housing Program.

Mr. Commander, as a duly elected delegate from the Department of Iowa, I move for the adoption of this report. ...*Second.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Any discussion? Hearing none, all those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? The report of Veterans Employment & Education is adopted.

Presentation: Employer of the Year Award for Hiring Veterans, Large Category Akima, Fort Cavazos, Texas

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Military members transitioning home have few priorities that are more important than finding meaningful employment. A number of outstanding employers were recognized by The American Legion at the VE&E Convention Committee meeting for their work in hiring veterans. But we would like to recognize one company for its outstanding record of hiring veterans, in the Large Business Category of 200 or more employees, Akima Technologies of Fort Cavazos, Texas. Accepting the award are Lanny Hogaboom, director of Ground Based Logistics, Facilities & Ground Logistics, Executive Shannon Carney and Project Manager Joel Petrik.

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion National Award for Outstanding Large Employer of Veterans 2022. Presented to Akima, Fort Cavazos, Texas, for an exceptional record in the employment of veterans presented at the 104th Annual National Convention, Charlotte, North Carolina, August 30, 2023. (Applause)

LANNY HOGABOOM: Good afternoon. Thank you so much. On behalf of our CEO, Mr. Bill Monet, I am incredibly honored to accept the American Legion Large Employer of the Year Award on behalf of Akima. This award underscores our commitment to veterans and the contributions that they make to the success of our company and our U.S. government customers. Our projects support a wide variety of government agencies and organizations. And we recognize that employees who have served are ideally suited to help us as we aid our customers in sustaining our country's security, safety, freedom and economic vitality.

At Akima, we greatly value the skills and dedication that our veteran employees have gained through their military service. Over 25 percent of our 10,500 employees, myself included, and over one-third of our leadership team have served. Thank you for all that you

do at The American Legion in highlighting the contribution that veterans can make to every business. We're humbled to receive this award and inspired to continue our commitment to our veteran brothers and sisters. Thank you again. *(Applause)*

**Presentation: Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year Award
Kelly Norris, DVOP Representative, Texas Veterans Commission, Garland, Texas**

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The American Legion is proud of the men and women who work on behalf of disabled veterans seeking employment. This year I am happy to present the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year Award to Kelly Norris of Garland, Texas. *(Applause)*

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion National Award for Outstanding Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist 2022 Presented to Kelly Norris, Garland, Texas, for your outstanding service to the veterans of the state of Texas. Presented at the 104th National Convention, Charlotte, North Carolina, August 30, 2023. (Applause)

KELLY NORRIS: I'm so honored to receive this award today. I'm humbled and grateful to be able to receive it. I just thank The American Legion for it. I thank Margaret Young, my supervisor, for nominating me and my leadership at the Texas Veterans Commission.

But more than that I'm just grateful and thankful to have a job where I can help fellow veterans better their lives and help them through tough times. So, thank you for sharing this moment with me, and y'all have a great rest of your convention. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: A former Green Beret, our next guest earned a Silver Star for Valor, the Bronze Star and a Purple Heart while in Vietnam. He holds a degree in Speech Communication from Metro College in Denver. He inspired many as a motivational speaker, published author, actor, singer and poet. He owns Florissant Kennels in Colorado and is a life member of American Legion Post 171 in Cripple Creek. Please welcome Keith McKim. *(Applause)*

**Address: Keith McKim, Military Assistance Command Vietnam
Special Operations Group**

Thank you, Commander Troiola, distinguished guests, my fellow Legionnaires. I'm Keith McKim, and I'm a storyteller. I have a couple of stories to share with you today, but first I'd like to brag a little bit about my grandson. My grandson is 23 years old. He holds a full-time job now with a computer company. He's married to a beautiful woman. They have a little boy and a baby girl. He also attends night school at the University of Colorado in Denver.

This last fall, he learned that he had to take one final class before he could graduate and get his degree, his bachelor's in advertising. The class he had to take was in biology. The final exam was in December, just before the Christmas break. When the students entered the classroom, the exams were on the desk, face down. The professor stood in front of the class and told them that there were 10 questions on the test. He said that No. 10 was the most important question, and that it was worth 60 points on their grade. Get that one right and one more and they passed the course.

Of course, when they turned the test over, the first thing they did was go to question No. 10. The question was simple enough. It was, name seven advantages of mother's milk. My grandson began: And his first answer was, well, it's the perfect formula for the child. Two, it provides immunity from several diseases. Three, it's always the right temperature. Four, it's inexpensive, and of course that's important to a young family. Five, it bonds a child to the mother and the mother to the child. Six, it's always available as needed. Then,

of course, his mind went blank, but he went back and he answered the other nine questions and came back to this one. He looked at the clock. He had one minute left in the test. He still didn't have an answer. He paused and looked at the clock again, 15 seconds. And he quickly wrote down, and "It comes in two, I tracked it, containers." (*Laughter*)

Thank you. My grandson got an A in the class and I think he's going to make a fine advertising lawyer. I'm not proud to tell you today that I've been married a number of times. But I can honestly say that not one of those divorces were my fault. I hear some twitters out there and doubt on women's faces, especially.

Let me give you an example. My third ex-wife was a romantic and a tech freak. She got one of the first iPhones when they came out and she learned how to text. She brought one home to me and taught me how. One day she was out with her office friends having lunch, and she texted me. She said, "If you're eating, send me a bite. If you're drinking, send me a sip. If you're sleeping, send me your dreams. If you're laughing, send me your smile. If you're crying, send me your tears. I love you." Being a pragmatist, I immediately responded, and I said, "I'm sitting on the stool, please advise." (*Laughter*)

I promised you earlier that I had a story to tell you. So, for a while I'd like to get a little more serious. I was a Green Beret, and I fought in Vietnam with MACV-SOG. Tonight, I'd like to tell you a little bit about SOG and tell you the story of one of our Medal of Honor recipients.

The stories that I write and tell are about the extraordinary men of SOG, MACV-SOG, Military Assistance Command Vietnam-Special Operations Group. Code named, the Studies and Observation Group.

SOG was the best kept secret of the Vietnam War. So, secret it was labeled a "black operation." Meaning that its very existence was concealed, even denied, by the United States government. This top-secret unit existed for only eight years, January 1964 through May 1972. During that time, it established tactics that are still in use today; and in the eight years of its existence, it garnered 10 Medals of Honor for the Green Berets.

Twenty-three SOGmen received the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest award for valor in combat. Most SOGmen were downgraded by at least one degree in order to keep attention away from their top-secret operations, operations that were conducted across the fence. That is to say, across the international borders of Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam.

There were 248 Medals of Honor awarded during the Vietnam War. Most of these medals were awarded posthumously. In fact, 156, 62.9 percent, were awarded posthumously. Army soldiers received the most Medals of Honor at 161, followed by the Marines with 57. Sixteen went to the Navy and 14 to the Air Force. Of the 161 Medals of Honor awarded to the Army, 22 went to Special Forces, the Green Berets, representing over 13 percent of all Medals of Honor awarded. Of the 22 awarded to Special Forces, SOG received 10 of them, almost half.

At the height of the Vietnam War, there were over 600,000 men serving in uniform in Vietnam. Out of the 600,000, only 4,000 were Green Berets, the Special Forces, representing less than one percent, yet they garnered 13 percent of the Medals of Honor. Consider also that of those 4,000 Green Berets, fewer than 10 percent a year volunteered for MACV-SOG's top secret operations. When you eliminate the administration, training and support personnel, that number shrinks to about 108, the men who actually ran the missions that SOG is famous for.

There were approximately 108 operators at any one time spread over the huge areas of Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam. Broken down into three command and control units: South, central and north. That means that there were about 36 operators per unit. Tiny by military standards.

You had to be recruited to go into SOG, and then only on a volunteer basis. Only the best of the best were chosen. Most soldiers, including most Green Berets, did not volunteer when they learned of SOG's high-risk missions and their high casualty rates.

SOG teams operated alone, deep behind enemy lines, primarily in Laos, Cambodia

and North Vietnam, along the heavily defended Ho Chi Minh trail. Generally, we operated with six to 12-man teams; two or three Americans, and four to nine indigenous personnel, mostly Montagnards. We were opposed by thousands of North Vietnamese Army soldiers. Anyone who served as an operator is a hero. To "jump the fence," as cross border operations were called, required men of unparalleled courage. More than 100 percent of SOG operators were wounded and 50 percent were killed, yet they went again and again to face and defeat America's enemies.

How can you get more than 100 percent wounded? Most SOGmen were wounded multiple times and, after healing, most still went back across the fence and all too often were wounded again or killed. Although 50 percent of SOGmen were killed, they had the highest kill rate in the history of the U.S. military. 158-to-1. For every SOGman killed, the enemy lost 158 men. Any SOGman captured was tortured and then killed. The North Vietnamese Army hated SOG teams and there was a reward on each SOGman's head. There were 327 SOGmen listed as missing in action. None were ever released from the POW camps.

After the war, it was learned, from the North Vietnamese, both high-ranking officers and individual soldiers, that SOG was the most feared unit that the North Vietnamese faced. It's amazing that this tiny group of men could cause such trepidation and fear in the hearts of seasoned soldiers. SOG took orders directly from the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon or from the executive branch of government in the White House. SOG was assigned only the most dangerous high-value targets, targets that would cost the enemy dearly. Targets that were sure to cost the SOGman's blood if not his life.

It has been estimated that SOG operations caused the North Vietnamese Army to divert up to 100,000 men for guarding and maintaining the Ho Chi Minh trail. Those 100,000 men were kept from injuring or killing American soldiers in South Vietnam because they were so busy chasing after SOG teams. SOG carried out some of the most dangerous missions ever conducted by the U.S. military. There was nothing outside the range of SOG activities.

SOGmen would take on any mission. If your time is up and you could not run missions, if your courage ran out or you felt that your luck was gone, if you got too old or too disabled, if fear or worry distracted you or you could not concentrate, if you lost the confidence of your team, if you're simply too afraid to go again, nothing was said by anyone. You would step down and not lose the respect of your fellow SOG operators. A spot in the rear was found for you, perhaps in supply or operations or training or, upon your request, a transfer to another unit.

SOG history is the stuff of legends. On April 4, 2001, 29 years after SOG had been disbanded, the United States of America, through the U.S. Army, officially recognized the bravery, integrity, devotion and sacrifice of its covert warriors. The unit was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for Valor. This designation is equivalent to receiving the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest award for valor in combat. Every man in the unit earned that reward.

The citation reads, in part, "The Studies and Observation Group is cited for extraordinary heroism, great combat achievement and unwavering fidelity while executing unheralded top-secret missions deep behind enemy lines across Southeast Asia."

In the end, as Vietnam collapsed, SOG was the only fighting unit left in Vietnam. During that time, SOG got two more Medals of Honor. MACV-SOG is the most decorated unit of its size in the history of the U.S. military.

A Green Beret, Roger Donlon, was the first man to receive the Medal of Honor from Vietnam. A SOGman, Green Beret 1st Lt. Loren D. Hagen, was awarded the last Medal of Honor for combat actions in Vietnam. SOG also had the most highly decorated soldier in the history of the U.S. military, staff sergeant, later, Robert Lewis Howard.

Under penalty of prison, fines and disgrace, each SOGman took an oath swearing not to reveal anything about their operations or their unit for 25 years after the end of the war. As the 1-0, the team leader of Recon Team Cobra, I, your storyteller, was a small part of

that saga.

Now I'd like to take some time and tell you the story of one of SOG's Medal of Honor recipients. The story I'm about to tell is a true story. It's the story of a hero. I'd like to begin by defining what a hero is. Not a dictionary definition, but the definition of a life of a man who I think we can all agree is a hero, a man by the name of Roy Perez Benavidez.

Roy was born in 1935, the son of a Texas sharecropper. He was orphaned at age 10. He dropped out of high school, dropped out of school in the seventh grade. In his hometown, he was known as "a dumb Mexican." This "dumb Mexican" was to become one of that rare class of warriors, a recipient of the Medal of Honor, the highest award that the United States can bestow on its military heroes.

Roy enlisted in the Army in 1952 at the age of 17. In 1965, while serving with the 82nd Airborne, in Vietnam, Benavidez stepped on a land mine. He was evacuated to Brooke Army Medical Center assigned to San Antonio, Texas, where he was told he would never walk again.

This "dumb Mexican" didn't believe the diagnosis and defied doctor's orders. He began an exercise program on his own. At night, in the darkness, he would slip from his bed, and using his elbows and chin, he would crawl to the nearest wall. He focused his mind through the pain and numbness in his feet and into the pain of his toes until he could move them. Then he moved his feet and his ankles.

Eventually he hoisted himself up and stood leaning against the wall. Finally, he walked out of the hospital under his own power. Benavidez stayed in the Army, was assigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, home of the 82nd Airborne and the Green Berets. Despite continuing pain from his wounds, he worked hard and finally qualified for special forces, the Green Berets. In January 1968, he returned to Vietnam.

On May 2, 1968, a Special Forces SOG team, Special Operations people, were surrounded by a hardcore North Vietnamese Army battalion. A battalion is made up of four companies. A company is made up of 120 men. This fight would pit 480 hardcore NVA soldiers against Roy Benavidez, two other Green Berets and 10 Montagnards. Four dead, the others all seriously wounded.

At 1:30 that day, screams for help were heard over the radio in the comms tent. "Get us out of here! For God's sakes, get us out of here!" Benavidez was in the tent and heard the call. He grabbed a knife and a medical bag and jumped on the helicopter to attempt to rescue the trapped team. When they arrived at the scene, the enemy were too numerous to attempt the rescue.

The chopper retreated to a position about 100 yards away, 10 feet off the ground. Benavidez leaped from the helicopter with only his knife and his medical supplies, landing on the ground, he was shot in his right leg. He got up and moved towards his comrades. A grenade blast knocked him down, shrapnel punching into his face and neck. But he reached the team and began treating the wounded, distributing ammunition and calling in air strikes. He was shot again.

Ordering the helicopter to come in closer, he got most of the dead and wounded aboard and then ran back to retrieve the last dead body. He was shot in his stomach. Holding his guts in with his left hand, he moved toward the helicopter, dragging his dead comrade. A grenade wounded him in the back and neck, knocking him down. He got up and kept moving, made it back to the chopper. It rose up off the ground and the pilot was shot in the head and killed.

The helicopter crashed. Benavidez pulled everyone, dead and wounded, from the burning chopper. Creating a defensive perimeter, Benavidez waited for the fast movers. That's the jet planes to come in and conduct air strikes. He also called for another helicopter to attempt the rescue. He kept fighting and encouraging the other wounded to fight until the helicopters could arrive. He was shot several more times.

When the jets arrived, he directed them to their targets until the enemy got so close that he directed the jets to come in danger close. In military jargon, danger close means that the good guys are in danger of getting killed by friendly fire.

The second helicopter finally arrived at the LZ, the landing zone, and Benavidez loaded everyone, dead and wounded, onboard. Just then a North Vietnamese soldier charged from the jungle and clubbed Benavidez with the butt of his rifle, breaking his jaw. Roy fought on and killed his enemy, but not before he was bayoneted in both arms.

This "dumb Mexican" with a broken jaw, bayonet wounds in both arms, a bullet in his gut, one lung collapsed from grenade shrapnel and a piece of shrapnel embedded in his heart, fought on with his knife and killed his attacker. Dragging the last of the team aboard the chopper, Benavidez saw two enemy soldiers charging out of the jungle. Picking up his enemy's AK-47, he shot them both. After counting the team to make sure all of them were aboard, Benavidez let the crew pull him inside.

Gunships had been ordered to rescue or escort the rescue chopper home. The gunship pilots reported that blood was dripping out of both doors of the rescue chopper and onto the jungle floor below. Lying on his back, Benavidez held his guts in with his own hands for the 20-minute ride back to the base. At Loc Ninh he was taken off the chopper, he was triaged and placed with the dead.

This 32-year-old son of a Texas sharecropper had just fought for six hours, suffered seven serious gunshot wounds, 28 shrapnel wounds, a broken jaw, two bayonet wounds, a collapsed lung, and a piece of shrapnel embedded in his heart, was triaged and placed with the dead.

But he was alive. His uniform was ragged and torn. His body was filthy. His intestines were exposed, covered in the disgusting jungle slime. His body oozed his life's blood. His eyes were blinded from the dried black blood that covered them. His jaw was broken, but he could hear, and he knew what was happening. He lay in a body bag bathed in his own blood as the doctor came over to feel each dead man's chest for a heartbeat before zipping up the bag for the final time.

When the doc touched Benavidez's chest, Roy forced his head up and spit a bloody glob of goo into the doc's face. The surprised doctor revised Roy's condition from dead to he won't make it, but we'll try.

Roy did make it, and he received the Medal of Honor for his actions that day. President Ronald Reagan said on the day that he awarded the medal, if this was a movie script, you would not believe it. Roy Benavidez is a hero and an inspiration to those of us who are in this fight to save our nation. Make no mistake, we are in a fight for the life and the soul of this great nation.

I'd like to close by quoting General George Patton when he said: "It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who are wounded and killed. Rather, we should thank God that such men exist."

Thank God for men like Roy Benavidez and for those of you who are willing to put your lives on the line for America. God bless you. God bless Roy Benavidez. God bless The American Legion. And God bless the United States of America. Thank you. *(Applause)*

Thank you very much. Thank you. About four years ago, I received a note from Roy Benavidez's daughter. I'd like to share it with you. She wrote: "Thank you for this tribute to my father, Roy. I appreciate the time it took to do this, and the effort involved. My father lived by the motto duty, honor, country. He never considered himself a hero, but just a soldier who did what he had to do. Again, thank you for this. Yvette Benavidez Garcia."

I thank you for letting me share the story of an American hero, Green Beret, SOGman, Sergeant Roy Perez Benavidez. God bless you. *(Applause)*

...The delegation viewed a video.

Special Presentations

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: As you have seen with the many donors that we have had to all of our outstanding charities, our membership dues pay for our overhead, but it is the generosity of patriotic donors that allows us to operate our fantastic

programs. Charles and Betty Carrigan have been steadfast supporters of American Legion Baseball and our World Series for many years. Legion Baseball was such a passion for Charles that his family included his love for it in his obituary when he passed away last year. They even encouraged people to donate to the World Series in his memory, in lieu of flowers. We are fortunate to have Betty and their daughter, Lisa Yarbrow, with us today for a special presentation.

ANNOUNCER: The American Legion extends its appreciation to the Carrigan Family for their unwavering support of American Legion Youth programs. Though Charles is no longer with us, we know he continues to watch over The American Legion World Series from his heavenly throne. From Charles Carrigan's service in the U.S. Marine Corps to the continued generosity and passion his family has for American Legion Baseball, the nation's largest veteran organization will forever remember the contributions of the Carrigan Family. Signed Daniel S. Wheeler, National Adjutant, Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola, National Commander. (Applause)

BETTY CARRIGAN: I would just like to thank the Convention for inviting us here. In the past years, it's been so far away that we haven't been able to attend, but when they said this year, we were thankful that we could come.

I'm just so thankful that the Lord has provided resources for our business that we can continue to support The American Legion. This was the first year that Texas had been to Shelby in Cleveland County, so we were kind of glad that they did win the Series. But Eddie and Millie, along with Stanley, they have been very kind to us to do several things in memory of Charlie, and I'm thankful for that.

But I am thankful that we still have the opportunity. Charlie looked forward every year to meeting his old friends down there in the Lou Center. Some of these past national commanders have been to Cleveland County for quite a few years, and we're just so thankful that they're still able to come.

I thank you for this plaque. It means a lot to us. As I said, I'm just glad that we have the opportunity to still help with the support. Thank you so much to the National Convention. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Kindly give your attention to Past National Commander Paul Morin for an announcement.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER MORIN: Thank you, commander. As you've just seen, this presentation to Betty Carrigan and her family and her late husband, Charlie, they're outstanding contributions. You can really see a lot of them when you look at that beautiful stadium. The billboard, or scoreboard, as we call it, is in their name because they paid for it. That's the kind of contributions this family has made to The American Legion World Series.

2011 was the first World Series, with the dream of a permanent home. I think several years ago Past National Commander Dan Ludwig coined it well. It's The American Legion's field of dreams, and it truly is. Eddie and Millie Holbrook, will you come up here.

As I said, it takes a lot of financial support to put on this series, and it being the home, permanent home of the American Legion World Series. The commander and I were out there, and many past national commanders, as Betty said, and looking at what they have accomplished in bringing that field to the field of dreams is outstanding.

But in order, as the commander and I discussed, to show our support from The American Legion, but we hope that this will continue on a grassroots and support in Cleveland County, Shelby, North Carolina, to continue to make the improvements to this field. I personally don't think they need any because it is already a field of dreams. But at this time, I will call up the department commander and her alternate NEC and NEC from Massachusetts to make a presentation.

DELEGATE DAVIS (MA): Good afternoon. The Department of Massachusetts honors its Past National Commanders Daniel J. Doherty, John P. "Jake" Comer, and Paul

A. Morin by donating \$10,000 today to the Cleveland County American Legion World Series, Shelby, North Carolina. (*Applause*)

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER MORIN: With that stipulation from Massachusetts, my good friend, Esquire Gaither Keener, has a nice sign out on the field. There's a stipulation, Eddie, that goes with it: Mine must be one foot higher and one foot wider than his.

And the commander, being the gracious challenger he is, he accepted the challenge and made a call back to New York, and he made it all happen. So, I call the Department of New York adjutant and its immediate past commander and present commander to the podium for a presentation.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN RILEY (NY): Dave Riley, chairman to the New York delegation, home of the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, the Department of New York honors its Past National Commanders Michael J. Kogutek, Richard M. Pedro, Fang A. Wong, and Vincent James Troiola with our donation, our first donation of \$10,000. (*Applause*)

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER MORIN: At this time, Eddie and Millie would like to say a few words. We put this challenge out. It is the field of dreams, and it's up to each and every one of us to continue this youth program to the next level, which could be unbelievable.

EDDIE HOLBROOK: Thank you very much, commander. Can I come back tomorrow? I'll come every day for checks like this. (*Laughter*)

Thank you very much. I could elaborate and say a lot of good things about The American Legion and what it means to us. I think I'm entitled to. I'm not a veteran, but I think I'm a very patriotic American, and the way we try to demonstrate it in Shelby is through the work of the American Legion World Series.

Millie and I are fortunate enough to head up a group of volunteers that consists of 25 executive members, 100 or so core volunteers, and I want you to get this, 400 to 500 volunteers that make up our team.

So it's not a small operation, and our dream from the very beginning of this small county, which our county has a population of only about 100,000 people, but our dream from the beginning was that we could stand up before a convention like this or before the Indy meetings and say our goal is to make The American Legion proud that they selected Shelby, North Carolina, in Cleveland County, in the state of North Carolina, to be the official host and home of the American Legion World Series.

It's a dream for us too that we can stay here and stand and listen to someone like Commander Morin say this is truly The American Legion field of dreams because it's a field of dreams for our local community also.

On behalf of the volunteers, my wife, Millie, and the many people who give so generously to support the organization, because we basically are driven by volunteer contributions and state and local contributions, we are a 501(c)(3), so we have to raise the money to make our organization go and to carry on with the field improvements, thank you so much for this contribution. More especially, thank you to what you mean to the lives of people in Cleveland County. Thank you. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The Chair recognizes the Honorable Vincent Gaughan of Illinois, chairman of the Convention Committee on Constitutional Amendments, for the purpose of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Constitutional Amendments
Vincent M. Gaughan, Illinois, Chairman**

National Commander Vincent Troiola, National Adjutant Dan Wheeler, National Treasurer Sean Long, Distinguished Guests, Brother and Sister Legionnaires. This is a report of the Constitutional Amendments Committee.

Sunday, August 28, 7023, the Committee met in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Mark C. Seavey (VA), National Judge Advocate, called the roll and announced that 43 members of the Constitutional Amendments Committee were present. The following report was authorized by the members and is hereby submitted to this Convention.

The meeting was opened by Mark C. Seavey (VA), National Judge Advocate, who acted as temporary chair. He stated a quorum was present and proceeded to the first order of business, which was the election of a chair and secretary.

Past National Commander Anthony Jordan (ME) moved, seconded by Frank Porter (MD) to elect The Honorable Vincent M. Gaughan (IL) as Chair. Frank Porter (MD) moved, seconded by Phyllis Cunningham (AK) to elect Cathy J. (WI) as Recording Secretary.

Thereupon they assumed their respective places. Copies of the Resolution, the Report of the Standing Committee, the Charter of The American Legion, National Constitution and By-Laws and the Uniform Code of Procedure for the Organization of

National Conventions of The American Legion, which include the Standing Rules of Convention, were made available to all members of the Committee at the meeting.

A motion was made by Deirdre Chapman (NM) and seconded by Phyllis Cunningham (AK) that all members of the Standing Committee on Constitution and By-Laws who were present at the meeting, but not actual delegates to the Convention Committee be seated with voice but no vote. The motion carried.

The Chair called upon Mark C. Seavey (VA), National Judge Advocate, who gave a summary report on **Resolution No. 22 (TX)** titled Amend Article II, Section 2 of the American Legion National Constitution.

The National Judge Advocate advised that the proposed resolution to amend the National American Legion Constitution is out of order for the following reasons:

A) It does not enumerate the specific Article and Section of The American Legion National Constitution to be amended.

B) The proposed resolution fails to cite and amend the corresponding language of the Corporate Charter of The American Legion and the corresponding Federal Statutes.

Therefore, the resolution does not provide the necessary language to amend the Constitution.

The Chair ruled Resolution No. 22 (TX) out of order. Notwithstanding that Resolution No. 22 (TX) is out of order, a discussion on the United States Constitution and American Legion Constitution was held.

Motion made by Deirdre Chapman (NM) and seconded by Jeff Joyner (NC) to affirm the Chair's ruling that Resolution No. 22 (TX) is out of order. Motion carried.

The Chair requested a motion that the Standing Committee on Constitution and By-laws report be adopted.

Frank Porter (MD) made the motion, and it was seconded by Phyllis Cunningham (AK).

The Chair then asked for a motion that the Chair and Recording Secretary are authorized to sign the report to the Convention on behalf of the members of the Convention Committee.

Stephanie Hanks (LA) made the motion, and it was seconded by Deirdre Chapman (NM). The motion carried.

Gene Pytka (RI) made a motion to recess, subject to the call of the Chair. The motion was seconded by Randy Lukken (NE). The motion carried unanimously.

The Chair then thanked the Committee for its cooperation and productive meeting.

The meeting was declared in recess pending a call from the Chair of the Committee.

Mr. Commander, as a delegate to the 104th National Convention of The American Legion, I move the adoption of this report. ...*Second*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Any discussion? Hearing none, all those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? The report of Constitutional Amendments is

adopted. The Chair recognizes Autrey B. James of California, chairman of the Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, for the purpose of making a report.

**Report: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Autrey B. James, California, Chairman**

Good afternoon, Commander Troiola, Past National Commanders, Delegates, current National Officers and guests. On August 27, 2023, 111 members of your Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation met at 9:00 a.m. in the Charlotte Center, Room 209. The Committee was called to order by Tiffany Ellett (VA), liaison representative appointed by the National Adjutant to act as temporary chairman.

A quorum being present, nominations were received for permanent chairman. Autrey B. James (CA), Chairman of the National VA&R Commission, was unanimously elected Chairman of the Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation.

Exercising the authority granted to her, the acting Chairman then accepted nominations for secretary to the Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation. Alan Cohen (FL) was voted as Committee Secretary. Chairman James assumed control of the remaining meeting sequence.

A committee comprised of Department Service Officers and Commission members in a virtual setting on August 21, 2023, screened the VA&R resolutions.

The screening committee conserved the time of the Convention Committee substantially. It was chaired by Ralph P. Bozella (CO), the Chairman of the VA&R Commission, and was composed of the following Department Service Officers and Commission members:

- Steven Kleinglass (MN)
- Summer Kristiansen (ND)
- James Brehio (MA)
- Jim Talaska (IL)

A report of their action, with recommendations, was presented to the Convention Committee for consideration.

The 12 Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation resolutions presented for the consideration of this Convention were referred by the Resolutions Assignment Committee. The following action on the resolutions was taken by the Convention Committee:

Approved or Approved w/Amendment	2
Consolidated with Resolutions Approved	1
Referred to the Standing Commission	9
Received and Recorded	0
Rejected	0

A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Chairman and Secretary to sign and deliver the report on the Convention Committee's behalf.

A report of action taken on the nine (9) resolutions referred to the Standing National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission will be made to the National Executive Committee and to the Adjutant of the Department concerned.

Approved Resolutions or Approved with Amendment

Resolution No. 3: Amend Rating Requirements for Hypertension

Origin: South Dakota

**Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(As Amended and Consolidated with Resolution No. 39 (NY))**

WHEREAS, The American Legion is a national organization of veterans who have dedicated themselves to the service of their community, state, and nation; and

WHEREAS, After veterans are released from active-duty service, they may apply for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) compensation for their injuries and illnesses related to their active-duty service; and

WHEREAS, The implementation of hypertension as a presumptive condition to Agent Orange exposure has been highly anticipated since at least 2006, when the Institute of Medicine first released a report that placed hypertension in a "limited or suggestive evidence of association" category of illnesses; and

WHEREAS, Patients with hypertension under the supervision of medical care will start a prescription regimen as early as the 80 diastolic range to keep it under control, and

WHEREAS, Many Agent Orange-exposed veterans have been treating hypertension for multiple decades, some over forty years, making historical data without medication difficult to procure; and

WHEREAS, The released ratings in the 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for hypertension do not follow the standards for hypertension as recognized by the broader health community, namely the American Heart Association; and

WHEREAS, More often than not, obtaining a rating requires an examination outside of the VA, and if following numbers currently listed in the CFR, a veteran would be in hypertensive crisis if they were to qualify under 20 percent or higher, therefore jeopardizing the health of our veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion support legislation to amend existing language for the 10 percent rating in Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 4.104 Diagnostic Code 7101, Hypertension to read "or; minimum evaluation for an individual who requires continuous medication for control," and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion support legislation to amend existing language for all rating requirements in Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 4.104 Diagnostic Code 7101, Hypertension to better align with hypertension standards widely recognized by the broader medical community.

Resolution No. 4: Amend Eligibility for Burial Headstone and Markers

Origin: South Dakota

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, The National Cemetery Administration's purpose statements include "To mark Veterans' graves with a Government-furnished headstone, marker or medallion and to provide Presidential Memorial Certificates in recognition of their service to a grateful nation"; and

WHEREAS, All veterans who have served and would otherwise qualify for a government-furnished headstone should receive one; and

WHEREAS, Current law as written in Code of Federal Regulation, Chapter 1, Part 38, Section 38.630 (2)(a)(ii)(A) prohibits the issue of government-issued markers to veterans who have privately marked graves and passed away before November 1, 1990; and

WHEREAS, This leaves many veterans from our nation's greatest wars unrecognized for their service, in direct opposition to the National Cemetery Administration's vision of ensuring "No Veteran Ever Dies"; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 29, 30, 31, 2023, That The American Legion support legislation to amend Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 1, Part 38, Section 38.630 (2) to open eligibility for government-issued markers on privately marked graves regardless of the date of death of the veteran.

**Referred to the Standing Commission on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
Resolution No. 9 (FL): Change Post Service Officer Title to Post Resource Officer**

Resolution No. 10 (FL): Review of all Claims Affected by Inaccurate Contact Information

Resolution No. 15 (MN): Investigation of Anthrax Vaccinations

Resolution No. 23 (TX): Interment of War and Service Dogs in National Cemeteries

Resolution No. 38 (NY): Oversight of Medical Disability Examination Office Contract

Resolution No. 40 (NY): Department of Veterans Affairs S.A.V.E Training at Posts

Resolution No. 41 (NY): Veterans Health Administration Access for All Veterans

Resolution No. 42 (NY): Software Training and Oversight in Department of Veterans Affairs

Resolution No. 44 (NY): Oppose Claims Reviews by Private Companies

Commander, this concludes the VA&R Convention Committee report, and as a delegate to this National Convention, I move for its acceptance. ...*Second.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Any discussion? Hearing none, all those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? The report of Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation is adopted. With the adoption of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation report, it is time to announce the winner of the William F. Lenker National Service Trophy.

Presentation: William F. Lenker National Service Trophy

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: William F. Lenker was the chairman of The American Legion national VA&R Commission from 1967 until 1988. He was a true champion for America's veterans. This trophy is awarded annually to the department that best supports and implements programs to benefit veterans, their families, and their survivors. For the 2022-2023 program year, the trophy is awarded to the Department of Florida. (*Applause*)

National Adjutant, have you any announcements?

Announcements

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: The 1919 Society booth at the back of the hall is still open. Tomorrow the newest inductees to the 1919 Society will be recognized onstage by the reading of the names. I encourage you to support the Veteran & Children's Foundation with your contributions to the 1919 Society and American Legion Charities. Thank you.

Salute to Colors and Recess

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you, Adjutant Wheeler. Legionnaires, please rise and join me in a salute to the flag of the United States of America. On my count. One! Two! The time is 1423. The Convention will stand in recess until 8:30 a.m. tomorrow morning.

... *At 2:23 p.m., Wednesday, August 30, 2023, the 104th Annual National Convention of The American Legion was recessed to reconvene the following day.*

PROCEEDINGS
Third Day

Thursday, August 31, 2023

...At 8:30 a.m., the members assembled for the 104th Annual National Convention, and the following proceedings were had.

Call to Order and Salute to Colors
Vincent J. Troiola, New York, National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Ladies and gentlemen, as we begin our program, please join me in a round of applause for Rick Pedro at the keyboard. *(Applause)*

The Convention will come to order. Please stand and join me in rendering the proper salute to the flag of the United States of America. On my count. One! Two! For the invocation, I call on National Chaplain Daniel Mark Antal, Sr., of North Dakota.

Invocation
Daniel Mark Antal, Sr., North Dakota, National Chaplain

Would you please join me as we pray. From Psalm 34: I will extol the Lord at all times. His praise will be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord, let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me. Let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He answered me. He delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to Him are radiant, their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him, and He saved him out of all his trouble.

Eternal almighty, gracious God, You are above and beyond all, more than worthy of all our praise. As we spend this last morning at the 104th American Legion convention, help us to stay alert, to learn, and then carry home to our local posts the knowledge and spirit of comradeship we have received in this past week. Thank You for gifting all our national officers with the wisdom and words of leadership.

We humbly pray for men and women who begin their term of service today. We acknowledge the countless Legionnaires, Auxiliary, Sons of The American Legion, and Legion Riders who step up four roles of leadership and dedicated service. As we seek to do every day, we pray for the brave men and women of our uniformed armed forces, protect them from all harm and every enemy, seen and unseen. To You, O Lord, belong all glory and honor. Amen.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Ladies and gentlemen, please remain uncovered as National Sergeant-at-Arms Michael Byrnes of New York leads us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Pledge of Allegiance
Michael Byrnes, New York, National Sergeant-at-Arms

Please join in the Pledge of Allegiance.
... The Convention recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Please cover. The convention is now in session. You may be seated. I'd like to begin by announcing that after yesterday's fireside chat about veteran suicide, you generously passed a hat as a collection for Mark Tangey's medical bills. The amount raised was not just \$6,000, it was \$6,001. *(Applause)*

I promise you we did not add the one. It just came out that way. Your wonderful generosity is appreciated.

Presentation: The American Legion Fourth Estate Award

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: We begin this morning by recognizing outstanding achievement in journalism that had a positive impact on a community. The American Legion Fourth Estate Award is difficult to earn. It is a testament to the demanding nature of the competition and the quality of entries. Not only do the reports have to be informative and entertaining, they also have to provide a tangible benefit to society.

Our Fourth Estate winner for broadcast is a previous winner who really wanted and planned to be here this morning. But like any good news reporter, he has to be where the news requires him to be. He is currently in his home city of Tampa covering the hurricane.

First, a little bit about his award-winning work. Imagine it's early 2022 and you fly to Florida to take a cruise or enjoy a family vacation. You want the assurance of a COVID test, so you don't expose others. You see a pop-up clinic promising instant results and pay a couple of hundred dollars for that assurance. There were major problems with people who lived that scenario as reported by ABC Action News I-Team in Tampa. Please turn your attention to the video monitors. ...*The delegation viewed a video. (Applause)*

Broadcast Category
ABC Action News, Tampa, Florida

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Ladies and gentlemen, though they are not physically here, let's acknowledge the great work of our 2023 Fourth Estate Award for Broadcast, WFTS-TV and Adam Walser. We will send them their well-deserved award. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: One of the most significant victories for The American Legion and veterans everywhere was the passage and signing of the PACT Act last year. Leading the way in coverage about the harmful effects of burn pits and other toxic exposures impacting veterans was the "Military Times." Deputy Editor Leo Shane authored much of the coverage about these exposures and the latest developments in Congress and the White House. Let's take a look at this award-winning work.

...*The delegation viewed a video. (Applause)*

Please welcome our 2023 Fourth Estate Award winner for print journalism, Leo Shane. *(Applause)*

Print Category
Military Times, Washington, D.C.

LEO SHANE: Well, thank you all very much. I do have some bad news before I start off. I do not have any videos of me with Tom Cruise up in a fighter jet. I don't want to disappoint everyone first thing in the morning. The good news is that I usually only write a few hundred words when I write stories, so I will keep this brief. I won't delay things too much.

Thank you to the American Legion for this award. I'm flattered to be included among the exemplary journalists who have earned the Fourth Estate Award, including my colleague Adam, who unfortunately couldn't be here. I'm just as flattered this week to be able to talk to the veterans here, just flattered by the number of veterans who have come up to me and said that they're regular readers of my work and regular readers of "Military Times."

It's not always to see the impact of your work when you're writing and you're not engaging with folks all over the country face to face. So, it means a lot to be able to see that we are affecting and helping the individuals we serve. I'm not a veteran. I've always been struck by the generosity of the veterans' community in patiently teaching me the issues

that are closest to you and the stories that need to be out there, sometimes very patiently, as your Washington, D.C., staff can tell you. They've got to really walk me through a couple of these things. I hope I've lived up to their expectations in that work, and I hope I've been able to really share your stories.

Covering the PACT Act and the issue of burn pit injuries has been a years-long process for "Military Times," dating back to Kelly Kennedy's great work in 2008 and her really bringing this to light. Over the years reporters like Patricia Kime have kept that work going, and I get to stand here today and accept this award for "Military Times" thanks to those years of dedication and then years of exemplary work that they've done.

I'd like to thank my editor in chief, Mike Gruss, for having faith in me to write as much as I could on this topic last year even before it became evident this was going to become what it became. I think early on I just had a hunch that this time felt different; that finally we might see something with burn pits. We might actually see some real action on the larger issue of toxic exposure in the military and not simply the half measures that we had seen.

I've been fortunate to work at two great newspapers in my career in Washington, "Military Times" and "Stars and Stripes." I've had the opportunity to serve troops in the military at both, and I've had the opportunity to work with reporters who are really dedicated to telling the stories of both of those communities, really getting into the story, really representing to the rest of the country what they're missing when they don't know what's going on with troops, with veterans, with military families. I'm looking forward to next year, when I'm sure you're going to hear from another one of my colleagues for their great work for this award.

Thank you to my wife, who couldn't be here today, but has heard way too much about the PACT Act over the last two years or so, to the point where I think she thinks we might be getting some benefits. We're not. And thank you to my son and daughter, who have been exceedingly polite as I talk about this stuff at the dinner table and ask me why I only talk about boring stuff on TV and when I go places. I don't have a great answer for them, but I do love my work.

I love being able to tell veterans' stories. I love being able to share the stories with the rest of the country. And I like being able to let you all know what is going on in Washington, what is going on, how you're being helped and where the country is falling short. I plan on doing this as long as I can and as long as you all keep sharing your stories with me. So, thank you very much. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Our Veterans & Children Foundation continues to make a substantial difference in the lives of thousands of Americans in need. The assistance provided by this great foundation would not be possible without the extraordinary generosity of those belonging to the 1919 Society. I now call on Past National Commander Denise H. Rohan of Wisconsin for a very special presentation.

Presentation: 1919 Society Inductees

**Past National Commander Denise H. Rohan, Wisconsin, Chairman
Veterans & Children Foundation Steering Committee**
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Good morning, officers, Legionnaires, guests. I am excited to be here to talk with you about The American Legion Endowment Fund, better known as the Veterans & Children Foundation, or VCF. Before I really get into what I'm going to talk about, I would ask that the members of the 1919 Society please make your way to the front of the convention hall and gather here in front of the stage.

I'm going to keep talking. So, while they move forward, let me tell you a little bit about the Veterans & Children Foundation and how the earnings from this fund are used exclusively to support programs of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission, including service officer training and the Temporary Financial Assistance program, TFA.

The Temporary Financial Assistance program gives grants to military and veterans' families with minor children in their homes when they are experiencing an unexpected hardship. You may have heard about how this fund was used to give more than \$1 million worth of TFA grants to members of the Coast Guard during a government shutdown in 2019.

The VCF also funds training for our veteran service officers. Our American Legion service officers provide expert, free-of-charge assistance to veterans and their families as they try to understand the process of filing for and receiving the government benefits that they earned through their service to our nation. Through an arrangement with a topnotch law firm, close to half a million dollars is spent each year in department service officer training, materials and certifications, regional office site visits, and representing veterans before the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. We also have three national teams handling nothing but appeals. If it wasn't for our teams appealing those claims, 80 percent of the veterans who had claims denied would have stayed denied.

During the fall National Executive Committee meeting in both 2018 and 2019, the NEC approved a resolution stating, "The American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation would engage in a \$25 million financial campaign doing business as the Veterans & Children Foundation."

A plan to accomplish this objective was approved by the NEC during the fall of 2020 meeting. The plan included departmental goals of 25 cents per member each year over a seven-year period. I'll say that again: 25 cents per member each year over a seven-year period. As departments met their goals, specifically designed urns are placed on the desk of your NEC in the NEC room. Coming into convention, the following departments have met or exceeded their seven-year goals: the Department of Alaska, Delaware, France, Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Virginia, and Wyoming. Congratulations to those 13 departments. (*Applause*)

An additional 16 departments are over halfway to their goal. During a virtual NEC meeting in 2020, the creation of a 1919 Donor Society was discussed and approved. Further work was done to move the plan forward, and in May of 2022, the NEC passed Resolution No. 6 entitled "Creation of the American Legion 1919 Society."

Over the last several days, you should have noticed the screens in the convention center scrolling the names of the members of the 1919 Society, and hopefully, thanks to the commander who reminded us often, you may have stopped by the booth, the 1919 Society booth, in the back of the convention hall in the last couple days.

Now, to become a member of the 1919 Society, donors must contribute a gift of \$1,000 or more. The society consists of four membership levels based on the amount donated: bronze for a gift of \$1,000 to \$2,499; silver for gifts of \$2,500 to \$4,999; gold for the gift of \$5,000 to \$9,999; and platinum for a gift of \$10,000 or more. Each donor's name is added to a specially designed 1919 Society wall, which is located outside of the Endowment Room on the third floor of our national headquarters in Indianapolis. These donors' legacies will live on for many years to come.

I would now ask that National Commander Troiola and the president of the Endowment Fund, the Honorable Vincent Gaughan, please come forward. We are excited to officially induct our national commander into the 1919 Society and thank him for his generous donation of \$1,000 a month for the last 12 months. President Gaughan will be presenting the commander with his 1919 Society regalia while I read the names of our newest platinum and gold 1919 Society members. The following members were inducted into the 1919 Society earlier this week for donations that were made between June 1, 2022, through May 31, 2023.

Our platinum donors, donors of \$10,000 or more: Kurt Loudenslager from Michigan; The American Legion Post 62 from Washington; James E. Chapin, Department of Wisconsin; The American Legion Department of Missouri; National Commander Vincent Troiola; The American Legion Department of New Jersey; The American Legion Department of Oregon; The American Legion Department of Arizona; James B. Watson

of Texas; Community Charities of Minnesota; The American Legion Department of Massachusetts; American Legion Post 337 in the Department of Massachusetts; Cory E. Brockmann from the Department of Oregon; American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Minnesota; SAL Detachment of Massachusetts in honor of Past National Commander Clifford Smith; The American Legion Department of Minnesota; SAL Squadron 180, Department of Oregon; Daniel and Stacey Seehafer from the Department of Wisconsin; The American Legion Department of France; and Walter Ivie from the Department of Texas. (*Applause*)

Our gold level donors, from \$5,000 up to \$9,999: The American Legion Department of Kentucky; The American Legion Department of Ohio; The American Legion Department of Maryland; Minnesota American Legion Foundation; The American Legion Department of Georgia; Joseph Zvesper from Wisconsin; American Legion Post 964 from the Department of Illinois; American Legion Department of Nevada; The American Legion Post 4, the Department of Massachusetts; The American Legion Department of Delaware; The American Legion Department of South Dakota; The American Legion Department of Oklahoma; American Legion Post 327 from the Department of Virginia. Let's give them all a round of applause. (*Applause*)

Thank you, all, for your generosity and for making a difference in the lives of our veterans, their children, and their families. You guys can stay here as long as you want to or whatever. Feel free to stay, though. If you are interested in learning more about the Veterans & Children Foundation, you can go to www.legion.org/vcf, where you can download a toolkit to use while promoting this program.

While you are at that site, you'll also find a link with more information about how to become a member of the 1919 Society. I believe, by assisting veterans to get the benefits that they earned and giving them a hand up when their family is in need, we will be instrumental in reducing and hopefully eliminating veteran suicide in this nation.

As leaders of this organization, we need your help. We need your voice. You need to bring awareness to this wonderful fund-raising campaign. When you get home and someone asks you what's new at national, you can tell them that you learned how we can all be doing our part to eliminate veteran suicide by giving our veterans hope through your donations to the Veterans & Children Foundation. Make sure to mark your donations to VCF. Thank you. (*Applause*)

Collection of Donations to Operation Comfort Warriors

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: If anyone has donations for Operation Comfort Warriors or any other Legion charities, I will now accept those onstage. Those presenting checks should proceed to the microphone, announce the amount and the donor; then go to the front on the floor, over here, for a photograph.

...National Vice Commander Kennedy assumed the Chair.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): Good morning. On behalf of China Post 1 of The American Legion, we're pleased to present a check of \$1,000 to Operation Comfort Warriors.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (TN): Department of Tennessee donates \$2,400 to Operation Comfort Warriors.

DELEGATE NOONAN (MO): Good morning. My name is Rose Noonan. I am the immediate past department commander for the great state of Missouri. Along with George Shepherd, one of our NECs, we present a check for \$3,396 for Operation Comfort Warriors.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN RILEY (NY): Dave Riley, chairman of the New York delegation. Also with me on the stage is Department Adjutant James Casey. I have two checks to present today, one from Department Auxiliary for Be the One for \$1,212.87 and another check for Operation Comfort Warriors from the Department of New York for \$19,157.

DELEGATE CHURCH (PA): Good morning. I'm Doug Church, western section vice commander of the state of Pennsylvania. With me is our NECman, Mike Stelacio; alternate NECman Mike Murphy; Adjutant Woody Hogan; and Assistant Adjutant Troy Michaels. I'd like to present a check for \$1,300.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MI): On behalf of Department Commander Brian Mohlman and Past Department Commander Marilyn Britten, the officers and members of the great state of Michigan present \$2,000 to Operation Comfort Warriors.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (OK): Good morning. On behalf of the Department of Oklahoma, we have a check for \$650 for Operation Comfort Warriors.

DELEGATE CONNER (MA): Good morning. My name is Scott Conner, department vice of Massachusetts. With me here today, Department Commander Sandra Davis, and our NEC Mike Davis. Presenting on behalf of our Past National Commanders Daniel Dougherty, Jake Comer, and Paul Morin, who was our inspiration for today's donation. A special shout out to our grassroots gang, Jim and Rich of the Vernon Hill post, and Adam, Lisa, Ryan, and my Coast Guard veteran wife, Grace, for a check in the amount of \$3,250.

DELEGATE STENNIS (OH): Good morning. My name is Charles Stennis, and I am the immediate past commander of the Department of Ohio. With me this morning is our NECman Steve Masowick; our current commander, Jason Rue; and our adjutant, John Robinson. The Department of Ohio proudly donates \$10,000 to Operation Comfort Warriors.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER KOUTZ: Commander, from the Department of Indiana, we have Department Commander Robert Oeth; NEC Ed Trice; alternate NEC, Kenny Cooper; and National Vice Commander Kenny Hill. Donations we received since the May meetings, Jasper American Legion Post 147, \$500. American Legion Indiana Auxiliary, the president of the Indiana Auxiliary this year, her project was Operation Comfort Warriors. She raised \$18,064. An unknown person, \$1,700.02. Sellersburg Post 204, \$1,500. Miami Correctional Facility, \$555. Robert E. Kennington Post 34, \$500. Tennyson American Legion Post 463, \$500. Griffin American Legion Post 66, \$500. Angola Squadron 31, \$250. Bonnie Sloan Squadron 28, \$250. Active SAL Squadron 355, \$200. Kevin Brinksneider from Tell City, \$200. Ron and Brenda Byrley, \$100. Richard and Andrea Wuttke, \$100. Lori Lowery, \$100. Sons of the American Legion 7th District, Tell City American Legion Post 213, \$50. And our Detachment of Indiana commander's project this year was Operation Comfort Warriors under Charlie Gemlich. His project raised \$24,543.73, with a total today: \$49,714.75.

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER KENNEDY: Our next speaker successfully represented more than 12,000 veterans and their family members before the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. Prior to his founding of the law firm in which he is a managing partner, he served as an appellate litigator in VA's Office of General Counsel, Appellate Litigation Division, in Washington, D.C. In 2010 and 2011, he served as president of the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims Bar Association. A graduate of Andrews University in Michigan, he holds a Doctor of Jurisprudence from Indiana University School of Law. From Bergmann & Moore, Glenn R. Bergmann. (*Applause*)

**Address: Glenn R. Bergmann
Managing Partner, Bergmann & Moore**

Thank you and good morning. It's a pleasure to be here. I have had the honor of sitting on the floor these last couple of days, and I know that this is an opportunity to talk about myself, but I'm not going to do that. I'd like to talk about you, and I'd like to talk about your American Legion leadership and your department service officers.

In 2017 your NEC passed a national resolution that approved a memorandum of understanding with Bergmann & Moore that set forth three principal thrusts: Number one, no-cost representation in disability appeals before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans

Claims; number two, the provision of a national training school of your department service officers; and the third was a more amorphous principle, and that is supporting other American Legion initiatives.

I'd like to show you a report card of the work that has been done since 2017. Now, any appeals before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims take at least a year because justice doesn't work as quickly as, sometimes, we'd like, but it's a very fast docket. I'm very proud of the work that is done there of the judges, even of the VA attorneys. I hope you can see these numbers, and if you can't, I'm going to quickly go over them. Since September 1, 2017, up until July 30, so just a month ago, we have had 5,552 completed case dispositions of American Legion members. I am proud to report that, of those 5,552, 5,531 ended in a favorable outcome to your members. *(Applause)*

That means that only about five out of every 1,000 appeals of your members ended in a loss. Today, at this very moment, we have approximately 1,105 currently pending cases. Again, this isn't a representation of us, this is a representation of the success of your department service officers.

This is not a flag of Japan. I was going to use the Bergmann & Moore blue, but I used American Legion red. This is a pie chart, and for those that couldn't see the numbers, I hope this represents better the success of your department service officers because it's your service officers who start the claims. They present the arguments. They obtain the evidence. By the time the cases come to federal court, where we take them and represent you, the record is closed. We cannot add evidence. We can add argument, and that's what we do. This report card, again, of 99.6 percent success rate in federal court is a result of your leadership in having us and educating your department service officers on how best to serve The American Legion members and how to quickly obtain benefits for your members.

Which leads us to the second main thrust of the memorandum of understanding pursuant to the national resolution in 2017, and that is training. The provision of training, we conduct two national training schools each year. Up until COVID, these were in-person sessions in Washington, D.C., and in Indianapolis. After COVID hit, actually, we were in session in Washington, D.C., when COVID revealed itself, so to speak, and everyone was sent home. Since then, they have been remote.

But I am again proud to say that 2,153 graduates have graduated from these schools, your service officers, over 13 schools. When I say graduate, that means that there was a test. This isn't a merely show up and get a certificate. We test your department service officers. We push them hard, and I am proud to say that 2,153 graduates, an average of 200 DSO students per session.

Effective last year, as a result of your executive director, Chanin Nuntavong, he approached me and said, "We'd like to do more." As a result of that conversation, we created a new service officer school, which we now run monthly. Again, I'm proud to say there have been this year just about 500 graduates of that school. So, each month, in addition to the two national training schools, we also have a monthly new service officer school. Board unit trainings are also part of our umbrella of education. A suicide prevention training is in progress.

What's very exciting, and again, this is another result of the initiatives of your executive director, in October 2024 there will be a Legion leadership symposium, which is going to be the top of the top in training. Obviously, that's still a year away, but we have been planning with your VA&R staff.

I'm excited to say that that in-person school will involve members of congress, VA leadership, and oral argument before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. They are coming out of the courthouse, coming to the national convention center in Leesburg, and they are going to hold an oral argument, a three-judge panel oral argument at this school. I'm very proud, again, of the investment your American Legion leadership makes in your department service officers related to training.

Everyone remembers the PACT Act. The PACT Act came out last August, which was

a great provision that came out of Congress. Buried into the PACT Act was what the law calls an "other matter," and that is Camp Lejeune Justice Act. Bergmann & Moore is not a mass tort firm; but, like you, we saw that these predatory law firms came out of the woodwork and started aggressively approaching Legion members. So, we talked to your leadership about entering into an MOU to protect your membership, to create and execute a service project that helps support Legion membership in determining whether or not the Camp Lejeune Justice Act is something for them.

I'm proud to say, as part of that initiative, we interviewed and screened a number of law firms to help determine which law firm to send your Legion members to. We were able to negotiate a reduced fee structure that caps costs and fees. I'm proud to say we are part of the executive committee of that mass tort litigation, which, as of now, it hasn't been publicized. I'm publicizing it a little bit today. But that makes us part of the leadership board of the Camp Lejeune Justice Act litigation.

This is an example of what your leadership, and I want to thank Dean Kessel for seeing the importance of making sure that you, your membership, your Legionnaires and leaders in The American Legion get up-to-date, accurate information about Camp Lejeune Justice Act. Each month there is a full-page ad in your "American Legion Magazine."

What I hope you're also noticing, there are not ads from other law firms trying to get your Legion memberships to enter into fee agreements of 50, 60 percent plus costs, which is abusive. Part of this outreach includes promoting accurate information, ensuring that the confusion, and there's a lot of confusion. I'm sure you remember all the ads that you hear and see. You can't get away from the ads, but some of the confusion includes that the lawsuit involves an offset against VA compensation.

That is not true. Camp Lejeune Justice Act is a parallel remedy to VA claims. So, we are making sure the word gets out to everyone in The American Legion related to Camp Lejeune Justice Act. We have engaged several individuals to help in this effort. Anita Best is a retired colonel, public affairs officer of the U.S. Marine Corps. She helps us as our CLJA coordinator. And Liz Hartman, who is one of yours, who acts as a spokesman, she travels the different posts talking about Camp Lejeune Justice Act.

So, our approach is a two-pronged approach. We are recommending that members talk to an accredited American Legion department service officer about the best strategy going through a VA claim and separately filing potentially a Camp Lejeune Justice Act. Because remember, folks, these are parallel remedies. Obtaining the one doesn't prevent you from obtaining the second.

Finally, the third initiative of the national resolution that dates back to 2017 is support and protection of other American Legion initiatives. That was completed just two weeks ago. Your leadership elected to support appellant James Rudisill in his GI Bill battle before the U.S. Supreme Court and asked us as your law firm to file a brief on behalf of The American Legion.

Let me just pause for a second to talk about the GI Bill. This is something I did not know until I started researching the GI Bill, but the original GI Bill, which was entitled the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, which passed in 1944, did you know this was an American Legion initiative? Your own past national commander, a gentleman by the name of Harry Colmery, was the principal architect of this ground-shaking bill, which included a comprehensive economic package not only of education benefits, of home loans, farm loans, and unemployment benefits. History gives credit to The American Legion as being one of the principal architects, which still today is considered one of the most profoundly successful pieces of legislation in the history of our country.

This is a copy of the front page. I highlighted what it says there, "Brief of the American Legion." Here is a copy. This was filed on behalf of The American Legion on August 16, just two weeks ago. I'm proud that the American Legion again has a voice on the national stage related to the GI Bill. (*Applause*)

I'd like to conclude by making an observation from my perspective as your legal counsel in helping your members with disability benefits and with education and with these

other initiatives: We do not need new veterans service organizations. There is a perfectly good one right here. *(Applause)*

I went to the symposium of Be the One, and I was impressed with what you are doing to destigmatize suicide by bringing in, and it's not a campaign, it's an initiative to bring in younger veterans because you are charged, just as the generation before you, with supporting them, with leading them. Some of you have what the bible calls a crown of wisdom, which is gray hair. I would encourage you to bring in the younger leaders. You have a lot of smart, young veterans that are serving as Legionnaires. Your department service officers have a lot of young people who are passionate, who are smart, and they deserve, I believe, not to replace you, but to be here with you and help lead.

Finally, again, I would like to encourage you to take a strong stand to mobilize your membership before Congress so Congress can see the importance and the might and the strength of the American Legion. There are bad actors out there, as you heard from VA Secretary McDonough, talk about veterans should not pay to file claims. And that is what's happening because predatory claims agents have come in, they've entered the arena, and they are hollowing out The American Legion. They are doing the work of your department service officers. That needs to stop.

What is Bergmann & Moore doing? I'm happy to say that we have assembled a leadership team. We've engaged a national software development company to create an innovative, user-friendly claims platform so that your department service officers, instead of helping 500 veterans at a time, that they can help 1,000, 2,000, because that's what the competition is doing, and they're doing it for a fee.

We believe that claims processing, the filing of claims should be free. By the end of this year, we will have invested \$1 million. This is a multiyear package. We believe that initial claims should be done by your department service officers, and it should be done for free. Thank you for your attention, and may God continue to bless The American Legion. *(Applause)* ...National Commander Troiola resumed the Chair.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Total contributions for Operation Comfort Warriors in 2023 are \$250,066.10. *(Applause)*

Here is a record for you. Total contributions this year to all Legion charities, \$10,875,042.26. *(Applause)*

And your national adjutant has just nicknamed me the \$10 million commander.

Presentations

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I would now like to call my family to the lectern. I'd like to introduce my wife, Saveria, who's put up with me on the road to the national commander as well as national commander. And anybody who's been a national commander knows that your wife is sitting home, hopefully with company, but most of the time not, and I can't thank her enough for what she's done to support me in my Legion career. I'm looking forward to taking her away on our 50th anniversary, which will be in three weeks. *(Applause)*

My daughter Jeanette, the baby, for all of her support. Believe me, she gives me support and tells me what to do and what not to do. Must have got it from her mother. Thank you so much. And Daniel Roe here is her boyfriend. They've been together for eight years. He wanted to sit in a seat back there, but I consider him family because I know he takes really good care of my daughter. Thank you, Dan. *(Applause)*

I think I've had a productive year. I don't really generally put any attention to myself because I believe that it's we and it's not I. There's a little-known statement that's been going around the United States as I've been traveling. They call me the blue cap that's stuffed into a red cap, and that's the way we like to be remembered because I visited a lot of small posts in rural communities, and most of the time there was no lectern, no podium. I don't believe in that.

We had some nice conversations sitting down informally. I think the post membership really liked that. That's the way it should be. They probably represent a good portion of all of our posts. My project, besides Be the One, was to make sure I got to as many of those small posts and small communities as I could. I think we're all better off for it. Very proud people, posts with eight members in them, doing such crazy things. I'd walk up to a post commander and say, "What do you do for The American Legion?" "We don't do anything." Then you have the conversation around a table, and they'd tell you, "Commander, as soon as you leave, we've got to get ready for our Memorial Day parade."

I said, "Who runs it?" "We do." I said, "I thought you said you did nothing." That's the way they are. It's just a regular thing to them. "We sent four kids to Boys State." One of them had a military museum that they ran in the town. Pretty neat stuff. I'll remember that for a long, long time. For those of you that are in here that belong to a small post, thank you so much for allowing me to share in your experiences.

Past National Commanders are back here. They are so valuable to me during the year, advice, support, friendship, building confidence in me, which I don't think I suffered from after the first day. You just get going and keep going, and here I am. Thank you so much to all the past national commanders.

There's a gentleman sitting over here, Adjutant Dan Wheeler, has become a good friend and confidant. And without him, I don't think any of the past national commanders would be where they are today, intellectually and humbling. Every time you call him up, it could be nighttime, could be daytime, he's there, he's got the right answer. And if he doesn't have it, 15 minutes later, you can be sure he woke somebody up to get you that answer.

When I go back to my days of campaigning and we were during COVID, we had our committee meetings, the New York committee, by Zoom. I was very lucky because I had a past national commander on my committee, John P. "Jake" Comer. John, please stand up and take a bow because I really appreciate what you did for me on my committee. He used to say, "I'm doing nothing. I'm sitting on the couch."

Anybody from the New York committee, please stand and be recognized. New York Committee to Elect. Can't see out there. If you're out there, please, thank you very much for everything you've done. *(Applause)*

Department of New York, please rise. There they are. Thank you for everything you've done for me during my years. I really appreciate it. Adjutant Jim Casey, Department Commander Dave Riley, Department Commander Tim Comer, and Mike McDermott, I think, was part of that. Thank you so much for what you've done for me.

And all of you in this room, you're what makes The American Legion tick. I talk mostly to the blue cappers because you're the ones that make it happen. You're the grassroots of the organization, where the rubber hits the road, and that's how we get all of our volunteer hours so we can report to Congress. It's fantastic what we're doing in the communities. Thank you for that as well.

Who else do I have here? I don't have anybody here. I've got some other people, but I'm going to introduce them as we go along. Thank you very much for this year. You guys, thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, there they are. Thank you. Okay, next.

Would my national vice commanders please come forward. All of my vice commanders have represented me well during the past 12 months. I appreciate your devotion and sacrifice for this great organization. Before I go on, in the beginning of the year, most people don't know this, but I had a little hiccup in my health, and it lasted for about nine weeks. If it wasn't for these vice commanders filling in for me in the states that I couldn't go to, I don't know what I would have done. I want to thank them very, very much for filling in for me when I wasn't able to. As a token of my appreciation, I would like to present you each with a gift. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER KENNEDY: National Commander Troiola, on behalf of your five national vice commanders, we want to thank you for the great year you had. We want to thank you for the help and support you gave us and to this great American Legion organization. On behalf of the five of us, we would like to present you with this

gift.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Some of the people in the audience may appreciate what they wrote because not too many people know my nickname: Jim aka Mij. I'll get to that in a second. "It's been a pleasure serving as one of your vice commanders. I had a great time traveling throughout the West spreading your team's programs, especially Be the One and community involvement. From Doug."

When I got to Wyoming on a campaign trip, there was a NEC and the department commander waiting for me in the airport, and they had a sign, and it said, "Welcome to Wyoming, Mij." That's Jim spelled backwards. I feel the love. Thank you very much. Wow, gift card for \$1,000. Thank you so much. *(Applause)*

I now call on the national historian, sergeant-at-arms, chaplain, and my aide to come forward. You each played important roles in the success of our organization during the past year. I salute you for your service. Please accept these gifts as a token of my appreciation.

They told me this is going to be tough. It's tough. I'm going to start with Gary. And a lot of you that know Gary that went on my travels, how great of an aide he was. The national president, national Sons commander, Past National Commander Comer, Flo, all those came to visit with us, Gary became their aide as well. When I chose him, I tell everybody when I go to visit that most people who see the aide only see him stuffing bags in the back of the car at the airport, and that's not really why I chose him.

Gary was the department commander of New York for our centennial year, the 100th year. He's a 27-year Navy veteran. He's a leader. He's great for advice. He's a confidant. When you're traveling, sometimes you need somebody to lean on or ask for advice before you go out and visit, and he did such a wonderful job of that. Always one step ahead of me. Every time I asked him a question, he had the answer ahead of time. It's going to be tough going on without seeing him every morning. Thank you, Gary. *(Applause)*

GARY SCHACHER (NY): Good morning, American Legion. Commander, it was an honor, a privilege, to have the unique opportunity to travel around the world with you, to go to all the posts that we went to. You wanted to hit small posts, we did that. Thank you for having me part of your year. The friendships made to the departments and the Legion Family out there from around the world, thank you for your hospitality and friendship.

We have a little presentation for you, sir. So, you might have received a coin or two. We have a coin rack here for you for the boatswain mate that you are. I'm going present you with your first coin. This is the Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola National Commander's coin. And we have a retirement box that says Be the One, American Legion, Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola, National Commander. For all the little knickknacks you received.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: That was tough. Next, we have a few words from National Adjutant Dan Wheeler.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: I'd like to ask that our national treasurer, judge advocate, assistant national adjutant, and executive directors to come forward. National Commander Troiola, I can't tell you what a pleasure it's been to serve with you. I love sitting around those banquets, and we tell jokes. The last time we sat around and told jokes, I got COVID. *(Laughter)*

I don't know what happened, but Rodney was very sorry to see me get sick. You're not easy to buy for. You didn't drop any hints, probably because you never think of yourself first. You are that definition that we heard yesterday of what love is. You think of other people first. So, we went the easy route. The gentleman on the stage here with me and the directors at national headquarters all contributed to buy you this \$1,500 Amazon gift card. And be sure to share it with Saveria because she shared you with us the past 12 months.

We know back in Maine the bus company called and said they want you back. So, we included some Snickers, pretzels, and other snacks. We figured those kids deserve a good sugar rush after being away from you for a year, and we know you appreciate them being a little hyperactive. So, it's been a pleasure serving under you. You've done a fantastic job representing The American Legion. We all love you, and we're going to miss you. *(Applause)* ...*National Vice Commander Kennedy assumed the Chair.*

NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER KENNEDY: After serving as a national vice commander, I am honored to represent all members of The American Legion in presiding over the next order of business. This is the time when we present to National Commander Vincent James "Jim" Troiola, the colors of his term in office and a plaque. At this time, I call on Past National Commander Richard Santos to present the colors, which will be followed by the presentation of the plaque.

**Presentation: Plaque and Colors to Outgoing National Commander
Richard Santos, Maryland, Past National Commander**

Please rise. I ask for Newport Harbor American Legion Post 291 Color Guard, Department of California to present the colors to center stage. Hand Salute! Two! Commander, be the one. Your colors, the American flag, and The American Legion red banner are presented for us. The American Legion red banner has been your guidon while serving our great nation and our organization. Under this banner, you have carried the fight, the message, and hope for our nation's veterans, with the reverberation, resonance, and echo of "Be the One."

When you served on USS Nitro, boatswain mate 3rd class, then, as now, Old Glory was your standing, flying high off a full staff on the fantail and port and on the highest part of the ship, the mast, underway, from horizon to horizon, to be seen. As we see here today, the colors of the United States are never dipped, never subservient, always waving, carried high. As you have led us, carried high. You have stood tall and never wavered in your service, dedication, and commitment to our nation's military, veterans, and their families. May these colors guide you in your future endeavors. May they wave erect, free and true. May they remain in a prominent area of your home, symbolizing your year of service to The American Legion. Commander, these are your colors.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Color Guard, retire my colors. Hand salute! Ready, two! Thank you, Commander Santos. You were our 9/11 national commander. And as such, you have been a great example of how to lead our organization through tough times. Your wisdom and experience are tools that will continue to benefit this organization that we both love so much. You can be seated. There are far too many people who helped me throughout my Legion career for me to start naming them here, but rest assured that you are one whose counsel I valued highly. I understand you also have another presentation.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER SANTOS: I, as all past national commanders, never follow the script. For the previous 103 national conventions, men and women have been elected and taken center stage as national commander of The American Legion. Many more have been honored by a vote of a national convention or made honorary national commanders. As national commander, the chief executive officer, and the official spokesman of The American Legion, I like Mutt and Jeff, and weathering some rough seas and perilous conflicts, you have represented us throughout the United States and in many countries overseas. You let the world know The American Legion's purposes, policies and mission. Upon taking the oath of office for national commander September 1, 2022, you announced, and I quote, "My platform, my number one priority, is tackling the toughest challenges facing veterans, veteran suicide. The American Legion is asking you to Be the One. And by 'you,' I include every one of us, military and civilian alike. We all need to Be the One and to begin thinking, talking, and acting to save just one life."

Well, commander, you have held true to your platform and to your number one priority. Under the Be the One brand and your leadership, you have led the movement, the mission, the struggle, and, yes, the battle to reduce the rate of suicide in the veteran community. By veteran community, I include those on active duty.

You have put the Be the One ship on the right course at the right speed. The difference that you have made and the number of lives you have affected is probably boundless and inestimable. However, as the future becomes the present, we may use the reduction of 21

lives per day to zero as our scale.

Commander, I present to you your plaque. It attests to your election to the high office of national commander. The plaque symbolizes your service to The American Legion. The plaque is one measure of our appreciation, our gratitude and our recognition of the thousand Legionnaires who you met during your term of office, from the national officers with whom you served and of those who are here today to witness. The plaque reads: "Presented to Vincent J. 'Jim' Troiola, elected by National Convention to serve the high office of National Commander of The American Legion for the year 2022 and 2023. This commemoration is given in appreciation to your dedicated leadership, recognition of your devotion to the four principles of our great organization, service to God and country, and a token of the high esteem your fellow Legionnaires have in you. Given on this 31st day of August, 2023, before the delegates assembled at the National Convention."

The American Legion seems to have the right person at the right time with the right message serving as national commander. I learned that from Past National Commander Jake Comer. We always seem to have the right person there. You are no exception. You were the right one at the right time to Be the One.

If you were on the USS Nitro right now in the boatswain locker, I'm sure the chief boatswain mate would say to you, "Bravo Zulu," which means job well done. And to use another nautical phrase of good luck, a blessing, as it were, as a person departs on a journey of life, may you and your family always have fair winds and following seas. Commander, thank you very much. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Is the past national president of the Auxiliary, Vickie Koutz and the past national commander of the Sons, Chris Carlton in the audience somewhere? Thank you so much for a great year. Two great partners. I appreciate all the work you've done on behalf of your organizations and helping each other with their own projects. You'll be friends of mine for the rest of my life. Thank you so much. *(Applause)*

Thank you again, PNC Santos. This plaque will forever be a reminder of the remarkable honor that was bestowed on me. I believe every national commander tries to leave his or her mark. But as you know, the same works in reverse. The American Legion has left its mark on me, and I know the impact that this great organization has had on you. I would like to thank everybody in this room for allowing me the honor to lead The American Legion for this past year. Thank you. *(Applause)*

...National Commander Troiola resumed the Chair.

Special Order of Business: Election of National Officers

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: We have come now to a special order of business, the election of National Officers. National Judge Advocate Mark Seavey will read the Rules of Convention governing the nomination and election of officers.

NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE SEAVEY: The rules for election of national officers are as follows: Voting shall be by acclamation, except when a roll call is demanded by the chairman of at least three departments. Election of national officers shall be by roll call.

Prior to the election of national officers, the national commander shall appoint, subject to the approval of the convention, a judge of election and such number of tellers as he deems necessary, provided that the total tellers so appointed shall be an odd number. In a contested election each candidate going to the ballot shall be entitled to one teller of his choice.

Nominations for national officers shall be from the floor on roll call of the departments alphabetically arranged. Each department may present as many candidates as it chooses. Nominating speeches for national officers shall be limited to five minutes each. Not more than two seconding speeches shall be made for any candidate and said speeches shall be limited to three minutes.

When more than two candidates are nominated for any office, balloting shall continue until one candidate receives a majority of the votes of the convention, except in the election of national vice commanders. In a contested election for national vice commanders, balloting shall continue until (a) majorities and (b) pluralities are established for one or more candidates under the following provisions: If, on any ballot taken, less than five candidates receive the necessary majority to elect, the candidate or candidates receiving a majority vote shall be declared elected and a new ballot shall be taken for the remaining number of places to be filled, the candidate receiving the lowest number of votes on the preceding ballot shall be disqualified; except should two candidates remain to fill one place, a new ballot shall be taken.

The convention will nominate and elect a national commander, and five national vice commanders, in this sequence. At the conclusion of balloting on national vice commanders, each department delegation chairman shall deliver a written ballot to the tellers. Such ballots shall be in the hands of the tellers before communication is made to the national commander for announcement of the results. This concludes the rules.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: As chairman of this convention, I now appoint as judge of the election, James W. Casey, adjutant of the Department of New York; and as tellers of the election Julie Muhle, adjutant, Department of Wisconsin; Harry R. "Butch" Hansen, Jr., adjutant, Department of Connecticut; and PNC Jimmie Foster, adjutant, Department of Kansas. Will the Judge and tellers of the election please come forward.

In my remarks a little bit ago I was a little overwhelmed I forgot to thank the most important part, and that's the staff of The American Legion headquarters. From Indianapolis, from Washington, all of them do such a great job in keeping the national commander in check, making sure they have everything necessary for me to do my job. So, all the national staff, the directors of the divisions, and all of the support people, please, thank you very much, and especially Patty Jackson, my secretary. She was fantastic, especially in her first year. Thank you. *(Applause)*

National Adjutant Daniel S. Wheeler will now call the roll of the departments. The purpose of the roll call is to receive nominations for national commander of The American Legion. *[The national adjutant called each department in turn.]*

DELEGATE KEEN (AL): Buddy Keen, delegate from Alabama. Mr. Chairman, Alabama yields to Wisconsin.

DELEGATE STUVENGEN (WI): Mr. Commander, Karl Stuvengen, delegate from Wisconsin. Mr. Commander, I request that the chair recognize Past National Commander Denise Rohan for the purpose of a nomination for the high office of national commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Request granted.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER ROHAN: Thank you, commander. National officers, delegates to this 104th National Convention, Legion Family members, guests, friends, good morning again. This time I am here to talk to you about a man from Wisconsin that I have known for over 20 years.

Many of you came to know him when he served Past National Commander Jimmie Foster as his national chaplain. During the August 2011 memorial service in Minneapolis, Minnesota, he shared a story that had the entire Legion Family abuzz and some in tears. We left that service with our hearts uplifted. Everyone listened and absorbed what he had to say. We learned and heard more than just a memorial service that day. We heard from a chaplain that was destined to be something even greater. We learned that God had blessed The American Legion with a man that everyone could get behind and follow, a man who truly believes in "For God and Country."

When his year as national chaplain was over, he went back to Wisconsin where he learned even more about The American Legion and our entire American Legion Family. He studied our history and about The American Legion's mission across the globe. He continued to grow and take on challenges of leadership, leadership positions in the state of Wisconsin and at the national level, and as he learned, as he learned, he began to realize

how personal The American Legion is to each and every one of us.

During National and our department Legion colleges, we talked about our why: Why did we first join our organization? Why did we continue to be part of this Legion Family? Why? Why do we spend our time, our vacation, our money, doing what we do? What difference does it make?

This man not only found his why, but he understands that God does not work alone; he works through each and every one of us every day. During the membership workshop last month, he shared with you the three Cs of servant leadership: Competence, character and commitment. Competence as a leader. He has learned about our Legion Family inside and out. He has traveled the country to get to know you and to learn about your concerns. He has the wisdom to surround himself with Legionnaires who have more years of experience. And he listens. He listens to staff and experts in their fields. A competent leader never stops learning and does their best to encourage and help their followers to continue to learn.

Character. Leaders must be an example for others to follow. Legally, morally and ethically. They make decisions based on what they believe and what they have personally lived through themselves. They are there with unwavering strength and wisdom. Others want to be like them.

And commitment, leaders must make a commitment to the organization, to be part of a team, part of this amazing American Legion Family. They must be passionate about their jobs. They're resolved to contribute honorable service to accomplish a mission despite adversity, obstacles and challenges. Leaders must be ready to rise to any challenge that comes before them.

I believe if you Google "servant leader," you will find a picture of this man. He knows what it means to be a servant leader and has the competence, the character and the commitment to lead The American Legion and our members into the future. He will lead from the front, helping us understand our purposes and our mission, but he will also be behind us, giving us support and words of encouragement whenever they are needed.

Today may be the last day of our convention, but we have a major order of business in front of us. We need to elect the right person who can see that the work that we did here in Charlotte is moved into action, a person ready to lead us forward.

It is time to send this man on a mission to spread the good word, the good news of an organization of family that is all about God and country. All about making a difference in the lives of our military, our veterans, and their families. All about showing the world that we are veterans still serving America.

As a delegate to this National Convention, it is my personal privilege to place into nomination, Wisconsin's Daniel J. Seehafer for the high office of national commander. Thank you. *(Applause)*

DELEGATE DAVIS (AK): Mr. Commander, Deb Davis, Delegate from Alaska. Mr. Commander, Alaska yields to Kansas.

DELEGATE EHART (KS): Mr. Commander, Jeremy Ehart, Delegate from Kansas. Mr. Commander, I request that the Chair recognize Dan Wiley for the purpose of seconding the nomination for the high office of national commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Request approved.

DELEGATE WILEY (KS): Good morning. National Commander Troiola, National Adjutant Wheeler, national officers, past national commanders, delegates and guests to the 104th National Convention of the American Legion, I am Dan Wiley, a delegate from the state of Kansas. And it is my distinct honor and privilege to second the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer, representing the Badger State of Wisconsin to the high office of national commander of The American Legion.

Dan earned his eligibility through service with the United States Navy during the Bosnia and Herzegovina war era as a commissioned officer enrolling in the Navy chaplaincy program. As Dan says, "God has a way of opening and closing doors," and so it was with Lieutenant Dan's military service. His military service opened the door to God

and country, but the door didn't close with his discharge. Instead, it opened a passageway to a lifetime of service, to both God and veterans.

A member of the Horicon Post 157, Dan has served in numerous leadership positions at all levels of The American Legion. At the post level, Dan served on the building committee, as adjutant and was a 100 percent and all-time high post commander. At the county level, he served as commander and chaplain, and he served as commander, first vice commander and second vice commander at the district level.

For the Department of Wisconsin, Dan has served on the Membership & Post Activities Committee, the Finance Committee, the Americanism Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee and as chairman of the Religious Emphasis Committee. He also served as assistant chaplain, chaplain, vice commander and commander.

At the national level, Dan is a graduate of the National American Legion College. He's served on a number of committees, including the Marketing Commission Executive Committee, the IT Oversight Committee, the Foreign Relations Committee, the National Cemetery Committee, and the System Worth Saving Task Force.

Dan has also served as chairman of the Chaplain's Conference, the 21st Century Ad Hoc Committee, the Membership & Post Activities Committee, the Veterans Employment & Education Commission, and most recently the Legislative Commission. Dan served as national chaplain in 2010-2011.

Dan is married to Stacey and has two children, Jacob and Emma, all of whom are members of the American Legion Family. Dan has served his God, his family, his country and The American Legion with honor, and now will admirably serve as your American Legion commander with his theme of "Be the One."

As a duly registered delegate, I proudly second the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer to be your next national commander. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I now call on National Adjutant Wheeler to continue the roll.

DELEGATE SIMON (AZ): Mr. Commander, Mike Simon, delegate from Arizona. Mr. Commander, I request that the Chair recognize Matt Shuman for the purpose of seconding the nomination for the high office of national commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Request approved.

DELEGATE SHUMAN (AZ): Good morning, Legion Family! National Commander Troiola, National Adjutant Wheeler, national officers, past national commanders, fellow delegates, and guests to the 104th National Convention of The American Legion, my name is Matthew Shuman, and I hail from the Great State of Arizona, the home of Senators Barry Goldwater and John McCain. I rise today with great happiness and joy to second the nomination of our friend, Reverend Daniel J. Seehafer, from Wisconsin, to serve us all as the national commander of America's largest and most impactful veterans service organization.

Dan was born and raised in Merrill, Wisconsin. In high school, he was the class treasurer and a member of the jazz band. Dan was quite an active student, just as he is an active Legionnaire. Dan lettered in cross country as a sophomore, giving him the experience to cross this country in service of his people.

After high school, Dan attended Concordia University and received a Bachelor of Arts. From a young age, Dan knew and felt he had a higher calling and wanted to be a pastor. Following his dream, Dan visited the Holy Land while in college, which ultimately led him to getting a Master of Divinity from his beloved Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

After following the Lord's plan for Dan's education, he returned to Wisconsin in 1997, where he was installed as an Assistant Pastor at St. Stephen Lutheran Church, where he still serves his flock today as administrative pastor, and he loves it every single day.

Daniel earned his eligibility for membership in The American Legion by serving in the world's greatest and most powerful Navy. As no surprise, Dan again followed the Lord's guidance, and he served in the United States Navy Chaplaincy Program. Dan loved his

time in the Navy, as his position enabled him to not only serve with Navy personnel, but also with the United States Marine Corps. From his time in San Diego, Newport, Everett, Washington, the USS Paul F. Foster and even Camp Pendleton, Dan will always cherish his time in military service.

Legion Family, as I mentioned a few moments ago, Reverend Dan is still an active pastor. In fact, Dan still has a congregation of over 900 baptized souls, a parochial school and even a children's center.

None of this would be possible without the sacrifice love, dedication and support from his amazing wife Stacey and his two children, Jacob, who just finished high school, and a daughter, Emma, who just finished the eighth grade.

In closing, Dan has served God, his family, his country and The American Legion with honor and distinction and will now admirably serve as your next American Legion national commander.

As a duly registered delegate from the great state of Arizona, I proudly second the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer to be the one and become your next national commander. For God and country. Thank you. *(Applause)*

...At this time, a demonstration of support ensued.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The convention will come back to order. All delegation chairs please proceed to a floor microphone. The adjutant will continue the roll call.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (AR): Mr. Commander, Arkansas seconds the nomination.

DELEGATE ALDRICH (CA): Commander John Aldrich, California delegate. We cast all our delegate strength, second the nomination for Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN LENNON (CT): Richard Lennon, delegation chairman from the Department of Connecticut, submarine capital of the world. On behalf of our delegation, we second the nomination for Daniel Seehafer for the high office of national commander. Thank you.

DELEGATE LACY (DE): Delaware, Dwight Lacy, seconds the nomination to Daniel J. Seehafer for the position of national commander.

DELEGATE COLEMAN (DC): Detasha Coleman, District of Columbia. On behalf of our chair delegation, we endorse the election and the nomination for Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATE RAMOS (FL): From the great Sunshine State, NEC Jim Ramos, and votes 115 votes for our next national commander Daniel Seehafer.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (FR): Mr. Adjutant, the Department of France, birthplace of The American Legion, seconds the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer for national commander.

DELEGATE WHALEN (GA): James Whalen, delegate from Georgia. We second the nomination.

DELEGATE RIDDELL (HI): Fran Riddell, delegate from The Aloha State. Aloha State casts their votes for Daniel J. Seehafer.

DELEGATE SKINNER (ID): Bob Skinner, NEC delegate, Idaho seconds the nomination of Daniel Seehafer for national commander.

DELEGATE BUSKE (IL): Delmar Buske, commander, Illinois. Illinois seconds the nomination for Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATE OETH (IN): Mr. Chairman, Bob Oeth, department commander of the great Hoosier state, proudly seconds the nomination.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (IA): Department of Iowa seconds the nomination for Daniel J. Seehafer, national commander.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (KY): Commander, Kentucky and the Kentucky proud delegation, proudly endorses and seconds the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer, national commander.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (LA): Louisiana seconds the nomination Daniel Seehafer for commander.

DELEGATE WOODS (ME): Lloyd Woods, NEC from Maine proudly seconds the nomination for Daniel J. Seehafer for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN HIGGINS (MD): Ruth Higgins, delegate chairman from the Department of Maryland, 104th National Convention, home of Past National Commanders Eaton, Bacon and Santos. We place all delegation strength behind Daniel Seehafer from the Department of Wisconsin for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN DAVIS (MA): Sandra Davis, delegation chair. Massachusetts further seconds the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer for national commander.

DELEGATE WOOD (Mexico): Mike Wood, NEC, Mexico. We second the nomination.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MI): Mr. Chairman, the Department of Michigan seconds the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer for the office of national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN FURLAND (MN): Tom Furland, delegation chair from the Department of Minnesota. Minnesota seconds the nomination for Daniel Seehafer.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (MO): National Commander, national adjutant, as a registered delegate of the Department of Missouri, on behalf of Past National Commander Joe Frank, home of president and Legionnaire Harry S. Truman, home of Super Bowl champions Kansas City Chiefs and the site of the 2027 National Convention, Missouri seconds the nomination of Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATE LONG (MT): Lowell Long, department commander from Montana, Montana seconds the nomination for Daniel Seehafer for Commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SUCHY (NE): Nebraska, Don Suchy, delegate chairman, home of Past National Commander Michael Helm, cast all our votes for Daniel Seehafer, for seconding the nomination.

DELEGATE EVANS (NV): Jeanette Evans, Department of Nevada, duly registered delegate seconds the nomination for Daniel Seehafer for national commander.

DELEGATE PAQUIN (NH): Leo Paquin, New Hampshire. We second the nomination for Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN FISHER (NJ): Steve Fisher, delegation chairperson for the Department of New Jersey, seconds the nomination.

DELEGATE CHEATHAM (NM): Ed Cheatham, Department of New Mexico, seconds the nomination for Daniel J. Seehafer for national commander.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (NY): New York seconds the nomination for Daniel Seehafer for the high office of national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN DONNELLY (NC): Mike Donnelly, delegation chairman, seconds the nomination for Daniel J. Seehafer.

DELEGATE CARROLL (ND): Clarence Carroll, Department of North Dakota, on behalf of the North Dakota delegation, future home of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, we second the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN STENNIS (OH): Mr. Chairman, Charles Stennis, delegate chairman, the Buckeye State seconds the nomination for Daniel Seehafer as national commander.

DELEGATE SMITH (OK): Tim Smith from the Department of Oklahoma, we proudly second the nomination of Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATE PHILLIPS (OR): Flynn Phillips, the Oregon delegation seconds the nomination for the proud Navy chaplain of Daniel J. Seehafer.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CHURCH (PA): Doug Church, delegate chairman, Department of Pennsylvania, home of the Past National Commander Ron Conley, do proudly nominate Daniel Seehafer for the high office of national commander.

DELEGATE NORD (PH): Carl Nord, Department of the Philippines, seconds the nomination for Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN ROSARIO (PR): Carmen Rosario, chairman for the delegation of Puerto Rico. We second the nomination of Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATE WEINREICH (RI): Jim Weinreich, delegate for Department of Rhode Island. We proudly second the nomination for Daniel J. Seehafer for the high office of national commander.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (SC): Mr. Adjutant, the great state of South Carolina, we proudly second the nomination of Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATE BRENDEN (SD): Denny Brenden from the great state of South Dakota, home of Mount Rushmore, birthplace of American Legion Baseball proudly seconds the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer.

DELEGATE CULVER (TN): Lanny Culver, commander, Department of Tennessee seconds the nomination of Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN HINES (TX): Gerry Hines, state chair and head of the state that has the national American Legion Baseball champion. We second the nomination of Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CASE (UT): Doug Case, delegation chair of Utah. We second the nomination of Daniel Seehafer for national commander.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN SCANLON (VT): Tom Scanlon, duly elected delegation chair, is proud to second the nomination of Daniel Seehafer.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN OERTEL (VA): Rick Oertel, delegation chairman, Virginia, seconds the nomination for Daniel J. Seehafer.

UNIDENTIFIED DELEGATE (WV): The Mountaineers of West by God Virginia second the nomination of Daniel J. Seehafer for the high office of national commander.

DELEGATE BARNES (WY): Bill Barnes, delegate, we second the motion for Daniel J. Seehafer.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, that completes the roll call.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Thank you. I now recognize from the floor microphone number one.

DELEGATE DONNELLY (NC): Mr. Commander, Mike Donnelly, delegate from North Carolina. Mr. Commander, I move that we suspend the rules of this convention pertaining to the election of national commander and the nomination and election of the national vice commanders, which rules shall be reinstated at the conclusion of the election for the national vice commanders.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: There is a motion before us to suspend the rules of this convention pertaining to the election of the national commander and the nomination and election of national vice commanders, which rules shall be automatically reinstated at the conclusion of the election of national vice commanders. Is there a second? ...*Second*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Hearing a second, this motion is nondebatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? Carried. I now recognize from the floor microphone number two.

DELEGATE DIXON (VA): Mr. Commander, Linden Dixon, delegate from the state of Virginia. Mr. Commander, I move that the nominations for the office of the national commander be closed.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: We have a motion that nominations for the office of national commander be closed. Is there a second? ... *Second*.

Hearing a second, the motion to close nominations is a nondebatable motion and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? Carried. I now recognize from the floor microphone number one.

DELEGATE BRAMBILA (CA): Mr. Commander, David Brambila, delegate from California. Mr. Commander, I move that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of this convention and that Daniel J. Seehafer be elected national commander by acclamation. ...*Second*.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Hearing a second, there is a motion before us that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of this convention and Daniel J. Seehafer be elected national commander by

acclamation. All those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? Carried. I now call on the national adjutant.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, as national adjutant, I cast one vote representing the entire delegate strength of this convention for the election of Daniel J. Seehafer as the national commander of The American Legion. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I declare Daniel J. Seehafer elected national commander of The American Legion. Will the sergeant-at-arms assist the new national commander of The American Legion to the platform. He will be escorted to the stage by Department of Wisconsin National Executive Committeeman Robert L. Shappell. *(Applause) ...The delegation viewed a video. (Applause)*

The Chair recognizes Past National Commander Jake Comer for the purpose of administering the oath of office to the new national commander of The American Legion.

Administering the Oath of Office to the National Commander

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER COMER: Raise your right hand and repeat after me: I, Daniel J. Seehafer, do solemnly pledge myself to perform faithfully and impartially the duties of the office of national commander of The American Legion. I further pledge that I will support and defend the Constitution of The United States of America and the National Constitution and By-Laws of The American Legion. I do not subscribe to the principles of any foreign government or group opposed to our form of government, so help me God. Commander, may I be the first to congratulate you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Ladies and gentlemen, the 2023-2024 national commander of The American Legion, Daniel J. Seehafer. *(Applause)*
...The delegation viewed a video. (Applause)

Acceptance Speech: Newly Elected National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer, Wisconsin

Good morning, Legion Family! To my fellow delegates out there, national officers, PNCs, and even the staff, as well as distinguished guests, obviously Team Wisconsin. *(Applause)*

My church back home, St. Stephen, Horicon, Wisconsin. Of course, my family: My wife, Stacey; my mom, Jean; my extended family, who's also with us. I also want to make a long-distance dedication, though, to my daughter who's in school, couldn't be here, the trip a little bit difficult for her. Anyway, let's say: Hi, Emma! ...*Chorus of "Hi, Emma!"*

Thank you for that. This will go down in history for a long time. But a big heartfelt thank you for making this journey to national commander a reality. Yes, a reality. From that very first "just ask" moment back in 1997 by Bill Kiekhaefer, a member of Post 157 Horicon and also a member of my congregation, to numerous mentors and leaders and friends, some who are still with us, and others who are now in Post Everlasting.

To that special moment when I became your national chaplain under the infamous Commander Jimmie Foster back in 2010. Right, commander? And then concluding my department commander year back in July of 2017 with a resolution as Wisconsin's endorsed candidate for national commander. Yes, with various committee assignments, chairing our important commissions along the way, and campaigning for two years, we are now here. *(Applause)*

And a repeated question that comes to all leading candidates at this point of the journey is this, and I'm sure you said it, too, to me: Are you ...*Chorus of "Ready."*

Ready? Well, the answer is a resounding yes. Yes, I am. You know, family, as I first entered the convention center as a candidate to now receiving the proper attire as your newly elected national commander, you might have noticed a theme streaming through the air, songs from the "Rocky" soundtrack. Now, it's not because I have this great love for boxing or somehow, I'm just stuck in the '80s, but who doesn't like a little Rocky, right?

However, as I came across an article from "The Washington Times" last year, it left me with mixed emotions and questions like: What's happening to America? What's going on? Where's the love for God and country? Jennifer Harper wrote: An attack on the U.S. homeland would bring out the fight in most Americans, according to a new poll, but a surprisingly large percentage said they'd flee. So, Americans were asked, if they were in the same position as Ukrainians are now, would they stay and fight or leave the country?

The results, a majority, 55 percent, say they would stay and fight, while 38 percent say they would leave the country. Yes, a majority would stay, but 38 percent? Thirty-eight percent of Americans would leave? So, let's bring some of that concept into our family. Does it matter that we are the largest wartime veterans organization? Does it matter that we have Congress's ear and are invited to the table when it comes to the relevant veteran issues? ...*Chorus of "Yes."*

Does it matter that we still have all of our programs intact, up and running, even making them better and stronger than before, instead of cutting them due to budget constraints? More importantly, do you see the relevance in those statements, and do you, especially our leaders, have that desire and hunger to keep it this way? Or would you flee?

Basically, instead of learning from history and actually building upon it, that we would simply shrug our shoulders and mumble, "Well, those were the good old days." For example, while historians rightfully give President Roosevelt high remarks for his compassion towards the working class and downtrodden, his early administration was not what we would consider, let's say, veteran friendly.

At our National Convention back a few years, let's go back to 1933 just for a moment, FDR said this, and I quote: "No person because he wore a uniform must thereafter be placed in a special class of beneficiaries over and above other citizens." You see, what he failed to understand is that veteran status is not a royal title that people receive at birth. It's a status that is earned. Yes, earned by people like you and me. (*Applause*)

Who are willing to die for their country. Clearly, World War II changed the president's thinking on a matter as he signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, just more than two weeks after the first wave of U.S., those troops of ours, how they stormed then the beaches of Normandy.

We certainly know the primary author of that vision, don't we? Actually, the handwritten copy of that first draft is underneath a glass display case in our Endowment Room at national headquarters, third floor, I just might add. But you see, family, PNC Colmery understood that it was right for America to remember returning war veterans by making it possible for them to obtain college educations, business and farm loans, and purchase homes.

Though everyone loves the GI Bill today, it was certainly not a slam dunk at the time. Remember? "All That Glitters is Not Gold" was the headline of an open letter from leaders of other veteran organizations opposing an early version of the legislation. Now, to be fair, the GI Bill was indeed expensive. The 14.5 billion total spent for education and \$20 per week for 52 weeks of unemployment, that pay, that was no pittance. That cost, however, paled in comparison to the higher tax revenue gained from an educated working class, and then a housing boom resulting for millions of homeowners.

When the initial GI Bill period ended back in 1956, get this, 7.8 million out of 15.4 million veterans had enrolled in an education or training program. The bottom line? The bottom line? Communities, as well as universities, all over our great land owe their very existence to this bill. And it has been estimated as well that the GI Bill returned \$7 to the economy for every dollar of cost. 7-to-1.

And who made that possible? From the vision to the enormous support, that hunger and that fire in the belly, The American Legion. (*Applause*)

Talk about being personal, talk about being relevant. Family, our involvement, that powerful voice of ours, continues today. So, will you rise up to the challenge and follow me on this, to follow me as we together embark upon a new mission? In fact, when it comes to membership, specifically, I'm calling it "Operation Eye of the Tiger." Eye of the tiger,

for it is about family. It's about having, once again, that fire in the belly and knowing the relevance of who we are and what we can give to our communities, to our states, to our nation. Hey, why not? Let's have a little fun too.

And yet, family, this isn't just about numbers, not with me. Never with me. It's about people, our fellow veterans and their families, and, yes, even you. You who are right here listening now and also those who are watching. That's why with you we will make this year a transformational one for the American Legion Family, with special focus on servant leadership, having competence and character and commitment.

I truly believe we are at the forefront of rediscovering value proposition of membership and legislative together and the greater good that we, the Legion, brings to America by building more informed and civically engaged citizens, for it should not end at Boys State or Girls State.

Family, we're starting to see some of the metrics of this too. Compared to last year, we have more grassroots messages sent and over 500 congressional contact report forms submitted. That's why I am not letting this progress go unnoticed or letting it wither on the vine. As I addressed last year's membership workshop, we responded with 8,000 messages to Congress in over just a weekend? Then adding an additional 15,000 within a week or so and going over that 30,000 threshold into support the PACT Act.

So, yes, it can be done. It has to be done. But let's make it tenfold with more grassroots campaigns, Zoom meetings, webinars, trainings, for this can really be the difference between life and death. Think of it. Again, personal? Relevant? Absolutely. This is who we are. This is The American Legion.

Family, this leads me to my last point but our top priority, and that's the prevention of veteran suicide. The numbers are all over the place, but I believe the numbers tend to be, let's say, undercounted. Again, learning from history, going back to 1922, "The New York Times" reported that two veterans a day, two, were taking their own lives.

Now, given the horrors of World War I, I find that number suspiciously low. VA has released figures a couple years ago of about 17 per day, but that doesn't include active-duty deaths. Last year a joint study between America's Warrior Partnership, Duke University, and the University of Alabama contended that it could be more than double that, double!

The researchers said many drug overdoses were classified as accidents or unknown intent as to the cause. Those studies are constant with what a veteran told a member of our staff. After losing his own son to veteran suicide, the Army veteran said that, if he were to take his own life, he would try to make it look accidental so his family could still receive life insurance benefits. It's for people in those situations, veterans with suicidal ideations, that we have created our own initiative, Be the One. Be the One.

My '23-'24 theme, a theme that started with you, Brother Troiola, commander, as we continue then to invest our time and our resources to destigmatize the act of getting help, for it's okay to ask for help. It's okay not to be okay. That's why with all this talk about numbers on this very subject, the only number I want us to push now is this: One. One as "Be the One." Be the One to save one. Yes, one veteran, even the spouse, from taking his or her own life.

And remember, family, we are not doing this out of the love for racing per se, even though new fans have been created and the driver of our own Be the One car, Alex Palou, is kicking some serious tail in the series. I think it's going to be a championship year! But how awesome it is to actually partner with Chip Ganassi and his INDYCAR racing team as together, together, we raise that public awareness about the ongoing crisis of veteran suicide and actually doing something about it! (*Applause*)

And that is saving lives one at a time, because, after all, it's personal, very personal. Therefore, we all have a place in this God-given guided journey, all of us, but it does require work. To love and care for veterans is not easy. To keep improving the quality and access of care for veterans is, again, not easy. That's why my project for this upcoming year is to open wide our hearts with financial support for The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation, VCF. This foundation supports families, families, who are in crisis, as well as

disabled veterans and service officers, yes, I might add, who provide free, free representation, no cost. That's what we do.

Family, this is who we really are, for it is our mission. Yes, our mission to care and to serve as we veterans strengthen America in the process, and we are certainly not alone. Yes, our living God brought us together for this very purpose, and where there is a purpose, there is relevance, for the Legion is something more than a veterans organization to promote reunions and social gatherings. It's something more than an organized effort to solely get something out of the government for service rendered. Rather, The American Legion is dedicated to the high purposes of putting something into the government, into our nation, because of that zealous desire to continue to serve after the uniform has been laid away. So, family, I now ask you: Are you ready? ...*Chorus of "Yes!" (Applause)*

I thought you would say that. So then let's roll up our sleeves, and eye of the tiger, it shall be. Let's make our voice even more powerful. And those who are watching and listening who are not yet members, join us. Please join us, and join us today, for membership does matter, it really does. But especially join us with that God-given purpose and relevance to save and change lives. Yes, strengthening America, a brother and sister at a time. So be the one. Let's be the one. Family, don't stop. Let's never stop, never. Thank you so, so much for this privilege and this opportunity to serve you as your national commander. Thank you, thank you, thank You. God bless. (*Applause*)

First Lady Presentation

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Ladies and gentlemen, as a point of personal privilege, I would like to call on Mary Ludwig, wife of Past National Commander Daniel Ludwig, for a presentation by the first spouses to the new first lady of The American Legion. (*Applause*)

Thank you, Mary. I now recognize microphone number two.

DELEGATE BIGGERSTAFF (TX): Mr. Commander, Kimberly Biggerstaff, delegate from the great state of Texas. Mr. Commander, since the rules of this convention have been suspended, I move that nominations for the office of national vice commander be made from the floor of this Convention.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: There is a motion before us that nominations for the office of national vice commander be made from the floor. Do I have a second? ...*Second.*

Hearing a second, the motion is nondebatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? We will now entertain nominations for the offices of national vice commander from the floor. I now recognize microphone number one.

Election of National Vice Commanders

DELEGATE WEAVER (GA): Mr. Commander, Melvin Weaver, delegate from Georgia. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Randy Goodman for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Request approved.

DELEGATE GOODMAN (GA): National Commander Troiola, national officers, past national commanders, delegates, alternates, and guests to this 104th Convention, it is indeed an honor for me to be here to nominate Robert "Mark" Shreve for the high office of national vice commander of The American Legion.

Legionnaire Robert "Mark" Shreve honorably served more than 22 years in defense of our nation in the United States Army, culminating as a law enforcement operations manager. He served tours of duty in Europe, South Korea, Southeast Asia, and various units within the United States.

For the past 18 years, Mark continued to serve America through his involvement in

The American Legion. He has served Harris County Post 189 as commander, senior vice commander, finance officer, and adjutant, where 100 percent membership is constant each year. As district commander, he led the way in formalizing a strategic plan for sustained membership growth in the district posts by conducting regional training within his district and being actively engaged in the use of mylegion.org.

As a result, the 3rd District of Georgia achieved Race to the Top recognition two consecutive years, and Commander Shreve was awarded the Georgia Department Legionnaire of the Year. During his tenure as district commander, the Department of Georgia also achieved 100 percent membership and a number two ranking nationally.

Legionnaire Shreve has served the Department of Georgia as vice commander, membership chairman, and commander. He was also instrumental in establishing the framework of our current Georgia Legion College. He is currently chairman of the American Legion Department of Georgia Medical Research Foundation.

Mark has served the national organization as a member of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Council, Veterans Employment & Veteran Preference Committee, American Legion College instructor, and subject matter expert presenter at our national conventions for new district commanders.

After serving in the Army, Mark became an operations manager with AFLAC worldwide headquarters in Columbus, Georgia. AFLAC worldwide headquarters recognized Mark as Volunteer of the Year, where he was granted a \$10,000 award to a charity of his choice. Mark chose The American Legion Department of Georgia VA Hospital Special Support Project. From this support project, monetary donations helped provide comfort items and support for veterans and their families at VA facilities in Georgia and nearest out-of-state VA facilities.

Mark is a 2016 National Legion College graduate and holds a bachelor's degree from West Virginia University and an associate degree from Saint Leo University. Mark and his wife, Robyn, have two sons, Robbie and Matthew.

I, Randy Goodman, a duly registered delegate to this convention, have the honor and pleasure to place a nomination for the office of national vice commander for the year 2023-2024, Robert "Mark" Shreve, representing the great state of Georgia. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I now recognize microphone number two.

DELEGATE EHART (KS): Mr. Commander, Jeremy Ehart, delegate from Kansas. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Paul Sanford for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Request approved.

DELEGATE SANFORD (KS): Good morning. Commander Troiola, Adjutant Wheeler, delegates and guests, it is my pleasure and distinct honor to place the name of Raymond L. Vail for national vice commander of The American Legion for the year 2023-2024.

Vail joined the U.S. Army in January of 1964. He was stationed in West Germany in the 7th Army, 1st Infantry Maintenance Battalion as an infantry field radio repairman. He was awarded the Detachment Soldier of the Month and graduated from the 7th Army NCO Academy in February 1966. He completed his enlistment in November 1966 with an honorable discharge at the rank of E-5.

He joined The American Legion in 1986 and is a paid-up-for-life member of Lon M. Helm Jr. Post No. 182 in Arma, Kansas. He served on many post positions, including post commander for three years. At the district level, he served as 3rd District vice commander and district commander in 2012 and 2013.

At the department level, he was master-at-arms in 2013 and '14, department vice commander in 2014 and '15, and elected to the Kansas department commander in 2015. He was elected Alternate National Executive Committeeman in 2020 and served till now.

He has served as a member of the Department Cadet Law Academy and the Oratorical and Scholarship Committee, a member of the National Security Commission and Foreign Relations Committee.

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He served on the Arma City Council from 2013 to 2020. He retired in 2000 after working 34 years in the pet food and can manufacturing industry. In August of 2000, he started a home repair and maintenance business, running that until 2016. He is married to his wife, Linda, since December 1970. Together they have four boys, six grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. He enjoys playing golf, doing crafts, and refurbishing vintage tools.

Again, my name is Paul Sanford, a registered delegate from the Department of Kansas, and it is my distinct honor to place the nomination of my good friend Raymond L. Vail from the Department of Kansas for the high office of national vice commander. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I recognize microphone number one.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN DUNN (LA): Mr. Commander, Allen Dunn, delegation chair from Louisiana. I request that you recognize Past Department Commander Herbie Petit for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Request approved.

DELEGATE PETIT (LA): Good morning. Mr. Commander, distinguished guests, fellow delegates, I am Herbie Petit, national chairman on Committee of Children & Youth. I have the honor and privilege to place the name of Charles D. Aucoin of Westlake Post 370 from Department of Louisiana for nomination of office of national vice commander for The American Legion 2023-'24.

Charlie has been an outstanding member of The American Legion for 52 years. To serve as national vice commander, Charlie will utilize his knowledge, his experience, his confidence, and his leadership that he gained on all levels of this great organization. He has held most positions, including area commander to commander on the post, district and department levels. Charlie has served on various committees and commissions on our national level, both as a member and as chairman at various times.

Here is a short scenario. Charlie has been a dedicated National Executive Committeeman for the Department of Louisiana since 2005; NEC liaison to Children & Youth Commission; NEC liaison, Veterans Employment & Education; NEC liaison to Internal Affairs; also appointed to the Ad Hoc Committee to study Department and Posts outside the United States; NEC Subcommittee on Committees, presently serving as chairman.

Charlie has been appointed by three governors to serve on the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs. He has also served as our national sergeant-at-arms in 1994-'95 under our very own Past National Commander Bill Detweiler. You will find Charlie to have a passionate spirit. He will be a dedicated national vice commander. As an honorably discharged Navy veteran, Charlie will always hold the honor of his fellow veterans close to his heart.

In closing, I, Herbie Petit, delegate from the Department of Louisiana, place the nomination of Charles D. Aucoin for the high office of national vice commander of The American Legion 2023-'24. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I now recognize microphone number two.

DELEGATE DIONNE (NH): Mr. Commander, Bob Dionne. I'm a delegate from the Department of New Hampshire, the Live Free or Die state. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Bill Biser for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Request approved.

DELEGATE BISER (NH): Commander, past national commanders, distinguished guests, fellow Legionnaires. I'm Bill Biser from Henry J. Sweeney Post 2, Department of New Hampshire. Quite a while ago I was asked, "Can you give some remarks regarding Bill Roy's nomination for national vice commander?" And I said, "I can't do that. I know him too well." But I relented. The other day, chatting with PNC Morin about this, he said, "You know Bill pretty well?" I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "Maybe you better bend the truth a little bit and give a respectable nomination instead of what you really want to say."

Anyway, I thought, not having done this before, of a few characteristics to mention about my friend Bill Roy. As far as loyalty, Bill will engage with any veteran, Legionnaire or not, where he can provide advice or steer the individual to a source of assistance. He then goes into follow-up mode to ensure the mission gets accomplished. He's been active around our state for so long, most Legionnaires know they can phone Bill Roy when faced with any issue with which they're struggling.

As for motivation, there isn't a Legion program out there where I've seen Bill not fully tuned in, ready to organize, ready to assist, ready to lead. During this convention, I've observed Bill talking with red hats, blue hats, white hats he's known for years. I'm convinced he's pumped up and really psyched about carrying out his duties this coming year. He's going to be a tiger.

Regarding his personal energy, most days Bill is the first one at the post for his daily adjutant chores. At least once a week, he's at B.J.'s loading his truck with baked goods for delivery to elderly, enclosed people, Liberty House, which is a veterans' rehab center, and other folks in need.

When our Honor Guard needs another body to fire an M1 Garand, Bill always answers the call. He always has time for that. He attends every possible district meeting, business or social, and never misses a department function. In short, his energy seems boundless.

Next, I thought about knowledge. Be it during an official meeting or a convention break or just during a post-meeting chat at the bar, I've seen nobody with the depth and breadth of Legion current or historical events than Bill Roy has.

Perhaps the most important of the characteristics I considered is leadership. Bill is the only one, at least over my 45 years with the Legion, to twice run for and be elected department commander. There were no emergency officer or other situations to prompt this, just his affection for the Legion and the Department of New Hampshire. Talk about shouldering the burden, he's the guy.

In my view, there might be another Legionnaire in New Hampshire who would be a good national vice commander, maybe, but given Bill's vast experience and proven competencies, I can think of no one better prepared for this role. Accordingly, it is my distinct honor to place the name of Bill Roy of New Hampshire, the Live Free or Die state, into a nomination for national vice commander. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I now recognize microphone number one.

DELEGATION CHAIRMAN CASE (UT): Mr. Commander, Doug Case, chair delegate from Utah. Mr. Commander, I request that you recognize Terry Schow for the purpose of a nomination for the office of national vice commander.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Your request is approved.

DELEGATE SCHOW (UT): National Commander, distinguished guests, fellow Legionnaires, on behalf of the western caucus and Utah, home of my dear friend Bill Kristofferson, it's such an honor to nominate Randy Edwards.

Randy is a go-to guy in Utah. The Daughters of the American Revolution recognized him with their national Veterans Volunteer of the Year. That's a high honor. He's our chair for the 1919 project in Utah. He's served at the post, district, area, department and national, serving on Americanism. He was instrumental in getting a Veterans Court started in Utah County. Veterans Courts make a difference in the lives of veterans.

He's served in the United States Army, including tours with Special Forces. Served in Panama. Speaks Spanish. So, if you need him to go to Puerto Rico, he's ready. He's a retired command sergeant major, having 38 years of service in the United States Army. He's a Lutheran by religious background, so as a result, I'm sure he will help Commander Dan do the Lord's work, looking after veterans across this country.

It is my high honor to nominate Randy Edwards for the office of vice commander. Thank you. *(Applause)*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I now recognize microphone two.

DELEGATE GRAVELY (NY): Mr. Commander, Janice Gravelly, delegate from New York. Mr. Commander, I move that nominations for the office of national vice commander

be closed.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: We have a motion that nominations for the office of national vice commander be closed. Is there a second? ... *Second.*

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Hearing a second, the motion is nondebatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor, signify by saying aye. Those opposed? So, carried. The Chair recognizes microphone number one.

DELEGATE STENNIS (OH): Mr. Commander, Charles Stennis, delegate from the Buckeye State of Ohio. Mr. Commander, I move that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote five times for the entire delegate strength of this convention and that the five candidates, Robert "Mark" Shreve, Ray Vail, Charles D. Aucoin, William Roy, Randy Edwards, be elected national vice commander by acclamation.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: We have a motion that the national adjutant be authorized to cast one vote five times for the entire delegate strength of this convention and that the nominated five candidates, Robert "Mark" Shreve, Raymond L. Vail, Charles D. Aucoin, Bill Roy, and Randy D. Edwards, be elected national vice commanders by acclamation. Is there a second? ... *Second.*

Hearing a second, the motion is nondebatable and requires a two-thirds vote. All those in favor, signify by saying aye. Those opposed? So, carried. I now call on the national adjutant.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: Mr. Commander, as national adjutant of The American Legion, I cast one vote five times with each representing the entire delegate strength of this convention for Robert "Mark" Shreve, Raymond L. Vail, Charles D. Aucoin, Bill Roy, and Randy D. Edwards for the office of national vice commander of The American Legion.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I declare Robert "Mark" Shreve, Raymond L. Vail, Charles D. Aucoin, Bill Roy, and Randy D. Edwards as elected national vice commanders of The American Legion. (*Applause*)

Installation of National Vice Commanders

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Will the new national vice commanders come to the platform to be introduced and sworn in. Please give them a round of applause. (*Applause*)

At this time, I am honored to swear you into your newly elected office as a national vice commander. I know you will uphold the trust that has been placed in you by the comrades who nominated and supported you and the convention delegates that elected you. I trust you will fulfill every obligation required of you. I challenge you to familiarize yourselves with the duties of your office and carry them out with the same spirit from which The American Legion was founded. The welfare, success and integrity of this great organization depends on you as you travel in the departments and throughout this country promoting the mandates of The American Legion as approved by the National Convention and the National Executive Committee.

It is your duty to protect the good name of The American Legion with the people of our great nation that you meet as you travel. Help them to know the Legion's purposes and policies. Remember the Four Pillars that motivate us as members to serve this nation. As you serve, always remember there is no rank, for we all serve as equals. We all are aiming for the same goals, the ideals of justice, freedom, democracy and loyalty.

This means you should always employ the cardinal principles of The American Legion to all those that we serve. The rehabilitation of all disabled veterans and the care of those who are now suffering from wounds, disease and want, to include the care of their family members. The education of our children. Educating citizens on the ideals of true Americanism. Maintaining a strong national defense. In your travels representing The American Legion, always practice these four pillars in your promotion of service to the community, state, and nation.

Please raise your right hand and repeat after me: I, state your name, do solemnly pledge myself to perform faithfully and impartially the duties of the office of The American Legion I'm about to assume. And I further pledge I will uphold the principles outlined in the National Constitution and the Preamble of The American Legion in service to our veterans and their families their communities, state, and nation. I further pledge that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America and that I do not subscribe to the principles of any foreign government or group opposed to our form of government, so help me God. Congratulations. (*Applause*)

Ladies and gentlemen let's have a big round of applause for your newly elected national vice commanders. (*Applause*)

Presentation of Colors to Newly Elected National Commander

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: I now call on Past National Commander Jimmie Foster to present the colors to our incoming national commander.

PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER FOSTER: Thank you, Mr. Commander. Commander Seehafer, please join me at the lectern. Legionnaires and distinguished guests, please rise for the presentation of our national colors by the Newport Harbor Post 291 Department of California to the national commander. Color Guard. Present the colors of the new national commander of The American Legion. Hand Salute! Two!

Commander, you already heard from Past National Commander Rick Santos. They like for the past national commanders to use the script to make sure that we stay online. But you are the third person on my team to attain the level of national commander. First was Bill Oxford from North Carolina, second was James Troiola from New York, and now you're up here for number three. I think I had a great crew. That's just my personal opinion.

You stand before this convention having received a unanimous vote of confidence in your ability to represent not only Legionnaires but also all American veterans in the coming months. As a veteran, I know that you are up to the challenge. You have served The American Legion in numerous capacities over many years. You have the experience and the knowledge to lead the organization. I know, and the delegates know, that you are the right leader at the right time to carry our organization forward for the next year.

You served the country as a Navy veteran, and you served your community and your church. You truly epitomize for God and the church and the community, both as a pastor and a leader of veterans. Your election was earned through hard work and service, just like your predecessors. May the colors that we present to you be a source of inspiration and pride. National Commander Seehafer, God bless you and our American Legion as you lead us forward in the coming year. Congratulations. (*Applause*)

If you're not standing, please do. Color Guard! Return the colors of the national commander of The American Legion to their post. Ready, two! Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: This is an exciting time for any National Convention. We have elected a new national commander and look forward to our next chapter as a new leadership team is installed at the top of all segments of the American Legion Family. This is also the time when the American Legion Auxiliary elects a new president.

The woman chosen to lead the American Legion Auxiliary has worked many years for veterans and their families. She served as the organization's national vice president and is a member of American Legion Auxiliary Unit 57 in Alaska. Born in Southern California, she moved to Fairbanks at age seven. She has called The Last Frontier state home ever since. She could never be accused of being a fair-weather president. She is twice eligible for the American Legion Auxiliary through the military service of her father, Ray Allington, and her son, Kyle, who serves in the Alaska National Guard. The new president is an American Legion Rider. She is committed to fully embracing The American Legion

Be the One initiative. Please give a warm welcome to national president of the American Legion Auxiliary, Lisa Williamson. (*Applause*)

**Presentation: Newly Elected National President, American Legion Auxiliary
Lisa Williamson, Alaska**

Is it morning still? Good morning. Just barely. Good morning all. When I was asked why I do what I do, I thought it would be easy enough. Would all the veterans here please rise. All you active servicemembers, please rise. You are why I do what I do, all of you. You are why what the American Legion Auxiliary does what we do as a family, and I thank you very much for that.

Commander Troiola did mention that my platform this year will be embracing the Be the One initiative, as we all concentrate on the military and veteran suicide epidemic. I'm hoping that together the impact as a family will make us have great success.

So, I thank you, all of you, I thank you all. I've been taught one thing: Be brief, be good and be gone. Thank you. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The man chosen to lead the Sons of The American Legion is eligible through World War II service of his grandfather, Ed Hall. A youth coach for 25 years, he is passionate about making young people feel welcome in the organization. He has taught classes at Sons conventions and meetings for the last several years and organized the first ever "Youth Room" at a Sons of the American Legion National Convention in 2019. He is a member of Glen Burnie Squadron 40 in Maryland and has served at every level of the Sons. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the national commander of the Sons of The American Legion, Donald Lee Hall, Jr. (*Applause*)

**Presentation: Newly Elected National Commander, Sons of The American Legion
Donald Lee Hall, Jr., Maryland**

Good morning. Good morning, commander, commander, past commanders, delegates. My heroes are veterans. It's a great honor to be here with you to bring greetings from over 375,000 Sons of The American Legion. We just finished up our convention, and I was so honored to come in to represent my grandfather, Ed Hall's service in the Army during World War II.

You, being veterans, and my grandfather is what gave me my slogan this year, "Representing More Than Me." I'm a member of the Sons because I represent his service. All the Sons, I asked them on Sunday to look back and make sure they did soul searching for the reason that they are doing what they do. We all represent someone else's service. All The American Legion does, the Auxiliary, same as the Sons, and all of our veterans represent your families, your departments, your detachments, as well as your post and home squadron.

But the veterans are why I do what I do. Your service is appreciated. I want to say thank you, and you still matter. I thank you for your commitment to our country. I thank you for your commitment to your post and to the Legion Family. I look forward this year to serving with Commander Dan Seehafer and President Lisa Williamson.

A couple weeks ago I was with Dan, and he gave that fiery speech about the eye of the tiger. They played the song. And when he walked off the stage, I was singing it. Then I got a chance to speak, and I came up, and I said, "Did you hear the words of the song? Because listen, it starts off "Rising up, back in the streets."

Legion Family, that's what we've got to do. We've got to get out of our post, back in the streets. That's where the membership will come from. That's where we've got to tell our story on what we're about. We're not about sitting in a bar drinking a beer. We're about doing things for our veterans, our community and our children. (*Applause*)

I believe strongly in the four pillars of The American Legion. This year I've made a

commander's challenge for the blue cap members, for the squadrons, to give \$1 to OCW, CWF, Boys State in their department, and have a blood drive, and that squadron can become a Four Pillar Squadron. That's what we're supposed to be about, supporting the four pillars and the American Legion Family.

I don't want to take up too much time. I want to thank you for having me here today. I hope everybody's had a great convention. I love The American Legion. I love the American Legion Family. I love the USA. God bless the USA, God bless our military, and God bless the American Legion Family. Thank you. (*Applause*)

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Commander Hall, please remain with us for a few moments. Also, National Commander Seehafer and National President Williamson, please join us at the lectern. Ladies and gentlemen, National Commander Seehafer, National President Williamson, and Sons of The American Legion National Commander Hall, your American Legion Family leaders. (*Applause*)

Unfinished Business

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA I now call upon Parliamentarian Vincent Gaughan of Illinois for the purpose of a technical motion.

DELEGATE GAUGHAN (IL): Mr. Commander, Vincent "Jim" Troiola, as a delegate to the 104th National American Legion Convention, I make a technical motion and move that the national adjutant be instructed to review the minutes of this convention and make any necessary corrections, without changing the intent, and proceed to edit, to distribute those minutes. ...*Second*.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: It's been moved and seconded for the adjutant to be instructed to review the minutes of the convention and make any necessary technical corrections, without changing intent, and to proceed and distribute those minutes. Any discussion? Hearing none, all those in favor, signify by saying aye. Opposed? So, carried. National Adjutant, have you any announcements?

Announcements

NATIONAL ADJUTANT WHEELER: The Post-Convention NEC meeting will occur in the Charlotte Convention Center, Room 219, Sections A-D, Meeting Level, immediately following adjournment. All new national officers are to attend. Thank you.

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Please uncover as National Chaplain Antal offers the benediction.

Benediction

Daniel Mark Antal, Sr., North Dakota, National Chaplain

Let us pray. As we conclude this family reunion of the American Legion Family, we leave to carry on the message of "Be the One" as well as the myriad of other issues involving our great nation. From every post across our nation, from Caribou, Maine, to Key West, Florida, from San Diego, California, to Bellingham, Washington, from El Paso, Texas, to International Falls, every post, we stand united.

We thank You for the many folks that work at our national headquarters and in Washington, D.C. Bless our people as we leave this convention that You will provide us, O God, with safety to belong the glory. Pro Deo et Patria. Now, may the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you His peace. Amen.

Retirement of Colors

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: Sergeant-at-Arms, retire the POW/MIA flag. Thank you. Cover. The Color Guard will retire the flag of the United States. The delegates will stand and hand salute on my command. Hand salute! Ready, Two!

Adjournment

NATIONAL COMMANDER TROIOLA: The time is 12:19. I now declare this 104th Annual National Convention of The American Legion adjourned.

...At 12:19 p.m., Thursday, August 31, 2023, the 104th National Convention of The American Legion was adjourned.

**2023 OFFICIAL AWARDS
ANNOUNCEMENT OF ANNUAL RECIPIENTS**

The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal Award: Awarded annually to an individual(s) or organization for their outstanding service to the nation and to the programs of The American Legion by nomination by department action or by the National Commander.

RECIPIENT: First Liberty Institute

American Legion Baseball Graduate of The Year Award: Presented to the major league baseball player who played American Legion Baseball as a teenager and best exemplifies the principles and purposes of the program in sportsmanship, citizenship, general good conduct, integrity and playing ability.

RECIPIENT: Corey Seager, Texas Rangers

Bob Feller American Legion Pitching Award: Awarded annually to that American Legion Baseball player recording the greatest number of strikeouts during the regional tournaments and World Series of American Legion Baseball.

RECIPIENT: Colten McAnelly, Francis E. Self Post 6, Cheyene, WY (29 strikeouts)

Commissioner of Baseball Trophy: Awarded annually at the Major League World Series to that baseball team which becomes the National Champion because of playing in The American Legion World Series.

RECIPIENT: League City Post 554, TX

Dr. Irvin L. "Click" Cowger Memorial R.B.I. Award: Awarded annually to The American Legion Baseball player who is credited with the most runs batted in by the official score keepers of the respective regional tournaments and World Series of American Legion Baseball.

RECIPIENT: Damon Suriani, Brooklawn Memorial Post 72, Brooklawn, NJ (12 RBI's)

The Ford C. Frick Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department having within its jurisdiction the runner-up team in the National Finals of The American Legion Baseball program.

RECIPIENT: Lincoln Post 3, NE

Frank N. Belgrano, Jr. Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department which has rendered the most outstanding service during the year to the program of the Boy Scouts of America.

RECIPIENT: Department of Missouri

George W. Rulon Baseball Player of the Year: A Plaque is presented to recipient by appropriate official upon conclusion of The American Legion Baseball World Series. Citation is presented to recipient at a special Hall of Fame ceremony at Cooperstown, NY, the following summer.

RECIPIENT: Jacob Cyr, League City Post 554, League City, TX

The Howard P. Savage, Jr. Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department having the baseball team which becomes the Champion because of playing in The American Legion World Series.

RECIPIENT: League City Post 554, TX

Jack Williams Memorial Leadership Award: Awarded annually to the manager and coach of the national championship team, as representative of the adult leadership Jack Williams stressed during his lifetime.

RECIPIENT(s): League City Post 554, League City, TX (coaching staff – Ronnie Oliver, William Kemp, Steven Whittington, Jack Kaiser, and Kameron Harddebeck.

James F. Daniel, Jr. Memorial Sportsmanship Award: Awarded to The American Legion Baseball player participating in the World Series that represents the principle of good sportsmanship emphasized by the program.

RECIPIENT: A.J. Evasco, Lincoln Post 3, Lincoln, NE

The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Air Rifle National Championship Award: Presented annually to the national tournament champions of the individual and team categories in Sporter and Precision disciplines of The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program. (Originally named the American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Trophy)

RECIPIENT(s):	Precision Team:	Lafayette Gun Club
	Precision Individual:	Jacob Wisman
	Sporter Team:	Nation Ford
	Sporter Individual:	Charles Bratton

The American Legion Baseball “Slugger” Trophy: Plaque is presented to recipient, or designated representative, by appropriate official upon the conclusion of The American Legion Baseball World Series.

RECIPIENT: Zack Hunt (.500) and Brady Cook (.500), Fred H. Sexton, Inc. Post 1, Florence, SC

Ralph T. O’Neil Education Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department within the continental limits in the United States showing the greatest Americanism activity in use of The American Legion School Medal Awards.

RECIPIENT: Department of Tennessee

The American Legion Baseball “Big Stick” Award: Awarded annually to that American Legion Baseball player having the highest total number of bases as determined by the official score keepers of the respective regional tournaments and World Series of American Legion Baseball.

RECIPIENT: A.J. Evasco, Lincoln Post 3, Lincoln, Nebraska and Zack Hunt, Fred H. Sexton, Inc. Post 1, Florence, SC (tied with 23 total bases)

Spafford National Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department of The American Legion having within its jurisdiction the winner of the National High School Oratorical Contest.

RECIPIENT: Department of Indiana

Francis M. Redington Sportsmanship Award: Awarded annually to the athlete competing in The American Legion Junior Air Rifle National Championship who best exemplifies good sportsmanship and fair play.

RECIPIENT: Rylie Stoesser

Daniel J. O'Connor Award: Awarded annually to that Department attaining the greatest number of percentage points compiled from information contained in the Consolidated Post Reports and supporting Department narrative. (Originally named the William Randolph Hearst Trophy)

RECIPIENT: Department of Virginia

The American Legion and Scouting "Square Knot" Award: This award is designed to recognize American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion members who are actively involved in the Scouting program. This award is not meant to be a selective or limited award, but one that is available to any American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion member who completes the requirements for the award. The Award is meant to recognize dedication and work required by an American Legion, American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion member to assist in furthering the Scouting program in The American Legion.

RECIPIENT(s): Phillip Rosini (NY), Keith J. Koster (NY), C.F. Trey Jaeger, III (FR), Ruth Carvajal-Dawson (SC), Kevin R. Eidell (SC), William H. Neal (SC), Robert D. Carvajal-Dawson (SC), Peter N. Holtz (IN), Douglas G. Kirby (TN), Barton L. Heldke (MI).

The American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year Award: Each respective American Legion Department (State) selection committee will determine the Eagle Scout judge to be the best in their department. Then the Department will send that packet, along with a list of the members serving on that selection committee to The American Legion National Headquarters no later than April 1st. The American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year will receive \$10,000 scholarship, three runner-up scholarship awards will be granted in the amount of \$2,500 each. The American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year will travel to join the Youth Champion Delegates of The American Legion that is honored at the annual National Convention of the American Legion.

RECIPIENT: Jack D. Adams (WA)

The American Legion National Education Award: Awarded annually to an individual, group or organization which has conducted the best all-around promotion of the education programs of The American Legion, education programs that correspond to the goals of The American Legion or has promoted or advanced education programs at the national level.

RECIPIENT: Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program

The American Legion Canadian Friendship Award: Awarded by the National Commander with the advice and consent of the National Executive Committee at such times and places as may be consistent and appropriate. It shall be awarded to specific individuals who shall be war veterans within the accepted meaning of the term and members of authentic veterans' organization in Canada. It shall be awarded to such individuals in recognition of outstanding service in the field of veterans' affairs and in the development and perpetuation of the spirit of international good will and comradeship between the United States and Canada and between their veterans' organization and The American Legion.

RECIPIENT(s): ANAVICUS – None Awarded for 2023
INDIVIDUAL – None Awarded for 2023

Department Award for 100% Post Children & Youth Reporting: Awarded annually to those Departments which achieve 100% of Posts indicating Children & Youth activity on Consolidated Post Reports.

RECIPIENT: Montana and New Mexico

National Employer of Veterans Award Recipient(s): Awarded to an employer in recognition of outstanding achievement in the employment and retraining of veterans.

RECIPIENT(s):	Large Employer	Akima Technologies, Fort Cavazos, TX
2022	Medium Employer	Texas Veteran Security, San Antonio, TX
Winners	Small Employer	TangoAlpha3, Austin, TX

Note: The 2023 National Employer of Veterans Award Recipient(s) will not be announced until 2024 National Convention.

National Employment Service Award Recipient(s): Awarded in three categories: Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) of the Year; Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) of the Year; Employment Service (ES) Office of the Year.

RECIPIENT(s):	LVER of the Year:	Eric Brown, Dallas, TX
2022	DVOP of the Year:	Kelly Norris, Garland, TX
Winners	ES Office of the Year:	Workforce Solutions Panhandle, Amarillo, TX

Note: The 2023 National Employment Service Award Recipient(s) will not be announced until 2024 National Convention.

Enhance the Lives of Disabled Persons Award Recipient: The program is a joint project between the National Organization & the AETNA Company, to award those Posts that enhance the lives of disabled persons by providing opportunities for their participation in community activities.

RECIPIENT(s):	PRIDE Industries Western Currency Facility, Ft. Worth, TX
2022 Winner	

Note: The 2023 Enhance the Lives of Disabled Persons Award Recipient will not be announced until 2024 National Convention.

National Employer of Older Worker Award Recipient: The program provides an Employer of Older Worker Award for a company that consistently hires older workers, especially veterans and serves as an inspirational recognition of a company with a record of support and commitment to the hiring of America's older workers.

RECIPIENT(s):	Harris Health System, Bellaire, TX
2022 Winner	

Note: The 2023 National Employer of Older Worker Award Recipient will not be announced until 2024 National Convention.

Michael Guty Homeless Veterans Outreach Award Recipient: The program provides the Michael Guty Homeless Veterans Outreach Award for a department of The American Legion that demonstrates involvement in homeless veteran initiatives that show outstanding support for activity in any or all of these areas: volunteerism, prevention, supportive housing, advocacy and fundraising.

RECIPIENT(s):	Department of New Jersey – Housing Our Heroes, Trenton, NJ
2022 Winner	

Note: The 2023 Michael Guty's Homeless Veterans Outreach Award Recipient will not be announced until 2024 National Convention.

National DEPARTMENT History Contest Awards: Awarded annually at the Fall Meeting of the National Executive Committee to those contestants entered in the National Department History Contest having submitted the One-Year History *Narrative* or *Yearbook* of the Department which best meets the standards established for that particular competition.

RECIPIENT(s):	Narrative – Indiana
	Yearbook - Nebraska

National Post History Contest Awards: Awarded annually to those contestants entered in the National Post History Contest deemed by a duly authorized panel of judges to have submitted the One-Year History of the Post which best meets the standards established for the competitions.

RECIPIENT(s): Narrative – Pony Express Post 359, Saint Joseph, MO
Yearbook – Women Veterans of Southwest Missouri Post 1214, Ozark, MO

International Amity Award: Awarded by the National Commander with the advice and consent of the National Executive Committee at such times and places as may be consistent and appropriate. It shall be awarded to specific individuals who shall be war veterans within the accepted meaning of the term and members of an authentic veteran organization established in the territory of any of the nations associated as war-time allies of the United States of America. It shall be awarded to such individuals in recognition of outstanding service in the field of veterans affairs and for service and contributions made in the development of international good will and comradeship between their organization and The American Legion.

RECIPIENT(s): None Awarded for 2023

Distinguished Public Service Award: Awarded annually by the National Commander with the advice and consent of the Commander’s Advisory Committee at the time of the annual Washington Conference. It may be awarded to one or more person(s) of the United States Congress.

RECIPIENT(s): Congressman Raul Ruiz (D-CA-25)

The Arthur D. Houghton Sons of The American Legion Trophy: Awarded annually to that Detachment of Sons of The American Legion in each of five membership categories (I – 200-1,000 members; II - 1,001-3,000 members; III - 3,001-6000 members; IV – 6001-12,000 members; V – 12,001 or more), each of said Detachments attaining the greatest percentage of increase over previous year’s membership when compared with all Detachments in its category.

RECIPIENT(s):	Category I	Detachment of South Dakota
2023	Category II	Detachment of West Virginia
Winners	Category III	Detachment of Georgia
	Category IV	Detachment of Arizona
	Category V	Detachment of Michigan

General Henri Gouraud Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department in each of six categories established by the National Membership and Post Activities Committee, each of said Department having been the first in its respective category to attain or exceed its nationally assigned membership quota (effective 1986).

RECIPIENT(s):	Category I	None qualified
	Category II	None qualified
	Category III	None qualified
	Category IV	None qualified
	Category V	None qualified
	Category VI	Department of Puerto Rico

General John J. Pershing Honor Award: Awarded annually to that Department having the greatest percentage of its posts receiving the Honor Ribbon for having 100 percent or more, of the post's previous year's membership enrolled for the coming year by December 31, and having reported such achievement to National Headquarters by not later than January 31.

RECIPIENT: Department of Wisconsin

Henry D. Lindsley Trophy: Awarded annually to the Department attaining the highest percentage of membership over its preceding year's membership by March 31.

RECIPIENT: Department of Puerto Rico

The American Legion National Recruiter of the Year: Awarded annually to the individual certified with the highest number of new members recruited from among all of the departments.

RECIPIENT: Patricia E. Liddell, Department of Georgia

Jerry L. Hedrick Membership Award: Awarded annually to the Department, not included among the several state Departments or the Department of the District of Columbia, attaining the highest percentage of membership as of March 31, over its preceding year's membership.

RECIPIENT: Department of Puerto Rico

O. L. Bodenhamer Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department designated to lead the parade at the time of the ensuing National Convention.

RECIPIENT: Department of Puerto Rico

The American Legion Air Force Academy Award: Awarded annually to that cadet of the graduating class at the Air Force Academy who demonstrates the highest proficiency in all academic subjects.

RECIPIENT: Cadet James M. Landy

The American Legion Coast Guard Academy Award: Awarded annually to that cadet of the graduating class of the United States Coast Guard Academy who is considered to have personally excelled in athletics.

RECIPIENT: Ensign Michelle Kwafo

The American Legion Merchant Marine Academy Award: Awarded annually to that graduating midshipman of the Merchant Marine Academy, enrolled in the Pre-Commissioning Seminar Course, and selected by the Academy Faculty, as achieving the highest grade pertaining to a 1,000-word composition dealing with the subject of National Security.

RECIPIENT: Midshipman Morgan Fortin

The American Legion Military Academy Award: Awarded annually to cadet of the graduating class at the United States Military Academy with the highest standing in Chemistry.

RECIPIENT: Cadet Malina Hatton

The American Legion Naval Academy Award: Awarded annually to that graduating midshipman of the United States Naval Academy who stands highest in those English, History and Government courses taken to complete a Foreign Affairs major.

RECIPIENT: Midshipman Dylan Carter

National Commander's Blood Donor Awards: Presented to departments in different sized categories for participating in The American Legion's Blood Donor Program.

RECIPIENT(s):	Category I	<u>Departments with 85,000 or more members:</u>
	Post Participation:	Department of Pennsylvania
	Individual Participation:	Department of Pennsylvania
RECIPIENT(s):	Category II	<u>Departments with 65,000 to 84,999 members:</u>
	Post Participation:	Department of New York
	Individual Participation:	Department of New York
	Category III	<u>Departments with 40,000 to 64,999 members:</u>
	Post Participation:	Department of Minnesota
	Individual Participation:	Department of Minnesota
	Category IV	<u>Departments with 25,000 to 39,999 members:</u>
	Post Participation:	Department of Virginia
	Individual Participation:	Department of Virginia
	Category V	<u>Departments with 10,000 to 24,999 members:</u>
	Post Participation:	Department of Alabama
	Individual Participation:	Department of Maine
	Category VI	<u>Departments with less than 10,000 members:</u>
	Post Participation:	Department of Vermont
	Individual Participation:	Department of Vermont

The American Legion National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award: To recognize an outstanding law enforcement officer as selected from Department law enforcement officer winners for distinguished on-and off-duty service. The accomplishments for which the award is presented shall have been in accordance with, or in furtherance of, established American Legion policies or programs and it shall have contributed to the preservation of law and order as well as the American way of life.

RECIPIENT: Patrol Officer Audrey Arbuckle, Crete, NE

The American Legion National Firefighter of the Year Award: To recognize an outstanding firefighter as selected from Department for distinguished on-and off-duty service. The accomplishments for which the award is presented shall have been in accordance with, or in furtherance of, established American Legion policies or programs and it shall have contributed to the preservation of law and order as well as the American way of life.

RECIPIENT: Firefighter John DeBisschop, III, Naugatuck, CT

Paul H. Griffith ROTC Trophy: Awarded annually to that Department giving the highest degree of support to the ROTC program within its jurisdiction, based on criteria drawn up by the National Security Commission.

RECIPIENT(s): Top 3 Departments:
 Department of Georgia
 Department of Florida
 Department of South Carolina

The American Legion Fourth Estate Award: Awarded to press, radio, TV, or other communications media; to associations of same, to owners, executive heads or staff members; such award to be in recognition of outstanding service to community, state, or nation, which service shall have been in accordance with or the furtherance of established American Legion policies and programs.

RECIPIENT(s): Broadcast: ABC Action News (WFTS-TV) I-Team, Tampa,
 Florida/Adam Walser
 Print: *Military Times*/Leo Shane

The American Legion Patriot Award: Awarded to an outstanding citizen who has demonstrated a profound and exceptional commitment to military personnel and their families.

RECIPIENT(s): Hon. Timothy K. Moore, Johnnie E. Webb, Jr., Chip Ganassi
 Racing

The American Legion Spirit of Service Award: Awarded annually by the Department of Defense and the six military departments that have identified the most outstanding men and women that have received press coverage in Armed Service News dispatches, the Pentagon Channel, their military base newspapers and their hometown publications.

RECIPIENT(s):

Army:	Sgt. Christopher Irvine
Navy:	Hospital Corpsman 2 nd Class Justin D. Santoyo
Marine Corps:	Sgt. Nhatalyne Bordes
Coast Guard:	Petty Officer 3 rd Class Ryan Knick
Air Force:	Staff Sgt. Joseph M. Allen
Space Force:	Spc. 3 Tyler J. Baker
Air National Guard:	Staff Sgt. Dhruva S. Poluru

Arch M. Cantrall Trophy: Awarded annually to that American Legion Band winning first prize in competition with all other American Legion bands during the annual National Convention of The American Legion.

RECIPIENT: Joliet American Legion Band, Joliet, IL

Glen R. Hillis Trophy: Awarded annually to that Color Guard winning first prize in competition with all other Color Guards during the annual National Convention of The American Legion.

RECIPIENT: Newport Harbor Post 291, Newport Beach CA

The Lemuel Bolles Trophy: Awarded annually to that band winning first prize in competition with all other bands during the annual National Convention.

RECIPIENT: Joliet American Legion Band, Joliet, IL

William F. Lenker National Service Trophy: Awarded annually to that State Department of The American Legion excelling in welfare work for war veterans, providing the membership of that Department shall be no less than 80% of the membership of the preceding year.

RECIPIENT: Department of Florida

Department of Veterans Affairs Health-Care Provider of the Year Award: To be awarded annually at the Washington Conference to one outstanding non-physician direct patient care provider in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), nominated and selected under such conditions as the Internal Affairs Commission should from time to time select as necessary and consistent with the effective administration of such an award.

RECIPIENT: Gobind Tarchand

Department of Veterans Affairs Physician of the Year Award: To be awarded annually at the Washington Conference to one outstanding physician in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), nominated and selected under such conditions as the Internal Affairs Commission should from time to time select as necessary and consistent with the effective administration of such an award.

RECIPIENT: Dr. Patricia Dickmann

The American Legion 104th Annual Report

FOREWORD

The American Legion continued to have a strong year under the leadership of National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola, New York. Membership was strong with nearly 2 million veterans in more than 12,000 posts throughout the nation and overseas. We recorded another year of rewarding service to America, her veterans, and their families.

The American Legion National Headquarters is located in Indianapolis, Indiana. In addition to the Indianapolis facilities, offices are maintained in Washington, D.C., to house those organizational functions requiring a close working relationship with the Congress and the appropriate agencies of the federal government. The editorial and advertising staffs of *The American Legion Magazine* are located at The American Legion's Indianapolis Headquarters.

The national commander's report is published herein as a part of the National Convention proceedings. Reports of the other national officers, the national commissions, financial statement with accompanying data, and a report of the national president of the American Legion Auxiliary are included.

Throughout the year, the two organizations continued to provide vital leadership to the nation and, through our activities and programs, contributed significantly to the preservation of the American way of life. We are proud of our accomplishments and look forward to the challenges ahead in the coming year.

Daniel S. Wheeler
National Adjutant

EXCERPTS FROM CONSTITUTION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

ARTICLE II

Nature

Section 1. The American Legion is a civilian organization; membership therein does not affect nor increase liability for military or police service. Rank does not exist in The American Legion; no members shall be addressed by their military or naval title in any convention or meeting of The American Legion.

Section 2. The American Legion shall be absolutely nonpolitical and shall not be used for the dissemination of partisan principles nor for the promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public office or preferment.

ARTICLE III

Organization

Section 1. The American Legion shall be organized in Departments with a minimum of one thousand members and these in turn in Posts. There may be one Department in each state, the District of Columbia, and in each territory and insular possessions of the United States. The National Executive Committee may establish Posts in the territorial and insular possessions of the United States and foreign countries, and shall designate the Department under whose jurisdiction they shall function, but this shall in no way affect the status of Departments already established.

ARTICLE IV

Eligibility

Section 1. An individual is eligible for membership in The American Legion only if the individual -

(1) has served in the Armed Forces of

(A) the United States at any time during -

(i) the period of April 6, 1917, through November 11, 1918; or

(ii) any time after December 7, 1941; or

(B) a government associated with the United States Government during a period or time referred to in subsection (A) of this section and was a citizen of the United States when the individual entered that service; and

(2) was honorably discharged or separated from that service or continues to serve honorably during or after that period or time; provided, however, that such service shall have been terminated by honorable discharge or honorable separation, or continued honorably during or after any of said periods; provided, further, that no person shall be entitled to membership who, being in such service during any of said periods, refused on conscientious, political or other grounds to subject themselves to military discipline or unqualified service.

Section 2. There shall be no form or class of membership except an active membership, and dues shall be paid annually, for multiple years, or for life.

Section 3. No person may be a member at any one time of more than one Post.

Section 4. No person, who has been expelled from The American Legion by a Post, and such expulsion reported by the Department to the National Headquarters within thirty (30) days, shall be admitted to membership in another Post without the consent of the expelling Post, except that where such consent has been asked for and denied by such Post, such person may then appeal to the Executive Committee of the Department of the expelling Post for permission to be admitted to membership in another Post, and shall be ineligible for membership until such permission is granted.

ARTICLE V

National Convention

Section 1. The legislative body of The American Legion shall be the National Convention, except as otherwise provided in the Constitution and By-Laws.

Section 2. The time and place of the National Conventions shall be determined by the National Executive Committee, which shall have authority to change such time and place for sufficient reasons to it appearing.

Section 3. In the National Convention each Department shall be entitled to five delegates and one additional delegate for each one thousand members, or major fraction thereof, whose current dues have been received by the National Treasurer 30 days prior to the meeting of said convention, and whose registration fees, as fixed by the National Executive Committee, for its total authorized delegate strength, have been paid; and to one alternate for each delegate. The delegates shall be chosen not less than two weeks before the National Convention at Department Conventions or in any other manner specified by any Department Constitution.

Section 4. Each duly registered delegate shall be entitled to one vote. The vote of any registered delegate absent and not represented by an alternate shall be cast by the majority of the registered delegates present from one's Department. Alternates for registered delegates shall have all the privileges of registered delegates, except that of voting. A registered delegate is a person who has received one's credentials after one's registration fee has been paid.

Section 5. A quorum shall exist at a National Convention when sixty percent of the Departments are represented as provided above.

Section 6. The National Executive Committee shall provide a Uniform Code of Procedure for the orderly organization and operation of National Conventions with

continuing power of revision, and said Code shall be applicable at all National Conventions unless it is amended, suspended, or repealed by a majority vote of the total authorized representation at a National Convention.

ARTICLE VI

National Officers

Section 1. The National Convention shall elect a National Commander, and five National Vice Commanders, who shall serve without seniority. No two Vice Commanders shall be chosen from the same Department. No persons shall be eligible for re-election to the office of National Commander or National Vice Commander.

Section 2. Such officers shall serve until the adjournment of the succeeding National Convention following their election and thereafter until their successors are chosen. Vacancies in these offices occurring between National Conventions shall be filled by election by the National Executive Committee, and any member of The American Legion, in good standing, shall be eligible for election to such vacancy; however, no Past National Commander, or Past National Vice Commander shall be elected to fill any vacancy in these respective offices.

Section 3. The National Executive Committee at its first meeting following the National Convention shall appoint the National Adjutant, National Treasurer, National Judge Advocate, National Chaplain, and National Historian, such officers to hold office at the pleasure of the appointing power. All persons having the custody of funds shall give adequate bonds, which shall be approved by the National Executive Committee.

Section 4. All Past National Commanders, while in good standing in their respective Posts, shall be members for life of the National Executive Committee, without vote, and shall also be life delegates to all National Conventions of The American Legion, with vote, to be exercised by them with their respective Departments.

ARTICLE VII

National Executive Committee

Section 1. Between National Conventions, the administrative power of The American Legion shall be vested in the National Executive Committee, which shall be composed of the National Commander, the National Vice Commanders, and one National Executive Committee Member and one alternate from each Department to be elected as such Department shall determine, the alternate to act only in the absence of the National Executive Committee Member.

Section 2. The term of office of such National Executive Committee Member and alternates shall be two years. The term of office of each National Executive Committee Member and alternate shall commence immediately upon the adjournment of the National Convention next ensuing after their election and shall end at the adjournment of the second next succeeding annual National Convention.

Section 3. Members of the National Executive Committee shall be delegates to the National Convention with vote, which vote shall be exercised with their respective Departments, except that the vote of the National Commander shall be exercised only in their capacity as chair of the National Convention.

Past National Commanders

John P. Comer, Massachusetts
Miles S. Epling, West Virginia
Robert S. Turner, Georgia
Bruce Thiesen, California
Daniel A. Ludwig, Minnesota
Joseph J. Frank, Missouri
Anthony G. Jordan, Maine

Butch L. Miller, Virginia
Hon. Alan G. Lance, Sr., Idaho
Richard J. Santos, Maryland
Ronald F. Conley, Pennsylvania
Hon. John A. Brieden, III, Texas
Thomas L. Bock, Colorado
Paul A. Morin, Massachusetts

Martin F. Conatser, Illinois
 Robert W. Spanogle, Michigan
 David K. Rehbein, Iowa
 Clarence E. Hill, Florida
 Jimmie L. Foster, Alaska
 Fang A. Wong, New York
 James E. Koutz, Indiana
 Daniel M. Dellinger, Virginia

Michael D. Helm, Kansas
 Harold D. Barnett, Georgia
 Charles E. Schmidt, Oregon
 Denise H. Rohan, Wisconsin
 Brett P. Reistad, Virginia
 James W. Oxford, North Carolina
 Paul E. Dillard, Texas

National Executive Committee Members

Hardwick O. Hall, Sr., Alabama
 James E. Pisa, Alaska
 Steve W. Aquirre, Sr., Arizona
 Mary V. Erdman, Arkansas
 Robert C. Heinisch, California
 D. Joseph Jackson, Connecticut
 Jeffrey K. Crouser, Delaware
 Carlton T. Durham, D.C.
 Jim V. Ramos, Florida
 James M. Settle, France
 Phil Youngblood, Georgia
 Francis E. Riddell, Jr., Hawaii
 Robert L. Skinner, Idaho
 Willard W. Erickson, Sr., Illinois
 Edward J. Trice, Indiana
 Dennis J. Soppe, Iowa
 Dan K. Wiley, Kansas
 William O. Moore, Jr., Kentucky
 Charles D. Aucoin, Louisiana
 Lloyd H. Woods, Maine
 David J. Johnson, Maryland
 Michael P. Davis, Massachusetts
 Michael D. Wood, Mexico
 Jerry D. Lynch, Michigan
 William C. Barbknecht, Minnesota
 Steve Sweet, Mississippi
 George E. Scarborough, Missouri

Peter H. Rice, Montana
 Frederick C. Craigie, Nebraska
 Jeanette R. Evans, Nevada
 Kenneth B. Maynard, Jr., New Hampshire
 Berley Hanna, Jr., New Jersey
 Edward Cheatham, Jr., New Mexico
 W. Michael Bowen, New York
 David S. Shore, North Carolina
 Dean Overby, North Dakota
 Stephen M. Masowick, Ohio
 Timothy W. Smith, Oklahoma
 Kevin John Owens, Oregon
 E. Michael Stelacio, Pennsylvania
 Michael S. Napsey, Philippines
 Ramon L. Rivera, Puerto Rico
 Ronald P. Lvasseur, Rhode Island
 Joe A. Lysaght, South Carolina
 Dennis O. Brenden, South Dakota
 Robert W. Hensley, Tennessee
 Kenneth W. Mueller, Texas
 Terry D. Schow, Utah
 Ronald L. Larose, Vermont
 Linden B. Dixon, Jr., Virginia
 William W. Kile, West Virginia
 Robert L. Shappel, Wisconsin
 Keith R. Davidson, Wyoming

Alternate National Executive Committee Members

Ronald F. Bradstreet, Alabama
 Michael E. Downs, Alaska
 Andres Jaime, Jr., Arizona
 C. Jacob Greeling, Arkansas
 Larry Leonardo, Sr., California
 Robert S. Murray, Connecticut
 Michael A. Havel, Delaware
 Christopher V. Herndon, D.C.
 Jerry J. Brandt, Florida
 Hans J. Stockenberger, France
 Randy Goodman, Georgia
 David R. Carlson, Hawaii
 Eugene D. Brown, Idaho

Roy Weber, Illinois
 Kenneth R. Cooper, Indiana
 Kenneth R. Rochholz, Iowa
 Raymond L. Vail, Kansas
 Michael W. Moses, Sr., Kentucky
 Rudolph A. Bourg, Sr., Louisiana
 Matthew D. Jabaut, Maine
 Melvin G. Smullen, Maryland
 Jodie L. Pajak, Massachusetts
 Jerry A. King, Mexico
 Larry C. Mooney, Michigan
 Peggy Moon, Minnesota
 Murry Q. Toney, Jr., Mississippi

Kerry L Boardman, Missouri
 Larry G. Dobb, Montana
 James A. Costello, Nebraska
 L. James Stewart, Nevada
 Robert E. Dionne, Sr., New Hampshire
 Eugene J. O'Grady, New Jersey
 David T. Stevens, New Mexico
 Timothy S. Van Patten, New York
 Jerry L. McClough, North Carolina
 Roger C. Sateren, North Dakota
 Ronald L. Chapman, Ohio
 John L. Bloxom, Oklahoma
 Eugene G. Hellickson, Oregon

Michael D. Murphy, Pennsylvania
 Carl A. Nord, Philippines
 Antonio Arroyo, Puerto Rico
 James H. Holland, South Carolina
 Frederick N. Nelson, South Dakota
 Nancy B. Harper, Tennessee
 John C. Hince, Texas
 Richard G. Fisher, Utah
 David Woodward, Vermont
 Leslie J. Clevinger, Virginia
 Frank L. Cooley, West Virginia
 Frank J. Kostka, Wisconsin
 Mike Cooke, Wyoming

**EXCERPTS FROM BY-LAWS OF THE
 AMERICAN LEGION**

ARTICLE I

**National Executive Committee
 Commission, Committee, and Employees**

Section 6. There shall be the following standing commissions: Americanism Commission, Convention Commission, Finance Commission, Internal Affairs Commission, Legislative Commission, Marketing Commission, Media & Communications Commission, National Security Commission, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission and Veterans Employment & Education Commission.

The commissions shall consist of such number of members of The American Legion as the National Executive Committee may from time to time determine. Appointments to such commissions shall be made by the National Executive Committee upon nomination by the National Commander. The National Executive Committee is empowered to assign duties and responsibilities to all standing commissions and committees and to group standing committees with commissions for the purpose of efficient supervision and coordination of activities.

Section 7. The National Executive Committee shall provide for the appointment and employment of such subordinate officers and employees as may be needed for the administration of the affairs of The American Legion, and prescribe their duties and emoluments.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER

Kenneth W. Hylton, Indiana

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve The American Legion in the capacity of National Vice Commander for the Central Region, following my election at the 2022 National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I was blessed and fortunate to have the seven departments that were assigned to me, and the members of The American Legion family treated us with great respect and consideration. I noticed after each visit, my family had continued to grow in size, making friends for a lifetime.

During the visits, I was helping spread the word of a very concerning campaign, the "Be The One" campaign, which addresses the issue of veteran suicide. It was very encouraging to see that all departments have been getting the word out to their communities and other organizations. We are seeing other community organizations joining in as well, to help find ways to beat the stigma of asking for help for those veterans at risk of ending their life. The American Legion is definitely on the right track in addressing this pressing issue. Continuing the campaign in the coming years is a wise decision of our organization.

During my travels to each department, I paid particular attention to their Veterans Service Office activities, looking for ways to better serve our veterans and their families. I found that not all states are created equal when it comes to serving those who have served in the military. Many of our states have county service officers in every county but unfortunately, there are states that do not have a system of County Veterans Service Officers.

Those counties without service officers are missing out on benefits coming from the federal government. In short, if the veteran is receiving a monthly check, that veteran will be spending his or her money in the county. The veterans also suffer because they need to travel to neighboring counties in order to file their claims, particularly in the rural areas.

Moreover, United States Department of Veterans Affairs forms can be a great challenge to many veterans and their families. Filing claims can be very complex, so complex that some veterans simply throw up their hands, give up and do without.

I can personally say, where I am located in Indiana, our office has several veterans from neighboring states coming to our office to file claims. We turn no one down because of their location. However, the county where they reside gets the credit for those veterans, not the county where the service is actually provided.

I also notice some are still filing claims by hand and using the US Postal Service instead of filing by electronic means. Recently, The American Legion offered help in educating county service offices right in their offices, through the services of the Rockville, Maryland law firm of Berman and Moore.

I am grateful I took the time to further educate myself on how to serve our veterans better. Somehow, we need to find a way to educate those state governments without county VSOs on the benefit to them, as well as on ways they can meet the need. Veterans would stand up and take notice of what The American Legion is doing for them. Also, the more we are able to educate our post service officers at the Department level, the better we are able to gain younger veterans into our organization.

During my travels, I also had the opportunity and pleasure of attending West Virginia's Mountaineer Boys State and Ohio's Buckeye Boys State. Both were well attended, but their attendance was down from previous years. It was reported that the recent pandemic period seemed to have caused some concerns of parents sending their children into a crowded environment.

Both Departments are working on an approach to promote awareness of the programs to get their numbers back up at reasonable level. What amazed me was the number of dedicated volunteers both departments had to help in mentoring the young men in preparing for their graduation from a week to shape a lifetime.

I was grateful for the opportunity to be assigned to attend graduation ceremonies for the Coast Guard Academy in Connecticut. It was an honor to present The American Legion outstanding cadet award to Ensign Michelle Kwafo from Ewing, New Jersey.

Commander Troilola was unable to attend The American Legion National Oratorical Contest due to his commitments. It was a great experience for me to observe at that level. What was even more exciting was watching the three finalists compete. Haley Bock from Indiana was tough to beat with her preparations. We are looking forward to next year's competition, which will be held in Hillsdale, Michigan at Hillsdale College.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER

Patricia A. Harris, South Carolina

I have proudly represented the Southeast Region of The American Legion, consisting of 13 Departments, including Puerto Rico. The Department Commanders and their support staff have shown remarkable resilience through leadership. Department Adjutants, Membership Chairs, and National Executive Committeemen on the National Vice Commander Harris's detail were exceptional. Unfortunately, all of my servicing Departments were impacted by natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, fires,

flooding, and earthquakes. Additionally, Legionnaires faced domestic tragedies, including shootings and civil/political unrest due to divisions and differences in popular opinion. The Southeast Region hosts essential U.S. military installations with elements ready for rapid deployment. On-the-spot meetings with Commanding Generals and Base Commanders highlighted the growing significance of The American Legion for our country.

Our Theme is "Be the One."

During my travels across different states, I consistently shared our mission of being the support system for struggling veterans. Whether they have experienced combat, sexual violence, or any other traumatic event, it is crucial for them to understand that seeking help is acceptable. The stigma surrounding mental health in the military has hindered many from seeking assistance. By promoting the "Buddy System," a familiar practice to most veterans, we aim to eliminate the shame and fear associated with seeking lasting support. We emphasize the importance of never leaving our fellow veterans behind or alone.

The Four Pillars-Our Impact in the Southeast Region-- National Security

During our "Be the One" Campaign, our efforts resonated with active-duty military personnel, particularly military leaders from Ft. Johnson, JRTC (Ft. Polk), Mississippi, and North Carolina. They expressed concerns about quality-of-life issues, military housing problems, childcare shortages, social justice, and defense funding for family support programs. Although there was some reluctance to discuss drug abuse, suicide rates, military sexual abuse, and domestic violence, I was assured that prevention and support services were in place. A highlight of our national campaign was being invited to address a forum at Ft. Bragg, NC (now Ft. Liberty, NC), where we discussed overcoming challenges in the military and the importance of visibility in the veteran community. We also had the opportunity to attend a Basic Training Graduation at Ft. Jackson, SC, where we connected with Cadre members and received a tour from Senior Leadership. Throughout our tours in Mississippi and Louisiana, we emphasized the significance of building strong relationships with our active-duty military, aligning with the principles outlined in the 21st Century Report. We advocated for their well-being, highlighted the importance of NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act) funding, and prioritized military quality of life, esprit de corps, and readiness.

Veterans and Rehabilitation

To highlight a long wait for justice, 55 years later, in Birmingham, Alabama, a VA Director discovered that a Vietnam Veteran seeking treatment had not received his Purple Heart, among other medals. The U.S. Marine Veteran is also a very active Legionnaire with the American Legion Riders. His mother held on to her Western Union Letter, which told of his critical wounds and guarded condition. I had the honor to present and finally pin his earned medals on him while three TV stations and a full house of spectators were present.

During the natural disasters, the Departments in the South experienced the wrath of hurricanes. The American Legion played a crucial role in disaster relief efforts following hurricanes and tornadoes in the South and Puerto Rico. Post homes served as community centers, and Legion materials were translated into Spanish to aid in membership efforts. I was graced to do a call-in on a radio show with the Department Commander and Adjutant of Puerto Rico. The 13th District (Southwest) Ft. Myers (Naples) area was devastated by significant damage. National Emergency Fund (NEF) claims were written to help affected eligible Legion family members and Posts.

This report highlights engagements with on-air radio shows, visits to areas affected by natural disasters, and in-person participation in events honoring veterans, including visits to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the White House, state capitols, VA medical centers, and military retirement homes.

I addressed the Student Veterans of America during their national convention (NatCon). Those futurist veterans are ready to share skills to better our organization. If

allowed to. During my engagement with many SVA members who are also American Legion members, I learned that we, as leaders, must do a better job at developing committed Legionnaires, not just members, but Legionnaires.

Children and Youth and Americanism

This report acknowledges the American Legion's programs that recognize youth achievements, such as oratorical contests, Eagle Scouts, Boys State, and Boys Nation. The Legion's support helps prepare young individuals for future careers and fosters a commitment to serving others.

I had the privilege to meet a female Eagle Scout at an event highlighting the winners of the Department of GA Youth Awards. The students express their thankfulness for participation in our programs. My report highlights youth sports programs within the Legion, including American Legion Baseball, Fast Pitch for Ladies, and Junior Shooting sports. These programs focus on sportsmanship, skill development, firearm safety, and responsible gun ownership.

The American Legion Baseball and World Series allow our boys to show their sportsmanship and skill, sometimes following them into the Major League. This year, I met Corey Seager of the Texas Rangers. He was presented with an award (2023 American Legion Baseball Graduate of the Year) that reflected his time as an athlete with American Legion Baseball and leadership.

From Historical Perspectives:

My report recounts experiences related to historical events and key locations. These include a visit to Abraham Lincoln's tomb as part of a national pilgrimage and a memorable crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, a symbol of the Civil Rights movement.

From Civil War to Civil Rights: Why this was Historical for me, The Pilgrimage to Lincoln-

Nothing could have prepared me for the experience of visiting a department outside of my region, like that of the Department of Illinois. I took part in the national Pilgrimage of the American Legion and its Auxiliary Organizations to the Tomb of Abraham Lincoln. While I have always been an enthusiast of Abraham Lincoln, the knowledge gained through the experience of literature, the museum, his Presidential Library, and speaking at Lincoln's Tomb played a big part in my historical journey. I am no doubt Southern. This journey took me from the Civil War to Civil Rights. I want to thank the Department of Illinois Legion Family for the beautiful experience and hospitality.

Crossing the Pettus Bridge-

Visiting our Southern Departments was a careful reminder of genuine Southern hospitality and a gentle reminder of its history in real-time. The War Museum and Tribal History of Oklahoma City displays the brave men who fought for our country. The engagements with veterans from various wars, including World War II and the Korean War, highlighted the struggle for civil rights and the significance of minority voices within the American Legion. I met a World War II centurion and a Korean War veteran who were "foot Soldiers" during the Civil Rights march and the Voting Rights march of 1965. They noted that while they almost fought for their country, among other minorities, they could not vote for a U.S. President, but their numbers count for the election of our National Commanders. This was the experience of my own father. We crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge as other National Commanders of the American Legion. The mayor presented me with the Key to the City of Selma; the night before, a County Commissioner presented me with a Key to Dallas County, Alabama.

I appreciated all the American Legion Riders that I rode with in Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and North Carolina. I participated in Legacy Runs, Mission 22/"Be the One" Rides

in Florida, as there were well over 250 motorcycles. I traveled with my own department Commander in North Carolina during our Legacy Run. This year, the Annual Legacy Run raised over one million dollars towards education for children of our fallen veterans. My speeches at the Posts were on the "BE The One" Campaign and VETS. I also spoke of Unity from the Four Chaplains and stressed that our Preamble is not just recited words but a blueprint of being a committed Legionnaire.

This report provides insights into the important work the American Legion does in supporting veterans and rehabilitation efforts. It emphasizes the need for commitment within the Legion, highlights the achievements of youth involved in Legion programs, and reflects on historical experiences that inspire continued dedication to the organization's mission.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER **Glenn L. Wahus, North Dakota**

Attended Fall Meetings in Indianapolis, Indiana on October 12-13, 2022

Drove to Newton, Kansas for Department of Kansas Membership Tour on October 23-27, 2022 – Toured 11 Posts in 3 days and 1 evening, those being Newton Post 2, Winfield Post 10, Independence Post 139, Fort Scott Post 25, Paola Post 156, Shawnee Post 327, Overland Post 370, Mound City Post 248, Chanute Post 170 and Halstead Post 231.

I was greeted at each Post with the upmost respect where I also gave greetings from myself and our National Commander and spoke on V.E.T.S., Be The One, Buddy Checks and Membership. Traveling Party consisted of Dept. Cmdr Jeremy Ehart, ANEC Ray Vail, Area Vice Cmdr George Honn, Adj. PNC Jimmy Foster and Myself

Drove to Independence, Missouri from November 2-5, 2022 for a Meet and Greet/Dinner at Tirey J. Ford Post 21, Home Post to President Harry S. Truman and A. Whiteman Post 642. Along the way we encountered a Veteran in distress, we called 911 and waited on phone until first responders showed up, it was especially heart warm when he called back and renewed his Membership, on another call we encountered a member that was had been listed as Post Everlasting, we called back, checked all her information and renewed her membership so we can bring them back from the dead also. The travel party consisted of Dept MO. Senior Vice Cmdr Mark Clark and Myself. Senior Vice Cmdr Mark also to me to Warrenburg Veterans Home where I met a Centurion Navy Veteran, we also toured the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Whiteman Air Force Base.

Was supposed to attend Veterans Day in Washington DC to put Wreath up at the Vietnam Veterans Wall with National Auxiliary President got held up in Bismarck, ND in a snowstorm.

Flew to Des Moines, IA for Membership Tour on November 13-19, 2022, we toured VA Home Post 739, Gold Star Museum in Camp Dodge, Veterans Freedom Rock, National Cemetery, Oskaloosa Post 34, Manchester Post 45, Dyersville Post 137, Field of Dreams, Manly Post 110, Ames for breakfast with PNC Dave Rehbein and his wife Ann, after breakfast we toured Ames Post 37, Story County Supermarket of Veterans Benefits, visited Dept Office and met staff, Osceola Post 69 and Van Meter Post 403. The traveling party consisted of Dept Cmdr Randy Johnson, NEC Dennis Soppe, ANEC Ken Rochholz, Membership Brian Ring Sr. and Myself.

Drove to Norfolk, Nebraska for Department of Nebraska Winter Conference on January 13-15, 2023 where I attended Department Executive Committee meeting, Open Ceremony, and the Oratorical Contest. In between Oratorical Judge tally and announcement of contest winner we had open questions for Dignitaries and Dept Cmdr and President, we need to change the name of this questioning to Jeopardy.

Drove to Minot, North Dakota for Department of North Dakota Winter Conference on January 27-29, 2023 where I attended a Joint opening session, Legion session, Oratorical Contest, and a Banquet.

Drove to Minnesota to attend a Sweetheart Membership Rally at Osseo-Maple Grove Post 172 on February 3-5, 2023 where our National Chaplain Mark Antal and his wife Ruth also attended, we all had lunch with Dept. Commander Jennifer Havlick, Adj. Mike Maxa, NEC Bill Barbknecht, PNC Dan Ludwig and his wife Ruth.

Flew into Des Moines, Iowa for Department of Iowa Winter Conference on February 9-12, 2023 where I attended a Department Executive committee meeting, Foundation Meeting with PNC Dave Rehbein and a Joint Opening session. The USS Iowa, SSN 797 had 3 crew members in attendance and The Dept of Iowa managed to get a temporary Charter for a Virtual Post on the Sub, something to think about.

Flew to Washington, DC for Washington Conference on February 26 to March 1, 2023 attended legislative meetings, Membership meetings, National Commanders call and Commanders report to congressional committee on Veterans affairs.

Flew to Baltimore, Maryland on May 24 to 26, 2023 to attend US Naval Academy Color Parade and make an American Legion Check Presentation to a Midshipman for scholastics.

Traveled to Washington, DC on May 27 to 30, 2023 to have Breakfast at Whitehouse and Lay a Wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Drove to Topeka, Kansas on June 2 to 4, 2023 to attend Department of Kansas Convention. Attended Department Executive meeting and American Legion session.

Drove to Oacoma, South Dakota on June 8 to 11, 2023 to attend Department of South Dakota Convention. Attended Department Executive meeting, American Legion meetings, Elections and gave the Oath of Office to new American Legion Officers.

Drove to Bismarck, North Dakota on June 23 to 25, 2023 to attend Department of North Dakota Convention. Attended Department Executive meeting, facilitated a Membership meeting, Joint American Legion meeting, election of Officers and gave Oath of Office to new Department Commander.

Drove to Springfield, Missouri on June 13 to 16, 2023 to attend Department of Missouri Convention. Attended Department Executive meeting and American Legion session.

At all times I carried the Commanders greetings. and his message of V.E.T.S., Be The One, Buddy Checks and Membership.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER Paul M. Kennedy, Pennsylvania

Some of the highlights from my visits to my 13 Departments in the great Northeast Region include going to DC to be with the Taiwanese Ambassador for their 112th National Day along with our great Washington D.C. staff. I also Participated in the Veteran's Day Ceremony along with Representatives from the VFW and the active military from the State of New Hampshire.

In New Hampshire, I took part in the best Legion.org class I've ever been in. It was truly a credit to the Department of New Hampshire. I also visited four Legion Posts.

In Connecticut, I was introduced to the Legion QR Code. The Department uses this to recruit new membership and did an excellent job. Through their help several Departments are now using their own QR Code. I also took part in a Native American Ritual honoring their past and present military members.

In Rhode Island, I was the keynote speaker at the Department Testimonial. I also went to a small Post where my wife and I talked with the Commander and his wife. This is a very small Post but every Holiday they open their doors and feed anyone that needs something to eat. What a great way to show the community who they are.

In Maryland, I participated in a membership promotion and a Buddy Check where we spent hours making phone calls in which they reached our veterans.

In Maine, I was part of their mid-winter conference where Be-The-One and membership took center stage. I also met with Legion family on what their programs were and visited several Posts.

In Vermont, at the mid-winter conference I learned about all of the outstanding work they were doing for Be-The-One and Homeless Vets.

In Massachusetts, I attended the Department Testimonial as well as the Department Convention. Past National Commander Comer read and expanded on a bio about a gentleman that gave a report on Be-The-One, and we received a great deal of success from that gentleman's report.

In New Jersey, I sat in on a five-hour class where they did Buddy Checks for all five hours. They brought back close to 300 members by doing Buddy Checks. I also participated in their 104th birthday celebration where I was given an award for contributions to the welfare of all veterans (given by NJ-Tag).

For France, I took part in the December meeting via zoom.

In Pennsylvania, I took part in a great membership drive where over 50 new members were signed up. I also took part in the December meeting where Past National Commander Ron Conley who has spent long years dedicated to our homeless veterans and Be-The-One.

In New York, I was honored along with a NY District Office in presenting an award to a Merchant Marine Academy graduate on behalf of our American Legion. I was also present at their Department Convention where several awards were given out for membership and Be-The-One.

In Delaware, I sat in on a three-and-a-half-hour Buddy Check. I had the honor of visiting five Posts and took part in the opening of a new Post as well as awarding them their Charter.

I saved this for the end, the best thing that I had the honor of doing is something that I never thought I would be able to do, on Memorial Day, I got to lay a wreath on the Vietnam War Wall. I spent 40 years in the military and many of my fellow veterans' names are on the Wall. This is something I never expected, and I appreciate the honor and opportunity to represent the largest and greatest veteran organization in the world, the American Legion, for allowing me to lay our wreath at the Wall. I thank you and the staff in D.C.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL VICE COMMANDER Douglas R. Uhrig, Wyoming

The departments of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Mexico, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Philippines, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming, consisting of some 220,000+ legionnaires, make up the Western Region of The American Legion. As the National Vice Commander, (NVC), for this region, I traveled extensively in 11 of them, and attended monthly zoom meetings with the leadership of the Western Region. On visits I stress the programs and issues that National Commander Troiola is championing; BE THE ONE, buddy checks, youth programs, legislative priorities, community involvement, legion.org, Consolidated Post Reports, and of course membership. My NVC travels started the day after I was elected. While attending the Commander's Reception at Lake Michigan, I was informed that the next day I would be

flying to Portland not heading home to Rock Springs, Wyoming. Travel dates and locations are listed below.

September 2, 2022, flew to Oregon for the Portland Grand Prix and worked the membership booth with the departments of Oregon and Washington.

September 3rd -5, Toured the US Coast Guard Cape Disappointment National Motor Lifeboat School, and visited seven posts in southwest Washington.

October 9th -13, Attended Fall Meetings and NEC in Indianapolis.

November 3rd -6, Wyoming District 4 revitalization, visiting posts in Powell, Cody and Worland.

November 12th, Casper, WY to speak at the dedication of the Memorial to Wyoming's Fallen.

January 13th - 15, Anaheim, CA to participate in their Mid-Winter Conference and was able to visit posts in Orange and Newport Beach before returning home.

January 28th -31, I left Rock Springs in the middle of a blizzard, driving 10.5 hours to Denver for their Mid-Winter Conference, then traveled I-25 South with Membership Chairman, Chip Kossow, Auxiliary President, Bettina Kossow, and NEC Tom, making visitations at posts in Castle Rock, Fountain, Florence, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Walsenberg, and Trinidad.

February 1st - 5, Entered New Mexico, stopping at posts in Santa Fe, Los Alamos, and Rio Rancho, on my way to Albuquerque for their Mid-Winter Conference, visited posts 69, 99,13,95, 72, and the department HQ in Albuquerque, along with Belen Post 81. On the way home visited Meeker, CO, Post74.

February 26th - March 2nd, Washington DC Conference.

March 9th - I drove to Vernal, UT, for a post meeting.

March 12th - 16, Tillamook, OR for a highly successful post revitalization.

March 23rd – 27, Phoenix AZ, to participate in their Mojave Desert Run. The four day "Leading the Legion Forward" drive included stops at posts in Tonopah, Buckeye, Quartzsite, Parker, and ending at a huge car show sponsored by the Lake Havasu American Legion.

April 15th – Grand Junction, CO for District Meeting.

April 16th - District 1 meeting in Kemmerer, WY.

April 26th - May 1st, Arizona for their "Northern Run", starting at department HQ in Phoenix, we made stops at legion posts in Wickenburg, Williams, Prescott, Flagstaff, Grand Canyon, Cottonwood, Camp Verde, Black Canyon City, and Tempe.

May 8th - 11, Indianapolis for the Spring Meetings and NEC.

May 13th - Huntsville, UT for a district meeting.

May 29th - 31, United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO. Presented awards at the 65th Graduating Class Award Ceremony. On behalf of Aviators Post No.743, NY, I presented the Cadet Summer Wing Commander Award to Julia B Gundlach, Cadet Fall Wing Commander Award to Christopher W. Von Haas, and the Cadet Spring Wing Commander Award to Eric B. Kenes. On behalf of The American Legion and Commander

Troiola, I presented the Outstanding Cadet in Academic Performance Award to James M. Landy.

June 1st - 2, Visited posts on the eastern plains of CO, including Rocky Ford, Limon, Brush, Yuma, and Wray. Also Cripple Creek, and back to Walsenberg.

June 8th - 11, Eastern Montana for a post membership drive, visiting posts in Fairview, Terry, Glendive, and Miles City. Also, the State Veterans Home in Glendive and the Little Bighorn site.

June 16th - 18, Wyoming Department Convention in Lusk.

June 23rd -26, Nevada Department Convention in Carson City, traveled with MOH recipient Donald (Doc), Ballard, SAL NVC Jack Youngs, and Department leadership to Virginia City.

July 4th – Rock Springs, WY. Road Post 24 float in the Liberty Day Parade.

July 13th -16, Idaho Department Convention in Jackpot, NV, unique convention, and vert cool Commanders Banquet. Visited Post 101 in Mountain Home, Department HQ and Prison ISCC Post 201 in Boise, and toured C. J. Strike Reservoir.

July 27 – Cheyenne, WY. Road Post 6 float in the Grand Parade during Frontier Days.

August 9th - 16, Attended the 96th American Legion Baseball World Series, Shelby, NC. Visited the Military Museum at Post 23, Gastonia, NC.

August 24th - September 1st, National Convention, Charlotte, NC.

Finally, I would like to say, what a wonderful year it has been to serve with National Commander, James V. Troiola, and as your NVC. To be able to travel and visit with dedicated Legionnaires throughout the western United States has truly been a blessing. I gained a multitude of new friends and look forward to future travels to reinforce these friendships. May God bless each of you, The American Legion, and The United States of America.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL CHAPLAIN Rev. Daniel Mark Antel, Sr., Minnesota

I was appointed National Chaplain for the coming year at the close of the 103rd National Convention held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin from August 26, 2022 to September 1, 2022. I served in the United States Army, United States Army Reserve and the North Dakota Army National Guard, from 1978-2004. I served as an enlisted soldier for six years and later as a chaplain for twenty years. I served two tours on active duty (as a chaplain) 1987-1990 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and then, 1990-1992 at NATO Support Activity Brussels, Belgium. I have also served civilian congregations at Bemidji, Minnesota; Leeds, North Dakota and Park River/Edinburg, North Dakota.

My duties as the National Chaplain started with a department chaplain's video training conference on September 30th. I then attended our Fall Meeting from November 3rd to November 7th. During this session, I gave the invocation and benediction at the Commanders Home coming dinner, the Americanism breakfast meal, the adjutant's dinner, and at the NEC meeting. All of these were held at the Sheraton Hotel, Indianapolis, Indiana.

January 26-29, 2023, I attended the Department of North Dakota Winter Convention where I was the keynote speaker. February 27-March 1st, I attend the American Legion Washington D.C. Conference where I delivered the invocation and benediction for three different meetings. I delivered the invocation and benediction at the Samsung scholarship award banquet. On February 28th I gave the opening prayer for the United States Senate.

May 2nd-4th attended the Spring Executive meeting and provided the invocation and benediction.

June 22nd -25th attended the American Legion Department of North Dakota Convention, serving as the department chaplain with various prayers and delivering the message at the memorial service. Attended the American Legion Department of Minnesota Convention, July 12-13, where I was the keynote speaker as well as delivering the message for the memorial service.

Then on July 22nd -25th I attended American Legion boys Nation session. Assisted with the Memorial service on July 23rd. The National Commander and I, along with two Boys Nation members, laid a wreath at the Unknown Soldiers Tomb on the morning of July 24th.

On August 26th -31st attended the 104th National Convention held in Charolette, North Carolina. I hosted the Chaplain's Breakfast August 27th at 7:00 AM. Then at 11:00 AM officiated the Memorial Service, which was a Post everlasting service for all the Veterans who passed away.

On August 29th I opened the Annual National Convention with an Invocation and sat on stage for the entire session.

Then on August 30th I opened the session with an invocation, and again on August 31st. I did close the 104th Convention with a farewell Benediction. And that concluded my term of office.

Over the course of my term in office I sent out several notes of condolence to the families of national officers who passed away this year.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL HISTORIAN Deborah A. Davis, Colorado

I am the National Historian appointed to this position at the 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, WI. I have been a member of The American Legion for 9 years and I am a member of the Helen K. Osmundson Post 206 from Aurora, Colorado.

One of the first duties of the national historian is to judge the history books that were submitted by departments and posts. I have been judging history books since 2017. October of 2017 I also joined NADHAL, the National Association of Department Historians of The American Legion.

The numbers of books received in the past two years, including this year, has been declining. We had 11 judges this year and we judged 32 books, ten department books, 22 post books. The winners and participants of the 2022 contest are as follows:

Department Narrative: Indiana (Stephen DeFoe), 1st Place; New Jersey (Gary Cooper), 2nd Place; Florida (Phillip R. Crouthamel), 3rd Place; North Carolina (Bill Richard), Participant.

Department Yearbook: Missouri (Jerome L. Goolsby), 1st Place; New Jersey (Gary Cooper), 2nd Place; Nebraska (Jennifer Laux), 3rd Place; Wisconsin (DuWayne Wieck), Participant; North Carolina (Bill Richard), Participant; Virginia (Edward Thompson), Participant.

Post Narrative: Augustus Ruser Jr. Post 273 (Madeira Beach, FL, Vicent Pupo Jr.) 1st Place; Pony Express Post 359 (St. Joseph, MO, Jerome L. Goolsby), 2nd Place; Helen K. Osmundson Post 206 (Aurora, CO, Deborah A Davis), 3rd Place; Mechanicsville Post 175 (Mechanicsville, VA, Douglas Harry Snell), Participant; Kings Mountian Post 24 (Johnson City, Allen Jackson), Participant; Fletcher-Pechacek Post 121 (River Falls, WI, Jim Sherrill), Participant; Clinton Post 209 (Clinton, MD, Linda P. Poulson), Participant.

Post Yearbooks: Julius L. Shryer Post 430 (Durant, IA, Scott N. Wolf), 1st Place; Oro Valley Post 132 (Oro Valley, AZ, Dan McGregor), 2nd Place; Severson-Cairns Post 501 (Madison WI, Morris Sadicario), 3rd Place; Ravalii Post 47 (Hamilton MT, Nancy A. Dezell), Honorable Mention; Women Veterans of SW Missouri Post 1214 (Springfield, MO, Terri Friend, Shellie Jones), Honorable Mention; Donaldson-Walker Post 108, (Cushing, OK, Evelyn Ferchau), Participant; Milton J. Broumshilde Post 205 (/Kenmore, NY, Derek M. Sansone), Participant; Francis Scott Key Post 11 (Frederick, MD, Gerard F. LoSardo), Participant; Temple Post 133 (Temple , TX, Shirley A. Platt, Participant; Somerset Post 38 (Somerset, KY, John Appicelli), Participant; Charles McGuiert Post 208 (Waxhaw, NC, David Vacchi), Participant; Dale Mabry Post 139 (Tampa, FL, Raymond J. Millaway), Participant; Travis Moothhart Post 184 (Brownsville, OR, Kneil A. Stucky),

Participant; Mechanicsville Post 175 (Mechanicsville, VA, Douglas Harry Snell), Participant; Camden Post 102 (Camden, TN, Michael White), Participant.

We had three new department historians join us for the first time, Tommy L. Hatton of GA, Robert E. Jerdan of MA and Rhonda J. Tyler of OK. Seven past national historians, Robert Gilmore, Jr, of AZ, Frazier Brinley of CT, Charles J. Zelinsky of IL, James C. Fratolillo of MA, Paul D. Bennett of MO, James A Mariner of NM, and Charemon Dunham of SD. Four past department historians, Dan Watrous of OH, Lynne Rollins of GA, Tania Griffin, of GA and Nellie DeBaker of WI, and seven returning department historians who helped with the contest, Kirk A Williams of AR, Terry Abdelnour of IL, Steven DeFoe of IN, Jerome Goolsby of MO, Bill Richard of NC, Albert Beyer of OH and Robin T. Shingleton of WV who is also our NADHAL president. I have them to thank for their participation this year.

The future of history books is changing. I am submitting a change to allow us to go digital. In addition to this new format, the instructions in the officer guide will include directions for submitting a digital copy of a history book. Hopefully, we will be completely digital by 2025.

Presentation of a digital book is as follows - A single PDF file not to exceed 50MB in size (smaller files are preferred. Also, the national historian will conduct an annual one-year history contest at the post and department level. One post entry and one department entry may be submitted by each department. Included in the guide will be an outline to compile a one-year history with judging standards for competition in the nation contests to be conducted in August of 2024 for the 2023-2024 legion year. This will allow the current national historian to report the results of the digital contest during his/her year. The judging will also be done digitally by chosen former national historian and Department Historians during the first 2 weeks of August. As for the 2023 contest, its instructions are in the current 2022 Officer's Guide.

At the 104th National Convention I hosted the National Historian's Luncheon in Charlotte, North Carolina during the National Convention on Saturday, August 26th, 2023. I asked Past National Commander Tom Bock to be my guest speaker. He was to talk about past national historians, department historians and other historians he knew and how historians have influenced his career in The American Legion. He was unable to make the luncheon and my guest speaker was Charles (Pat) Smith of Colorado. He spoke of past national historian he was very familiar with (from Colorado) and others.

I would like to thank Howard Trace, library and museum director, and his professional staff for their continuing dedication to The American Legion and the members of the National Association of Department Historians of the American Legion. Commander Troiola, it has been my great honor and privilege to be a member of your team. Thank you.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE

Mark C. Seavey, J.D., Virginia

During the past year, the legal office completed department investigations into departments in accordance with the Uniform Code of Procedure for the revocation or suspension of department charters. On June 10, 2023, a special National Executive Committee meeting was held in Indianapolis, Indiana, and the charters of the Department of Washington and the Department of Colorado were suspended. Members of the Department Advisory Committee and myself have traveled to both states on numerous occasions to attend conventions and fall conferences and to provide training.

In addition to handling the departments that I just mentioned, the legal office has managed a fairly large number of legal proceedings and lawsuits throughout the country. I do have some good news to report on that. Although our litigation docket has remained relatively stable over the past couple of years, we're seeing it fall off pretty precipitously of late, which means we're facing fewer lawsuits. And I still remain convinced that we will

never be found liable for any of them. The good news is we're trying to be good stewards of your money and that of our blue cap Legionnaires.

During the past year, travel has been pretty extensive. I have been on the road for a total of 67 days this year alone. That amounts to about 13 workweeks. That, obviously, is a pretty vibrant travel schedule. But as I've noted to many of the places I've been, I would prefer to spend three days talking to your DEC about how to manage things in the right manner than to have to go through the problem and the process of trying to reconstitute it after the fact. So if you want me to address your DEC, whether it's in a virtual forum over Teams or Zoom or however you want me to do it, or if you want me out there in person, I would far prefer to answer the problems before they come up. So please keep those invitations coming.

Like I said, I've been to Maryland where I spoke at the Bladensburg Peace Cross ceremony for the rededication. I attended the midwinter conferences in Indiana, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. I have been to Washington and Colorado four times each. I attended North Carolina for the National Convention. I attended the South Carolina department midwinter a few weeks ago. And I already have plans this year to visit at least South Dakota, West Virginia, and potentially New Mexico.

From the period from the 12th of October of last year to the 10th of October this year, we have issued ten indemnity agreements between The American Legion, American Legion Charities, and subordinate organizations. We have prepared 269 tax inclusion or determination letters for subordinate organizations. I've processed 310 IRS inclusion letters from subordinate organizations, have added or are working on adding 90 subordinate organizations to the Legionnaire's group exemption. I have reviewed 151 contracts and agreements and submitted our required annual supplemental group roster information to the IRS.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

**Chanin Nuntavong, California
Executive Director**

**James Baca, New Mexico
Executive Director**

MAIL

JUNE 1, 2022 - MAY 31, 2023

Incoming Letters:	1,469,896
Incoming Parcels:	2,719
Outgoing Letters and Parcels (Excl. Emblem Sales):	5,719,697

FREIGHT & EXPRESS

JUNE 1, 2022 - MAY 31, 2023

UPS/FedEx - Out – Cartons	594
UPS/FedEx - Out – Pounds	26,880
UPS/FedEx - In – Packages	1,635
UPS/FedEx - Out – Packages	2,262

LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

Howard Trace, Indiana (SAL), Director

The mission of The American Legion Library is to provide an information storage and retrieval system for The American Legion. Indexing of documents continues, and internal and external materials are added to the collection regularly.

The Digital Archive continues to provide access to historic material, including a new collection of Sons of The American Legion material, and is averaging over 16,500 page views a month. The most significant project of the year was the migration of the resolution, publication, photo, microfilm and museum databases to a web-based platform. This change decreased the support resources needed within national headquarters. Reorganization of the photo collection continues. All photos have been moved from the Prominent Legionnaire files to the photo collection and processing of digital photos continues with over 4,500 photos reviewed and roughly 10 percent selected for description and inclusion in the collection. Updates to the cataloging of the poster collection continues at a steady pace of five drawers annually. Conservation of the Foch, Haig and Pershing painting was begun and will be complete by the end of 2023. Division staff continues to work with IT and other staff at national headquarters on improvements to entering and maintaining information in the membership system.

Research queries included: Americanism, immigration, the American Legion Film Service, and the GI Bill. Most research requests can be fulfilled with publications already available in the Digital Archive but, in some cases, digitization of new material is required.

Publications, media and photographs cataloged	652
Museum collection items added or assessed	385
Items added to Digital Archive	1,332
Pages digitized	11,505
Boxes of archival material processed	38
Digital files processed	11,042
Correspondence answered by staff	776
Prominent Legionnaire questionnaires sent	343
Prominent Legionnaire questionnaires received	146

Significant Gifts to the National Headquarters Library and Museum

Donated by David M. Welihan: programs, magazines, and newspapers from 1927 National Convention.

Donated by Frank T. Vasecka: National Convention program, 1939.

Donated by Caroline Stickley Brooks: National Convention materials of Thomas E. Stickley, 1922-1949.

Donated by Mary O'Neil Sido: American Legion artifacts of PNC Ralph T. O'Neil.

Donated by PNVC Doug Haggan: "History of The American Legion Department of France, 1919-2023" by Doug Haggan (print and digital file), films of American Legion memorial events in France (film and digital files).

Donated by Donald Brusca: American Legion Junior Baseball Rules, 1939.

Donated by Tom Faggart: "The Early History and Founders of the Fred Y. McConnell American Legion Post 51, 1916-1929" (book).

Donated by Roger T. and Linda L. Stelle: "The Stars of Little Egypt: Lives Well-Lived on the Goshen Trail" by Roger Thompson Stelle (book), etched cane belonging to PNC John Stelle.

Donated by Stephen Blaha: "Dictionary: 50 Strange Words Made Plain", 1948 (National Americanism pamphlet).

Donated by Jim Caserotti: American Legion declamation medal, 1932/33.

Donated by Shane LaMartz: American Legion pistol match medal, 1934.

Donated by Ron Trn: American Legion World Series program, 1935.

Donated by PNVC David L. King: "Decanters of The American Legion" by David King, 2021 (pamphlet).

Donated by PNC David Rehbein: "The Legion Team: Forgotten Hockey in Waterloo, 1927-1930" by Tim Harwood (book).

Donated by Jerome L. Goolsby: "Department of Missouri History, 2020-2021" (digital file).

Donated by Andres Jamie, Jr.: "A Sacred Duty: How a Whistleblower Took on the VA and Won" by Paula Pedene (book).

Donated by George T. Blume: Boys National 50th Anniversary ring.

Donated by PNC John P. 'Jake' Comer: Army Golden Knights Baton presented during The American Legion World Series, 2023.

AMERICANISM COMMISSION
Mark A. Avis, Massachusetts, Chairman
Ronald E. Neff, Indiana, Director

The Americanism Commission of The American Legion was created by a recommendation adopted by the National Convention of The American Legion held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1919. It read: "We recommend the establishment of a National Americanism Commission of The American Legion whose duty it shall be to endeavor to realize in the United States the basic ideal of this Legion of 100 percent Americanism through the planning, establishment and conduct of a continuous, constructive educational system."

It is the objective of the Americanism Commission to translate Americanism precepts, principles, and ideals in a clear and practical manner to Legion posts and other groups and individuals, including young Americans.

While the Americanism program consists of a broad, objective, general plan that features wide-range community service, and sound citizenship and youth development, the efforts of the Americanism Commission are educational in nature and embrace these specific objectives:

- Promote understanding of the principles of a democratic government, and bringing more citizens to think seriously about the duties of citizenship;
- Give sound, practical service in our communities, and working to make communities better and safer places in which to live;
- Emphasize religion, encouraging its continuation in the life of every citizen;
- Encourage education in every possible manner, presenting school awards and scholarships, sponsoring, and conducting oratorical contests, cooperating with youth education and citizenship groups, promoting proper flag etiquette and display, and sponsoring objective youth development programs;
- Do important work for the youth of America, sponsoring American Legion Baseball, American Legion High School Oratorical Contest, American Legion Boys State, American Legion Boys Nation, American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program, American Legion Youth Cadet Law Enforcement, Boy Scouts of America activities, and many other citizenship and objective training activities;
- Work for the assimilation of immigrants through schools of citizenship and other agencies.

Additionally, the Americanism Commission has continued attentiveness in legislative matters affecting our way of life. Among legislative initiatives of The American Legion are: (1) continuing efforts to effect a constitutional amendment which would give Congress the authority to enact flag protection laws; (2) coordinating a nationwide effort to combat the secular cleansing of our American heritage through Establishment Clause lawsuits; (3) establishing English as the official language of the United States; and (4) amending the U.S. Flag Code in order to clarify the intent of some stated display procedures and to include contemporary, accepted patriotic practices.

This commission has the responsibility for supervision and coordination of four standing committees: American Legion Baseball Committee, Committee on Children & Youth, Committee on Youth Education and Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Committee.

The following is a summary of several programs that are the responsibility of the Americanism Commission and have been conducted during the 2022-2023 American Legion program year.

American Legion Boys State/Boys Nation
Jeff Bennett, Program Manager

The American Legion believes that if the United States is to maintain its form of government, it must have a citizenry that has a fundamental understanding and interest in its operation. This is what The American Legion Boys State program does for the young men of our nation. It teaches the fundamentals of American government at the state level.

It was 90 years ago that Legionnaires in the state of Illinois first recognized the need for a program that would help high school boys understand and appreciate the government they were learning about in the classroom. It was a time in the history of this nation when un-American ideas significantly threatened its future. Established in 1935, the overarching concept of American Legion Boys State, then and now, is to show young people that beyond a doubt, our form of government is good; however, its preservation depends upon intelligent, informed, and loyal citizens, in combination with an honest and impartial administration of government activities. The young men are chosen are the brightest within their communities, gathering to form fictitious political parties. Within these parties their political platforms are introduced, built upon, debated, and voted for through proper parliamentary procedures. Elections are held, positions filled, and a state governor rises from among the ranks.

Years before the COVID pandemic 18,000 young Americans took part in The American Legion Boys State programs across the nation per year, and since the average is over 10,000, the program has graduated well over 2,000,000 young men. From each of the 50 American Legion Boys State programs, a rigorous selection process produces two outstanding graduates from each program who go on to represent their state as an American Legion Boys Nation "senator" during the week-long program in Washington D.C. The week of government training in the nation's capital combines lectures, forums, and committees with visitations to federal agencies, institutions, and memorials in order to punctuate the importance of our nation's creation and the sacrifices necessary for its conservation. In addition, The American Legion provides unique occasions by facilitating visits to the White House and the offices of U.S. Senators. This valuable time is used to deliberate topics of importance to the participants' generation with their own elected officials. This opportunity crafts a truly unique and educational experience for both the Boys Nation senators and our nation's leadership.

These young men are charged with writing legislative bills and resolutions to be presented, debated, and conceivably passed in the Boys Nation Senate. The entire process occurs over the time span of one week, accomplished through the organization of fictitious party conventions, creation of party platforms, and guidance from the program's legislative team of counselors. One of the program's many highlights is the nomination, debate and election of an American Legion Boys Nation President and Vice President. David Daniel II was the first in Kentucky history to be elected our Boys Nation President and Joshua Blake of Louisiana was elected Vice President during the 2023 session of American Legion Boys Nation.

The volunteers who staff this program are mainly former Boys State/Boys Nation participants. Most specifically, junior counselors are program alumni, who during their tenure as a delegate at American Legion Boys Nation, were unknowingly evaluated for their leadership abilities, understanding of government, and grasp of legislative processes. Those who surpass their peers in these areas receive the honor of an invitation to return as

program staff. Boys Nation senior counselors and administrative staff are primarily comprised of Boys State directors and staff chosen for their technical abilities and unwavering faith in the American Legion Boys Nation program.

Boy Scouts of America
Jeff Bennett, Program Manager

In calendar year 2023 The American Legion chartered 1,959 Scout units in local communities across the nation which involved nearly 36,003 young people and 18,868 adult leaders. Its commitment to the principles of Scouting dates back to The American Legion's first National Convention in 1919. The American Legion supports the Boy Scouts of America because of its unique ability to provide opportunities to young people for leadership training, peer fellowship, life skills development and community service.

Also in calendar year 2023, a total of 1,452 youth recognized by The American Legion with a certificate issued from the national level for achievements in Scouting programs (1,232 Boy Scouts of America Eagle Scout awards; 18 Boy Scouts of America Venturing Summit awards; 17 Boy Scouts of America Sea Scouts Quartermaster awards; 185 Girl Scouts USA Gold Awards).

The American Legion selected Jackson D. Adams from Walla Walla, Washington, as its 2023 Eagle Scout of the Year. Selection is based upon a Scout's outstanding religious, school, community, and scouting program achievements. Jackson will receive a \$10,000 scholarship from The American Legion. The three runners-up are Taylor E. Bell of Murfreesboro, Tennessee; Charles Hiatt of Manhattan Beach California; and Scott Samuel Mozzillo of Thens New York. Each runner-up received a \$2,500 scholarship.

We had 8 Square Knot awards in 2023 and since inception in 2003, there have been 693 American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion members who have received the Scouting "Square Knot" award to recognize their dedication and work to assist in furthering the Scouting programs of The American Legion.

Citizenship and Naturalization
Ann Byars, Program Manager

Citizenship & Naturalization efforts of Americanism include: (1) promoting grassroots involvement at the post level in understanding, appreciating and actively participating in the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship and American government; (2) developing new ideas and initiatives aimed at promoting grassroots involvement at the post level in assimilating prospective citizens/legal immigrants into local communities and American society; and (3) monitoring and maintaining a portfolio of resolutions specific to the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship and the assimilation and naturalization of prospective citizens/legal immigrants.

The Americanism Commission strongly urges American Legion posts, districts, and departments (states) to undertake activities and collaborate with the U.S. Office of Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to help newly arriving legal immigrants and legal residents become assimilated and seek citizenship. Future goal is assisting soldiers ready for release to become legal and permanent citizens; this process would begin with post level volunteers reaching out to nearby military bases.

Flag Education
Ann Byars, Program Manager

The American Legion is a nationally recognized authority regarding proper display of the United States Flag. Each year, thousands of letters, phone calls and electronic mail messages are routinely answered pertaining to the proper display, use of and respect for the American Flag.

The American Legion is continuing to update a downloadable version of For Which It Stands, a multimedia instructional resource about the history of the flag of the United States, the significance and meaning of our flag and respecting and caring for our flag. It is intended primarily for use with students in the upper elementary and middle/junior high school grades.

In calendar year 2023 over 50,000 individuals and organizations received email notification each time the flag of the United States was to be displayed throughout the entire nation at half-staff. Subscribership to The American Legion's flag alert notification service continues to grow every year.

The American Legion continues its campaign to protect the United States flag from physical desecration. All 50 state legislatures have passed memorializing resolutions in support of a constitutional amendment to give Congress the authority to enact flag protection laws. Working with other organizations of The American Legion-founded Citizens Flag Alliance, The American Legion shepherded a flag protection Constitutional amendment through the House of Representatives during several Congresses. In June of 2006, The American Legion spearheaded a drive for the amendment in the U.S. Senate, coming within one vote of passage there. Legislation was again introduced in the 117th Congress.

About 1,200 flag etiquette and flag related questions were answered via email or phone in 2023. Americanism also branched into flag education sessions via Zoom, Teams, and podcasts, and serves as a credible flag etiquette for several news outlets, including Fox Online, CBS Newswire and the Wall Street Journal.

American Legion National High School Oratorical Contest **Kim Shriver, Program Manager**

The American Legion has awarded over three million dollars in college scholarships since 1938 to high school students participating in its annual High School Oratorical Contest.

Each contestant must give a prepared oration on some phase of the United States Constitution, giving emphasis to the duties and obligations of a citizen to our government. The prepared oration must be the original effort of each contestant, taking no less than eight minutes, nor more than ten, for delivery. Each contestant must also give an assigned topic presentation on a constitutional topic that is randomly selected during the contest from the four topics having been identified for each contest year. Assigned topic orations must take no less than three minutes, nor more than five, for delivery.

In 2023, forty-nine contestants competed in Indianapolis for scholarship money in this capstone event. Coming in first place was Haley Bock of Indiana, winning \$25,000. Ian Chung of New York won \$22,500 for second place. In third place, Emma Johnson of Wyoming, won \$20,000. All contestants who compete at the national contest go home with scholarship funds made possible through a grant provided by the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation and The American Legion. The American Legion continues to enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship with the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA).

Junior Shooting Sports Program **Kim Shriver, Program Manager**

The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports Program is a national Americanism program administered through American Legion post-sponsored Junior Shooting Clubs. The purpose of the program is to provide rifle safety and marksmanship training for young people and to offer a wholesome recreational activity through organized competition. Competition is divided into two disciplines: the precision three position air rifle and the sporter three position air rifle.

In 2022-23 there were 882 individual athletes and 166 shooting clubs who entered the postal match competition rounds of The American Legion Junior Shooting Sports National Tournament, wherein competition is conducted remotely at the local level. The 32nd Junior Shooting Three Position Air Rifle National Championship was successfully conducted in July 2023 at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The national championship climaxed the two rounds of postal matches which began the previous September. At the national championship medals were awarded to the top scorers in each discipline, and to top scorers in the prone, kneeling and standing positions. The two marksmen winning national titles at The American Legion's 2023 Junior Shooting Three Position Air Rifle National Championship were Jacob Wisman of West Virginia, in the precision discipline; and Charles Bratton of South Carolina, in the sporter discipline. Each champion received scholarships totaling \$5,000 sponsored by The American Legion and the Sons of The American Legion..

Service to God and Country

A program of fundamental Americanism, "Service to God and Country," seeks to prevent the spiritual decay of America by charging the electorate with a spirit of unquestionable Americanism, respect for law, reverence for authority and awareness of our human rights and freedoms.

"Service to God" emphasizes regular public worship, daily family prayer and the religious education of children, while "Service to Country" attempts to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to community, state, and nation. These objectives are aimed at preparing young Americans to take up tomorrow's responsibilities by teaching them moral and spiritual values, renewed interest in our nation's history, self-discipline, self-reliance, and ideals of loyalty and honesty.

Each year a conference for the department chaplains of The American Legion is held under the direction of its National Chaplain. Program information is provided for further dissemination to district and post chaplains who coordinate the program at the local community level.

BASEBALL COMMITTEE **Gary Stone, Missouri, Chairman** **Steve Cloud, Indiana, Program Manager**

The 2023 season of American Legion Baseball registered 2,932 teams to play American Legion Baseball. This encompassed 49,287 players representing 50 states and Canada.

In 2023 the team sponsored by American Legion Post No. 554 in League City, Texas emerged as national champion at the 96th American Legion World Series. This is League City's first national championship in team history and the first championship for Texas. The 2023 runner-up team was from Lincoln, Nebraska.

The 2023 George W. Rulon American Legion Baseball Player of the Year is Jacob Cyr, a player of the 2023 American Legion Western Regional championship team, sponsored by American Legion Post 554, League City, Texas.

Many American Legion players have gone on to distinguish themselves in Major League Baseball and have been honored with election to the Hall of Fame. Eighty-five Hall of Fame members played American Legion Baseball, including 2023 inductees Fred McGriff and Scott Rolen. Other American Legion Baseball alumni inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame include Tony Gwynn, Tom Seaver, Johnny Bench, Carl Yastrzemski, Brooks Robinson, and Paul Molitor.

American Legion Baseball is a fully compliant Safe Sport youth baseball program, following an initiative supported by USA Baseball in accordance with the U.S. Center for Safe Sports. Baseball Athlete Safety Education (BASE) features mandatory guidelines in

accordance with Public Law 115-126 Child Sports Act of 2017 to monitor, educate and train parents, players and coaches in abuse awareness and foster long healthy playing careers for young athletes.

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & YOUTH
Herbert J. Petit, Jr., Louisiana, Chairman
Stacy Cope, Indiana, Program Manager

The American Legion has been a staunch supporter of America's children and youth since the organization's founding in 1919. The young people of our nation continue to be of paramount concern to the Committee on Children & Youth, as its commitment strengthens, and it seeks ways to improve the well-being of all children.

Through the decades following our founding, The American Legion has become a strong advocate for children's rights and has remained at the forefront of the child welfare movement. The early years were devoted to progressive childcare and protection programs. Through the efforts of The American Legion and its affiliated organizations – the American Legion Auxiliary, the Sons of The American Legion and The American Legion Riders, as well as other independent organizations such as the Eight & Forty – many states and communities improved their own child welfare provisions.

The development of new and expanded public programs designed to provide economic security for children made it possible for our organization to turn its attention to other problems affecting young people. To date there is no area of child welfare that has gone untouched by the collective hand of The American Legion. The very program of Children & Youth itself is unique from any agency – private or governmental – in its ability to expand into every area of concern for child welfare and child health.

At its 33rd annual convention in 1951 The American Legion adopted a resolution which for a third time re-emphasized the three major principles of its child welfare programs, with those principles remaining as a firm foundation yet today:

1. Maintaining the integrity of the American family home;
2. Utilizing and cooperating with existing sound facilities for children instead of attempting to establish competitive and duplicating resources; and
3. Maintaining a whole child program designed to meet the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs of children.

While these principles represent the heart of a whole child program, its action is rooted in:

1. Prevention – Finding solutions to obstacles before they become long-lasting problems;
2. Education – Providing information to our members and the general public on timely issues involving children and youth;
3. Legislation – Maintaining knowledge of new and existing laws, needed amendments, and the administration of laws that affect young people at the national, state, and local levels;
4. Material aid – Providing direct assistance in the form of cash, clothing, food, and time.

For its over 100-year history, The American Legion's Children & Youth Programs have contributed to significant advancements in the area of child welfare. The American Legion has and will maintain a deep, community-centered interest in children in order to find new, and perhaps presently unknown, approaches to child welfare problems. There is no way of knowing what issues will face our youth tomorrow. Our survival may well depend upon the quality of care, education, and training that we, as parents and citizens, provide for all children today.

The American Legion is proud of its Legionnaires, as well as the members of its affiliated and supporting organizations, for their efforts on behalf of our nation's youth. Their efforts in the area of child welfare are a living testament to the ability of an

organization of free men and women to adapt itself to evolving needs, while maintaining high principles and taking on increased responsibilities under those principles.

2022-2023 Children & Youth Programs

The American Legion has long demonstrated a strong concern for the safety of this nation's young people. Legion volunteers regularly disseminate child safety information to parents, children, and community leaders. Making children safety conscious, in the home and outside, is necessary to ensure that they have an opportunity to play and grow into responsible adults and citizens.

As long as Halloween activities are sponsored and promoted in our various communities by duly appointed and elected officials, the Committee on Children & Youth of The American Legion believes that children and parents should know how to make this observance as safe as possible. To assist in this effort, the Committee on Children & Youth produces and distributes a brochure, "Make Halloween a Fun and Safe Night," to educate children and parents about trick-or-treat safety.

Unintentional injury is the leading cause of death and disability among our nation's youth according to a 2018 article in the New England Journal of Medicine. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 12,000 children and young adults, ages 1 to 19 years, die from unintentional injuries each year. Stanford Children's Health states that falls are the leading cause of nonfatal injury for children, with children ages 19 and under accounting for about 8,000 fall-related visits to hospital emergency rooms every day. In homes, playgrounds and parks, the potential for serious injury is always present. To help educate the public, the Committee on Children & Youth produces "Play it Safe," an electronic brochure to inform parents about the six most common causes of death among children and prevention strategies.

The American Legion is very concerned about youth suicide as a major threat to the welfare of our nation's youth. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the second largest cause of death among 10 to 24-year-olds. In 2019 the Journal of American Medical Association reported that the suicide rate among adolescents appears to be the highest since the government started collecting such statistics in 1960. The Journal of the American Medical Association reports that in 2017 there were more than 6,200 suicide deaths among adolescents and young adults ages 15-24. Suicide is a senseless tragedy but may possibly be preventable. The Committee on Children & Youth produces an electronic brochure entitled "Know the Warning Signs of Youth Suicide," designed to assist youth and adults in understanding some of the warning signs and facts about suicide.

The American Legion is also mindful of the pressures facing young people today, as well as the destructive consequences of drug use. Alcohol, tobacco, inhalants, and marijuana are often readily available and considered to be the entryway to a life of drug dependency and delinquency. Gateway drugs are so-called because the use of these drugs often leads to drug abuse, addiction and to the use of other drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and LSD. The teenage years are challenging and pressure from peers to use drugs can be extremely intense; however, individuals are ultimately responsible for their own behavior. Decisions made today can have far-reaching effects on one's life for years to come. To help combat this problem and educate our nation's youth about the dangers of gateway drugs, the Committee produces an electronic brochure titled "Gateway Drugs...Choose not to Use." This tool can equip parents and children with the facts about gateway drugs and help children lead a healthy lifestyle.

As sure as The American Legion is the largest veterans' organization in the world, there are veterans' families who require assistance. Rent may be overdue, or veterans' children are hungry because a parent is sick, disabled, deceased, or left the family. Whatever the reason, these children become the concern of The American Legion, and the

Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) grant program is a vital tool our organization uses to help meet the maintenance and health needs of qualifying veterans' children.

Begun in 1925 as a form of direct aid to the children of veterans, Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) remains unique in the social-work field even today and is still a very active program. Made possible by The American Legion Veterans and Children Foundation, the TFA grant program assists the households of qualifying veterans and military servicemembers meet the cost of shelter, food, utilities, and medical needs for their minor child(ren) when they are unable to do so. Through TFA, a Legion post may call upon the national level of The American Legion for cash grant assistance to help meet the basic needs of qualifying veterans' child(ren). Funds may be granted when it has been validated through assessment and investigation that the minor child(ren) are in need and that no other sources are available or those available are insufficient.

The minor child(ren) is under the age of 18 or 21 if still enrolled in high school and is unmarried. The minor child(ren) must be the biological child(ren), stepchild(ren), or in the legal custody of a qualifying veteran. A qualifying veteran is defined as a United States Armed Forces member serving on federal orders current under Title 10 of the United States Code, inclusive of all components, OR any veteran possessing an up-to-date membership in The American Legion. Active-duty applicants are considered without being a member of The American Legion. A single, one-time, non-repayable TFA grant of up to \$1,500 is permitted for the minor child(ren) of a qualifying veteran. During the calendar year 2022, there were 18 minor children of 8 Legionnaires and service members throughout four states who received \$10,574* in non-repayable cash grant assistance from the national level. (*subject to final audit)

Children & Youth Expenditures

The Committee on Children & Youth annually records children and youth activities of The American Legion Family, which includes posts of The American Legion, squadrons of The Sons of The American Legion, and units of the American Legion Auxiliary. Additionally, activities of salons of Eight and Forty are recorded as well. The contributions and expenditures of departments (states) and of the National Organization of The American Legion were obtained for the 12-month reporting period of June 1, 2022, through May 31, 2023 (see Table No. 1). Table 2 illustrates a historical record of expenditures from national temporary aid funds by American Legion departments (state) according to years.

During the same reporting period, the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation recorded \$579,263.52* in donations from members of the American Legion Family and individuals from across the country. Also, during the same reporting period of June 1, 2022, through May 31, 2023, the American Legion Temporary Financial Assistance program disbursed \$13,274.56* in grants to 28 children of 10 veterans. Table 1 shows that for June 1, 2022, through May 31, 2023, reporting period, The American Legion and its affiliated and supporting organizations reported a combined total of \$17,786,501* in expenditures and contributions to benefit over 796,268 children throughout America. (* subject to final audit)

Table No. 1 Children & Youth Expenditures and Number of Children Served

Region and Department	Legion Posts Reported	Temporary Financial Assistance by National	Contributions to Child Welfare Foundation by Posts and Units	Direct Aid from Posts, Units and Departments	Contributions to Other Child Serving Agencies by Legion and Auxiliary	Other Expenditures for Children by Legion and Auxiliary	Department Administrative Expense by Legion	Total Number of Children Served	Total Aid Legion Lines 3 thru 8
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
REGION 1									
Connecticut	57%	\$0.00	\$1,005.00	\$24,244.00	\$26,962.00	\$31,395.00	\$9,423.00	974	\$93,029
Maine	79%	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$21,212.00	\$20,699.00	\$55,750.00	\$7,486.00	6,668	\$105,147
Massachusetts	67%	\$0.00	\$6,958.93	\$17,249.00	\$29,332.00	\$70,173.60	\$69,718.00	1,527	\$193,432
New Hampshire	37%	\$1,200.00	\$2,420.99	\$7,228.00	\$5,201.00	\$58,385.00	\$6,367.00	627	\$93,042
Rhode Island	48%	\$0.00	\$975.00	\$1,670.00	\$9,619.00	\$13,011.00	\$1,950.00	3,755	\$28,225
Vermont	58%	\$0.00	\$1,454.00	\$22,119.00	\$5,825.00	\$27,718.00	\$18,413.00	1,913	\$75,529
TOTAL:	62%	\$1,200.00	\$12,813.92	\$93,762.00	\$96,638.00	\$286,432.60	\$113,357.00	12,284	\$884,204
REGION 2									
Delaware	100%	\$0.00	\$590.00	\$7,200.00	\$10,611.00	\$48,803.00	\$1,154.00	402	\$68,358
D.C.	11%	\$0.00	\$10.00	\$25.00	\$50.00	\$20.00	\$76.00	1.50	\$181
Maryland	100%	\$0.00	\$21,925.00	\$119,434.00	\$123,737.00	\$217,501.80	\$25,738.00	7,654	\$556,337
New Jersey	49%	\$0.00	\$2,070.00	\$90,285.00	\$44,951.75	\$234,017.00	\$19,515.04	10,138	\$390,839
New York	54%	\$0.00	\$9,311.73	\$149,808.00	\$694,290.00	\$471,064.00	\$95,892.00	17,037	\$1,420,366
Pennsylvania	58%	\$0.00	\$18,086.65	\$163,929.00	\$86,154.00	\$384,471.75	\$120,203.52	32,068	\$742,845
Virginia	82%	\$0.00	\$6,392.31	\$262,660.00	\$117,842.00	\$231,264.44	\$36,518.00	25,721	\$1,024,387
West Virginia	61%	\$0.00	\$601.55	\$35,228.00	\$3,543.00	\$36,991.00	\$6,930.00	3,305	\$83,294
TOTAL:	60%	\$0.00	\$58,977.24	\$908,499.00	\$1,080,978.75	\$1,604,122.99	\$646,027.56	97,825	\$4,288,606
REGION 3									
Alabama	66%	\$2,374.56	\$1,642.00	\$35,632.00	\$8,936.00	\$85,856.00	\$10,561.00	4,469	\$145,102
Florida	92%	\$1,500.00	\$21,873.00	\$284,292.00	\$246,084.00	\$573,000.71	\$105,256.63	27,985	\$1,212,006
Georgia	61%	\$0.00	\$1,479.50	\$99,617.00	\$42,822.00	\$468,854.00	\$29,544.00	7,863	\$952,317
Kentucky	69%	\$0.00	\$1,642.40	\$41,100.00	\$2,360.00	\$114,667.00	\$5,410.00	6,662	\$163,979
North Carolina	50%	\$0.00	\$1,898.00	\$47,471.00	\$82,715.50	\$186,122.00	\$20,211.02	15,571	\$338,418
South Carolina	57%	\$0.00	\$3,491.51	\$25,849.00	\$19,150.00	\$82,670.76	\$40,256.83	1,565	\$171,328
Tennessee	69%	\$0.00	\$6,787.38	\$45,021.21	\$11,040.00	\$90,579.20	\$46,370.47	7,139	\$201,187
TOTAL:	67%	\$3,874.56	\$38,813.79	\$520,362.21	\$413,125.50	\$1,991,649.67	\$287,608.95	69,684	\$2,825,435
REGION 4									
Arkansas	44%	\$0.00	\$625.30	\$8,872.00	\$6,916.00	\$33,673.00	\$5,071.65	1,592	\$65,058
Louisiana	29%	\$698.50	\$11,465.00	\$11,465.00	\$4,923.00	\$20,020.00	\$3,908.00	1,559	\$66,963
Mississippi	30%	\$0.00	\$1,850.00	\$10,650.00	\$18,527.65	\$48,817.00	\$9,213.32	8,683	\$89,058
Oklahoma	67%	\$0.00	\$2,048.37	\$22,562.00	\$14,214.00	\$80,862.50	\$24,532.00	3,510	\$124,219
Texas	67%	\$0.00	\$12,290.22	\$189,303.00	\$101,987.00	\$272,674.36	\$61,638.00	17,194	\$677,573
TOTAL:	59%	\$0.00	\$17,752.39	\$252,362.08	\$146,447.68	\$436,246.86	\$144,060.97	32,538	\$996,860
REGION 5									
Illinois	72%	\$0.00	\$11,384.00	\$323,707.00	\$131,212.00	\$335,950.00	\$45,019.00	57,215	\$847,272
Indiana	80%	\$0.00	\$3,724.12	\$148,274.00	\$263,548.00	\$291,874.00	\$80,275.68	11,847	\$777,696
Michigan	66%	\$0.00	\$3,554.45	\$41,979.00	\$28,569.00	\$134,350.00	\$19,744.00	9,091	\$228,206
Missouri	71%	\$0.00	\$1,086.55	\$34,788.00	\$144,288.00	\$117,610.00	\$24,865.28	5,266	\$322,638
Ohio	81%	\$0.00	\$16,254.60	\$340,898.00	\$216,200.00	\$483,831.00	\$42,033.00	54,780	\$1,102,217
Wisconsin	100%	\$0.00	\$4,094.00	\$71,453.13	\$76,707.00	\$179,758.31	\$61,095.00	47,253	\$355,107
TOTAL:	82%	\$0.00	\$40,107.92	\$961,099.13	\$883,624.00	\$1,633,373.31	\$263,031.96	185,452	\$3,661,136
REGION 6									
Iowa	50%	\$1,500.00	\$812.60	\$33,813.00	\$21,352.00	\$77,581.00	\$44,770.00	23,087	\$179,829
Kansas	56%	\$0.00	\$1,773.46	\$37,978.00	\$29,244.00	\$89,152.00	\$18,226.00	43,135	\$176,373
Minnesota	73%	\$0.00	\$7,760.50	\$483,908.00	\$250,106.00	\$372,147.00	\$420,773.22	163,960	\$1,514,695
Nebraska	100%	\$0.00	\$3,941.42	\$35,123.00	\$11,798.00	\$107,494.00	\$12,707.00	13,038	\$171,063
North Dakota	59%	\$1,477.00	\$202,088.00	\$67,388.00	\$20,182.00	\$130,182.00	\$23,922.00	7,204	\$416,067
South Dakota	61%	\$0.00	\$7,113.07	\$13,332.00	\$20,964.50	\$53,791.00	\$44,361.16	12,934	\$133,162
TOTAL:	66%	\$1,500.00	\$16,478.05	\$788,252.00	\$390,852.50	\$830,347.00	\$864,769.38	263,388	\$2,690,189
REGION 7									
Arizona	90%	\$1,000.00	\$4,529.00	\$262,293.50	\$135,767.00	\$356,772.02	\$33,071.00	21,783	\$783,433
California	76%	\$0.00	\$1,471.46	\$225,084.00	\$76,696.00	\$537,403.00	\$94,850.00	46,777	\$935,474
Colorado	27%	\$0.00	\$1,868.00	\$23,517.00	\$17,326.00	\$45,063.00	\$4,574.00	29,975	\$82,348
Hawaii	38%	\$0.00	\$675.00	\$0.00	\$1,270.00	\$864.00	\$39.00	43	\$5,339
Nevada	88%	\$3,000.00	\$600.00	\$24,750.00	\$25,261.00	\$26,765.00	\$4,933.00	952	\$85,309
New Mexico	100%	\$0.00	\$1,421.38	\$2,085.00	\$17,950.00	\$34,391.00	\$7,300.00	3,831	\$82,167
Utah	70%	\$0.00	\$100.00	\$10,880.00	\$270.00	\$7,467.58	\$11,512.42	465	\$33,230
TOTAL:	70%	\$4,000.00	\$10,664.84	\$567,619.50	\$274,610.00	\$1,008,726.60	\$156,770.42	103,886	\$2,012,280
REGION 8									
Alaska	84%	\$0.00	\$950.00	\$7,064.00	\$46,436.00	\$86,620.00	\$8,870.00	2,865	\$152,923
Idaho	100%	\$0.00	\$25.00	\$11,300.00	\$1,322.00	\$14,616.18	\$4,347.00	903	\$31,610
Montana	100%	\$1,200.00	\$665.00	\$24,098.00	\$33,714.00	\$43,562.00	\$6,343.87	1,275	\$109,563
Oregon	63%	\$0.00	\$1,669.00	\$62,944.00	\$39,074.00	\$49,142.00	\$36,974.00	7,741	\$179,803
Washington	44%	\$0.00	\$10,085.00	\$18,043.60	\$18,285.00	\$57,082.96	\$20,090.00	4,929	\$131,587
Wyoming	75%	\$0.00	\$4,964.02	\$30,375.00	\$24,878.00	\$76,721.00	\$13,630.00	8,423	\$150,568
TOTAL:	75%	\$1,200.00	\$26,358.02	\$143,842.60	\$166,709.00	\$327,627.14	\$90,354.87	26,125	\$756,074
REGION TOTALS:	68%	\$11,774.56	\$221,966.17	\$4,223,770.52	\$3,432,786.43	\$7,998,626.17	\$2,236,971.11	791,162	\$17,724,793
FOREIGN									
France	44%	\$1,500.00	\$0.00	\$4,000.00	\$250.00	\$500.00	\$1,175.00	1,000	\$48,650
Mexico	10%	\$0.00	\$80.00	\$2,150.00	\$0.00	\$2,002.00	\$500.00	345	\$16,023
Philippines	56%	\$0.00	\$130.00	\$4,525.00	\$2,571.00	\$8,155.00	\$1,765.00	663	\$8,130
Puerto Rico	67%	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$10,775.00	\$4,359.00	\$13,610.00	\$3,765.00	3,068	\$79,341
TOTAL:	56%	\$1,500.00	\$216.00	\$21,450.00	\$7,177.00	\$24,167.00	\$7,206.00	5,106	\$145,144
GRAND TOTALS:	67%	\$13,274.56	\$222,176.17	\$4,245,220.52	\$3,439,962.43	\$7,622,692.17	\$2,243,176.11	796,268	\$17,786,601.96

TABLE #1 REPORTING PERIOD: JUNE 1, 2022 - MAY 31, 2023

Child Welfare Foundation by National Legion	\$163,864.01
Child Welfare Foundation by National Auxiliary	\$62,267.16
Child Welfare Foundation by BWO	\$8,408.86
Child Welfare Foundation by Individuals	\$19,125.54
Requests to Child Welfare Foundation	\$463.81
C.W.F. by Sons of The American Legion	\$424,760.55
CFC/United Way	\$208.35
Total	\$679,168.52

TABLE NO. 2
EXPENDITURES FROM NATIONAL TEMPORARY AID FUNDS TO DEPARTMENTS ACCORDING TO YEARS

	1926-1945	1946-1955	1956-1985	1986-1995	1996-2005	2006-2015	2016-May 2023	Grand Total
Alabama	\$29,181.33	\$51,167.06	\$76,790.45	\$152,617.32	\$137,824.69	\$110,931.35	\$56,420.92	\$613,933.12
Alaska	\$0.00	\$1,827.56	\$1,550.00	\$0.00	\$3,500.00	\$2,185.98	\$11,200.00	\$20,043.54
Arizona	\$26,061.70	\$8,792.00	\$21,380.31	\$192,830.21	\$289,528.72	\$492,329.53	\$113,317.76	\$1,144,196.23
Arkansas	\$33,873.20	\$25,962.22	\$2,881.07	\$55,004.98	\$16,181.61	\$26,959.04	\$0.00	\$160,862.12
California	\$30,108.15	\$16,026.45	\$1,550.00	\$7,859.00	\$30,034.44	\$194,533.72	\$118,498.08	\$396,307.82
Colorado	\$41,651.11	\$22,618.11	\$1,395.00	\$12,230.83	\$17,292.15	\$172,131.92	\$86,436.31	\$356,000.13
Connecticut	\$1,854.00	\$440.00	\$450.00	\$1,192.00	\$7,971.56	\$32,258.56	\$21,615.33	\$66,781.45
Delaware	\$2,035.00	\$1,000.00	\$475.00	\$2,635.00	\$8,487.64	\$12,491.00	\$13,350.34	\$40,484.58
DC	\$23,670.00	\$1,203.50	\$900.00	\$29,139.75	\$2,319.00	\$6,376.63	\$800.00	\$39,804.88
Florida	\$33,341.28	\$25,520.50	\$2,530.00	\$27,060.88	\$84,489.81	\$457,310.37	\$270,962.82	\$881,195.68
Georgia	\$69,894.07	\$86,094.42	\$4,865.00	\$8,498.51	\$12,861.80	\$64,941.92	\$26,022.14	\$273,767.86
Hawaii	\$870.00	\$0.00	\$900.00	\$0.00	\$6,168.40	\$2,787.97	\$27,000.00	\$37,706.37
Idaho	\$7,593.50	\$5,771.85	\$7,366.39	\$20,228.20	\$195,485.15	\$244,319.48	\$16,219.86	\$486,984.43
Illinois	\$30,220.79	\$4,343.53	\$10,528.73	\$92,128.56	\$279,545.19	\$294,919.85	\$142,533.31	\$850,916.96
Indiana	\$31,850.08	\$1,396.40	\$2,920.00	\$126,455.88	\$173,400.65	\$311,401.98	\$190,951.90	\$1,046,136.20
Iowa	\$17,493.08	\$597.00	\$3,928.45	\$13,782.47	\$272,865.82	\$166,627.05	\$45,573.56	\$473,867.43
Kansas	\$20,768.80	\$42,094.35	\$9,823.00	\$9,241.54	\$16,291.60	\$81,187.11	\$11,353.25	\$168,827.65
Kentucky	\$23,343.50	\$45,527.80	\$64,854.96	\$44,239.69	\$12,445.22	\$153,892.00	\$45,092.69	\$339,854.93
Louisiana	\$23,400.50	\$38,454.30	\$3,995.00	\$7,340.45	\$33,897.24	\$15,051.72	\$55,768.28	\$177,307.49
Maine	\$3,818.94	\$1,910.26	\$2,678.55	\$16,912.00	\$22,305.05	\$15,827.28	\$11,100.00	\$73,150.06
Maryland	\$3,897.80	\$3,957.00	\$3,383.00	\$4,770.00	\$31,620.94	\$50,090.67	\$32,816.36	\$133,768.74
Massachusetts	\$2,754.50	\$455.00	\$150.00	\$4,690.00	\$18,888.67	\$22,870.48	\$60,800.19	\$110,389.84
Michigan	\$23,895.33	\$33,281.24	\$15,348.82	\$14,012.24	\$52,678.66	\$80,139.96	\$76,613.16	\$295,965.41
Minnesota	\$8,610.77	\$23,322.79	\$11,840.33	\$137,879.21	\$89,538.19	\$41,094.06	\$12,870.32	\$324,855.87
Mississippi	\$63,263.23	\$63,234.14	\$117,392.56	\$91,214.88	\$94,261.79	\$99,465.38	\$14,504.53	\$430,887.01
Missouri	\$53,073.08	\$47,799.64	\$11,056.00	\$17,969.51	\$38,984.13	\$149,430.46	\$3,673.54	\$322,038.36
Montana	\$5,414.25	\$1,668.85	\$1,575.30	\$38,671.40	\$97,913.91	\$97,616.22	\$20,881.65	\$223,341.58
Nebraska	\$5,470.10	\$17,358.88	\$17,321.06	\$3,373.28	\$7,959.49	\$19,019.41	\$7,214.11	\$70,487.84
Nevada	\$585.00	\$766.00	\$7,272.00	\$995.00	\$16,818.84	\$81,164.64	\$31,439.66	\$139,041.24
New Hampshire	\$4,250.50	\$4,941.50	\$0.00	\$53,557.79	\$12,610.00	\$23,124.23	\$31,557.82	\$106,956.76
New Jersey	\$8,995.53	\$1,396.40	\$4,000.00	\$55,576.20	\$53,184.60	\$48,721.88	\$48,348.38	\$278,995.99
New Mexico	\$20,074.30	\$53,098.74	\$58,723.89	\$111,071.87	\$49,282.39	\$40,257.73	\$5,939.00	\$338,427.52
New York	\$7,887.54	\$4,803.00	\$1,150.00	\$33,784.24	\$83,432.27	\$47,378.53	\$40,485.29	\$218,918.87
North Carolina	\$40,567.50	\$81,019.60	\$1,000.00	\$20,750.18	\$28,714.55	\$378,211.46	\$199,304.55	\$705,487.54
North Dakota	\$26,014.45	\$11,788.21	\$5,771.32	\$6,490.40	\$11,426.94	\$13,983.32	\$911.00	\$79,079.64
Ohio	\$2,930.43	\$5,116.25	\$11,613.89	\$1,357.65	\$13,289.44	\$108,007.84	\$31,557.82	\$204,873.32
Oklahoma	\$40,463.60	\$56,847.00	\$98,511.00	\$168,546.00	\$203,564.11	\$483,787.24	\$1,077,460.44	\$1,977,460.44
Oregon	\$1,250.50	\$13,750.15	\$24,595.95	\$42,465.83	\$14,796.00	\$252,933.02	\$121,766.72	\$473,558.17
Panama	\$675.00	\$534.00	\$600.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,809.00
Pennsylvania	\$2,247.41	\$651.00	\$3,284.85	\$38,183.37	\$29,350.12	\$169,099.68	\$11,198.81	\$290,555.04
Puerto Rico	\$17,057.00	\$37,734.00	\$55,499.50	\$43,420.00	\$11,100.00	\$16,844.88	\$24,394.46	\$228,009.80
Rhode Island	\$1,562.00	\$1,641.00	\$1,060.00	\$18,489.00	\$16,182.72	\$5,049.90	\$7,300.00	\$51,295.00
South Carolina	\$65,453.05	\$26,693.34	\$5,339.00	\$0.00	\$13,610.16	\$86,964.71	\$81,302.88	\$282,862.94
South Dakota	\$42,452.27	\$16,392.05	\$725.00	\$30,686.38	\$5,368.30	\$1,000.00	\$7,000.49	\$105,571.49
Tennessee	\$31,144.77	\$54,613.20	\$20,604.30	\$56,088.79	\$36,561.35	\$94,079.68	\$95,121.15	\$388,193.24
Texas	\$35,373.50	\$47,392.43	\$26,714.50	\$7,884.74	\$31,484.75	\$236,342.07	\$137,806.14	\$522,103.10
Utah	\$11,132.48	\$3,248.00	\$0.00	\$3,396.00	\$12,014.42	\$14,004.34	\$31,707.70	\$12,369.42
Vermont	\$1,824.50	\$9,251.50	\$0.00	\$4,925.00	\$6,004.26	\$7,701.44	\$0.00	\$29,706.70
Virginia	\$43,310.31	\$28,037.78	\$17,836.00	\$31,930.40	\$99,509.94	\$377,640.08	\$185,040.02	\$760,313.53
Washington	\$3,378.90	\$437.50	\$625.00	\$66,884.89	\$511,131.69	\$174,210.00	\$137,538.32	\$1,465,122.12
West Virginia	\$27,629.98	\$11,395.94	\$3,460.00	\$17,750.68	\$40,628.59	\$113,016.71	\$46,239.04	\$283,120.94
Wisconsin	\$16,881.98	\$8,067.25	\$9,878.00	\$16,242.78	\$74,327.21	\$95,856.52	\$12,315.00	\$232,668.74
Wyoming	\$8,180.00	\$1,993.00	\$1,350.00	\$979.00	\$13,746.91	\$34,232.42	\$5,459.85	\$65,940.98
Other Dep'ts	\$560.00	\$173.50	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,500.00	\$2,233.50
Miscellaneous	\$16,499.21	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$16,499.21
TOTAL	\$1,121,672.95	\$1,089,976.73	\$777,325.21	\$1,926,240.98	\$3,327,287.51	\$6,968,291.54	\$2,750,907.51	\$17,951,572.43

COMMITTEE ON YOUTH EDUCATION
Michael Westergren, Arkansas, Chairman
Ann Byars, Indiana, Program Manager

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship continues its tradition of awarding needs-based scholarships to children of fallen Post-9/11 service members as well as children of those Post-9/11 veterans receiving a combined total disability rating of 50% or more assigned by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Children of fallen Post-9/11 service members remain our highest priority in awarding this scholarship.

For 2023 there was \$1.48 million awarded in American Legion Legacy scholarships awarded to a total of 321 applicants, exhausting the total amount available to award. These awards may be used for undergraduate or graduate-level education at a nonprofit and regionally accredited institution of higher learning, including trade schools. Recently approved resolutions dictated that for the 2023 awards and moving forward, all funds raised from The Legacy Run will go directly to scholarships that are equally distributed to all students showing a need.

In addition to the American Legion Legacy Scholarship, our scholarship programs include American Legion National Oratorical scholarships, American Legion Boys Nation scholarships, American Legion Junior Shooting Sports scholarships, American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year scholarships, American Legion Baseball Leadership and All-Academic Team scholarships, and the Samsung American Legion Scholarship.

Samsung Electronics gifted The American Legion with a \$5 million endowment in 1996 as means of a showing appreciation for U.S. veterans who came to Korea's aid during its struggle against communist forces in the Korean War. As a result, the Samsung American Legion Scholarship program established a series of scholarships. Being good stewards of this generous endowment, The American Legion has continued to nurture and grow these funds through the years and since inception of the scholarship over \$6,701,500

Samsung American Legion scholarships have been awarded. This is achieved by annually awarding scholarships to (10) \$10,000 national scholars, (10) \$5,000 runners-up, and (80) \$1,250 department (state) finalists in conjunction with the American Legion Boys State and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State programs. Regrettably, Samsung American Legion scholarships were not awarded in 2020 due to the vast majority of American Legion Boys State and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State programs throughout the nation having canceled due to health and safety concerns associated with the unprecedented coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that gripped the globe. In 2021, however, a majority of Boys and Girls State programs were able to rebound from the pandemic to conduct a program, and as a result 86 Samsung American Legion scholarships were awarded totaling \$232,500 in 2022. In 2023 an estimated \$283,750 will be awarded.

The American Legion continues to believe that education is key to a united and informed citizenry. As such, we strive to improve our scholarships, education programs and youth development programs in a manner showing our dedication to the education of America's youth. The promotion of Americanism to our future leaders' threads throughout every American Legion scholarship and program. The resources that we provide to our Legion Family and communities at-large are specifically developed to aid in the expansion and culturing of such values among 21st-century youth.

The total amount of national scholarships awarded in 2023 will be near \$2 million.

YOUTH CADET LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE

Larry L. Price, South Dakota Chairman

Jeff Bennett, Indiana Program Manager

The American Legion Youth Cadet Law Enforcement (YCLE) program is an excellent vehicle through which young people may be empowered to realize early on that peace officers stand as staunch supporters for moral and legal rights, and that the dedication and impact they have within our local communities, states, and nation should be regarded with respect and appreciation. The YCLE program serves as an influential steppingstone for those high school students considering a career in law enforcement as they become familiar first-hand with professional practices and concepts of policing during a week-long program conducted at a law enforcement training academy.

There are currently twenty-two departments that offer an YCLE program: The American Legion Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Committee was formed in order to develop strategies and methodologies for promoting the YCLE program and its growth throughout the nation, as well as working toward an ultimate goal of pursuing the development of a national capstone program – the vision is that this national capstone program would be analogous of what The American Legion Boys Nation program is to The American Legion Boys State program. Electronic materials are available on The American Legion website at www.legion.org/youthlaw, providing information for American Legion departments working with law enforcement agencies to adopt and further promote the program.

AMERICANISM COMMISSION EXECUTIVE SECTION

Mark A. Avis, Palmer, MA – Chairman

Michael C. Donnelly, Palmer, NC – Vice-Chairman

Douglas Boldt, Callaway, NE – National Commander's Representative

Georgiann Callaway, Plainfield, IL – Consultant

Steve A. Brennan, Cheverly, MD – Consultant

Jon O'Connor, Bedford, MA – Consultant

Gary Stone, Independence, MO – Chairman, American Legion Baseball Committee

Herbert J. Petit, Jr., Metairie, LA – Chairman, Committee on Children & Youth

Michael Westergren, Beebe, AR – Chairman, Committee on Youth Education

Larry L. Price, Redfield, SD – Chairman, Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Committee

AMERICAN LEGION CHILD WELFARE FOUNDATION, INC.

Robert Mirrill, New York, President

Stacy Cope, Executive Secretary

In 1954 The American Legion endorsed the separate incorporation of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation. Since then, the foundation has granted over \$20 million dollars to other non-profit youth-serving organizations. The foundation exists to contribute to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual welfare of children and youth and to add to progress in the child welfare field through research, studies, surveys, projects or in other ways, including but not limited to all, youth activities now or hereafter sponsored by The American Legion.

At its annual meetings in October 2022 and May 2023, the board of directors approved \$797,251 in 17 grants awarded to 16 nonprofit organizations for projects to be completed during the 2023 calendar year. These grants have been awarded to support youth-serving projects that seek to enhance the lives of children by addressing their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs. The following is a brief summary of the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation grants awarded for 2023:

Alabama Rens Basketball Club of Huntsville, AL, was awarded \$9,130 for their project "Alabama Rens Basketball Youth Club." The grant will use basketball to encourage personal and athletic development and growth. Through mentoring and basketball, youth will learn and develop critical life skills.

American Kidney Fund of Rockville, MD, was awarded \$25,000 for their project "American Kidney Fund Virtual Camp: National Camp for Pediatric Kidney Patients." This grant will conduct virtual camps for those kids with kidney disease. Virtual camps offer a supportive environment where youth can engage with others like themselves, increasing awareness and self-esteem. The American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion support this grant.

American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters of Indianapolis was awarded \$4,514 for their project "Star Spangled Kids Educational Initiative." This grant seeks to further civics education for our nation's youth by providing them with a U.S. flag and books on the Pledge of Allegiance, Our Country's Flag, and the Constitution of the United States. The American Legion Auxiliary supports this grant.

American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters of Indianapolis was awarded \$65,000 for their project, "American Legion Auxiliary National Youth Programs Scholarships." This grant will provide academic scholarships in the following areas: the American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation program, the Children of Warriors National Presidents Scholarship, the Spirit of Youth Scholarship, the Honorary National Junior Division Vice President Scholarship, and the Junior Member Loyalty Scholarship. The American Legion Auxiliary supports this grant.

American Legion Department of California, District 22 of San Diego, Ca, was awarded \$15,000 for their project "San Diego American Legion Baseball." This grant will cover registration fees and program expenses related to the American Legion Baseball program.

Art on Wheels of Richmond, VA, was awarded \$5,100 for their project "Therapeutic Arts Programming for Youth." This grant seeks to use art for youth to find their voice, build confidence, and grow.

Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E) of Burtonsville, MD, was awarded \$30,870 for the project "Improving the Mental Welfare of 25,000 Children in Foster Care." This grant seeks to produce and disseminate the W.I.S.E Up! Powerbook for Children in Foster Care. The book helps foster parents answer difficult questions foster kids have.

Culture Creations, Inc. of Wichita, KS, was awarded \$13,000 for their project "Transformational Peer to Peer Mentorship Program Proposal." This grant seeks to create a mentoring program for those youth aging out of the foster care system. Youth will be paired with peer mentors who will help teach life skills and provide guidance transitioning into adulthood.

D.U.E.T (dba DUET Kids) of Savannah, GA, was awarded \$51,450 for their project "Student Teaching Student Initiative." This grant seeks to develop a music mentoring program where high school and college students' mentor younger students in music.

Florida Atlantic University of Boca Raton, FL, was awarded \$6,561 for their project "Pet Dogs, Resilience and Well-Being in Military Adolescents." The grant seeks to study mental health in military adolescents that own and do not own a dog. The American Legion Auxiliary and The Sons of The American Legion support this grant.

Health World Education Ltd. Of Scottsdale, AZ, was awarded \$4,000 for their project "The Horsense Program." This grant will help cover expenses related to a five-weeklong camp where they will teach youth life skills, team building, making better choices, and healthy habits. The American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion support this grant.

Hermansky-Pudlak Syndrome Network of Oyster Bay, NY, was awarded \$17,350 for their project "HPS Kids Camp." This grant will provide a 3-day camp for those children suffering from Hermansky-Pudlak Syndrome (HPS) while parents attend educational sessions so that they may better understand HPS. The American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion support this grant.

Knowledge Point Network of Livingston, TX, was awarded \$28,330 for their project "Operation Lifeskills 365." This grant seeks to develop a web-based platform that will directly service youth by providing them with physical and outdoor activities to teach them essential life skills and coping mechanisms.

National Organization of Motivation & Incentives thru Education for Youth, Inc. (dba NOMIE for Youth) of Shreveport, LA, was awarded \$7,500 for their grant "NOMIE for Youth Fundamental Life Skills Workshop." This grant seeks to conduct in-person and virtual workshops to teach essential life skills and instill positive values in today's youth.

Pittsburgh Penguins Foundation of Pittsburgh, Pa, was awarded \$9,450 for their project "HeadsUP Pittsburgh: Baseline Concussion Testing Partnership." This grant will provide baseline concussion testing and education for athletic youth ages 14 and under. The Sons of The American Legion support this grant.

The American Legion National Headquarters of Indianapolis was awarded \$500,000 for their project "The American Legion Children and Youth National Program-2023." This grant will cover academic scholarships and youth program-related expenses in the following areas: American Legion National Oratorical Contest, Boys Nation, Junior Shooting Sports Program, Baseball, and Eagle Scout of the Year. The grant will also provide grants to the Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) grant program that will provide financial assistance to the minor child(ren) in the home of an eligible veteran or military servicemember to maintain shelter, food, utilities, and clothing. The American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion support this grant.

Youth for Christ Military of Englewood, Co, was awarded \$10,000 for their project YFC Military: Investing in Military Connected Youth through Camp." This grant will provide scholarships for military children to attend a camp.

The American Legion Child Welfare board of directors meeting on May 7, 2023, following members were elected to board positions until Spring 2023: Robert Morrill of New York, president; Peggy Moon of Minnesota, vice president; George C. Lussier, Jr. of Virginia, secretary; and Michael Helm of Nebraska, treasurer. Administrative personnel appointed by the board were Shawn Long, assistant treasurer, and Stacy Cope, executive secretary.

Under the 1969 Tax Reform Act, the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation retains its tax-exempt status. Gifts, therefore, are deductible for federal income tax purposes to the extent permitted by law, and bequests are deductible for federal inheritance tax purposes to the extent permitted by the Federal Tax Act.

AMERICAN LEGION ENDOWMENT FUND CORPORATION
(dba The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation)
Vincent M. Gaughan, Illinois, President

In 1925, World War I veterans, widows, and children struggled to return to a regular life. The members of The American Legion, aware of the vital responsibilities entrusted to them by those who had served, knew the time had come to take action. More than 900,000 Legionnaires, American Legion Auxiliary members, and other American citizens joined the campaign, raising nearly \$5 million and establishing the American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation.

Since those early days, over \$30 million has been distributed to disabled veterans and the children of those who served our great nation. Gifts and donations are added to the endowment trust administered by the American Legion Veterans and Children Foundation. The foundation, whose members are selected by the National Executive Committee of The American Legion, takes great care to ensure that these gifts are wisely invested. Income from fund investments is then passed on to The American Legion national organization to administer programs of Children & Youth (C&Y) and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R), which include funding for the Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program, Department Service Officer school and Board of Veterans Appeals training.

During the calendar year 2022, the American Legion Endowment Fund transferred trust earnings of \$235,807 to The American Legion to support the Children Youth and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation programs. Donations to the American Legion Endowment during this time totaled \$1,239,118*. It is important to note that due to the fund's structure as an endowment, only the earnings on the fund are spent, ensuring that donations will continue to support veterans and their children for generations.

During this program year, the American Legion Endowment Fund continues to bring awareness of its vitally important mission of helping our veterans and their families in this great nation. The increased visibility of the American Legion Veterans and Children Foundation has prompted an increase in media coverage promoting awareness of the TFA grant program offered through the Americanism Commission's Committee on Children and Youth and Veteran Affairs & Rehabilitation programs, which includes department service officer training. The American Legion provides these services to the veteran and their family free of charge. Service officers work on an estimated 750,000 claims worldwide from U.S. military veterans at any one time. The TFA grant program continues to provide financial grants to qualified veterans with a minor child(ren) in the home to cover the child(ren) basic needs when financial hardship is experienced.

At the board of directors meeting on May 9, 2023, the following officers were elected: Hon. Vincent M. Gaughan, president; James Koutz, vice president; and Anthony Jordan, treasurer. Administrative personnel appointed by the board were Shawn Long, assistant treasurer, and Stacy Cope, secretary.

Under the 1969 Tax Reform Act, the American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation retains its tax-exempt status. Gifts, therefore, are deductible for federal income tax purposes to the extent permitted by law, and bequests are deductible for federal inheritance tax purposes to the extent permitted by the Federal Tax Act.

(*subject to final audit).

CONVENTION COMMISSION

Michael E. Walton, Illinois, Chairman
Bridget A. Robinson, CMP, CMM, Georgia, Director

The 103rd annual National Convention of The American Legion convened in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 26 – September 1, 2022. National Commander, Paul E. Dillard of Texas, called the National Convention to order at 8:30AM on Tuesday, August 30, 2022, welcoming Legionnaires to Milwaukee and thanking them for their continuing service to our Country and to our veterans. The 103rd National Convention began with the Opening Ceremony, which included, Rob Jones a USMC Veteran and Paralympian, who addressed nearly 5,000 American Legion Family members on Tuesday morning. Other guest speakers addressing the 103rd National Convention of The American Legion were the LTG Walter Piatt, Director of the Army Staff; CSM Robert M. Patterson, USA (Ret.) Medal of Honor Recipient; The Honorable Denis McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs; The Honorable Ron Johnson, United States Senate; The Honorable Scott Fitzgerald, United States House of Representatives; The Honorable Mary M. Kolar, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs; The Honorable Cavalier Johnson, Mayor of the City of Milwaukee. Also, Chip Ganassi, Jimmie Johnson and Tony Kanaan were in attendance.

There were many highlights during the 2022 National Convention, but three events conducted at the National Convention deserve special mention. On Friday, August 26, the Color Guard Contest took place and were well attended. Four color guards competed in three categories with Newport Harbor Post 291 of Newport Beach, California, being awarded the National Commander Color Guard. Four bands participated in the Competitive Concert Band Contest with Joliet American Legion Band of Joliet, Illinois, being crowned National Champions. There was one Exhibition Band. The Patriotic Memorial Service, featuring the Bel Canto Chorus, was attended by approximately 2,000 American Legion Family members. On Tuesday, August 30, the National Commander's Banquet for Distinguished Guests was held at the Milwaukee Convention Center. The banquet featured local all-genre band known as Front of House as the entertainment and was attended by over 2,300 Legionnaires and guests.

FINANCE COMMISSION

Gaither M. Keener, Jr., North Carolina, Chairman
Shawn T. Long, CPA, Indiana, National Treasurer
Brian Ruiz, Indiana, Corporate Controller

The primary obligation of the Finance Commission is to prepare a yearly budget for the National Executive Committee, handle funds under that budget, and exercise reasonable oversight to see that the various divisions and departments of the national organization operate within appropriations. The Finance Commission includes seven members, with the national adjutant as ex-officio secretary and the national commander and national treasurer as ex-officio members. Also attending these meetings are the executive directors of the Washington and Indianapolis offices, the Corporate Financial Controller, and liaison observers from the National Executive Committee.

The national organization had a net operating deficit of \$9,310,532 for 2022. We received \$18.50 dues per member, allocating \$15.50 to the General Fund and \$3 to The American Legion Magazine. Income of the national organization derives from annual membership dues, interest on investments, magazine advertisements, Emblem Sales, contributions and other approved activities.

A full financial statement is incorporated in the auditor's report, found in the 2022 Annual Report.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION
Robert E. Newman, Indiana, Chairman
Matthew E. Herndon, Indiana, Director

The National Internal Affairs Commission was established by resolution of the National Executive Committee in 1947. The original charge for this constitutional commission still remains: to formulate and recommend policies and to oversee the implementation of adopted policies relating to activities conducted for organizational purposes.

Among those purposes are all those not properly the responsibility of any other national commission, as well as membership strategies, post formation, clerical and records administration for posts and individual members and special projects. The Commission provides guidance and assistance to the National Adjutant on necessary administrative operations. Under the broad interpretation of those purposes not properly the responsibility of other commissions, Internal Affairs oversees awards, constitutional discipline, and commemorative activities. The Commission also monitors legislative and other regulatory activities that potentially affect Legion posts and departments, recommending appropriate courses of action.

The Commission has four standing committees assigned to it for supervision and coordination: American Legion Riders Advisory Committee, National Convention Resolutions Assignment, Constitution and By-Laws, and Membership & Post Activities.

The Internal Affairs Commission also provides guidance for the following programs:

Sons of The American Legion: The Sons of The American Legion (SAL) membership is currently more than 375,563 members worldwide and is at an all-time high. 38 of the 55 detachments (states) finished at 100 percent and 19 achieved 105 percent at or above their annual membership goals. The SAL continues with the "Buddy Check" initiative that reaches out to squadron members and veterans in their communities to check on their health and well-being. It is the SAL a program of The American Legion whose fund raising and volunteer efforts support programs such as the Veteran Children and Youth Foundation (VCF), Veteran Affairs Volunteer Services (VAVS), National Emergency Fund (NEF), the Legacy Scholarship Fund (LSF), Operation Comfort Warrior (OCW) and Child Welfare Foundation (CWF), to name a few.

According to the activity reported through the SALs Consolidated Squadron Reports (CSR), SAL squadrons collectively donated cash and volunteered hours to the following:

- Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation – volunteered over 849,928 hours equaling over \$21,613,669 in direct labor and over \$118,539 in donations.
- **Veterans Education and Employment** - volunteered over 23,496 hours equaling over \$597,503 in direct labor and over \$1,018,260 in donations.
- **Americanism** - volunteered over 434,685 hours equaling over \$11,054,039 in direct labor and over \$2,674,409 in donations.
- **Child Welfare Foundation** - volunteered over 24,148 hours equaling over \$614,083 in labor directly and over \$1,035,309 in donations.

Across all SAL programs, they volunteered 4,987,268 hours equaling over \$126,826,225 in direct labor based on \$25.43 per volunteer hour and donated over \$7,366,547 that went directly to their communities and supported our veterans and their families.

Since 1932, the Sons of The American Legion have continued to be an integral component of The American Legion Family and to our local communities.

The American Legion Riders -- The American Legion Riders (ALR) has organized chapters in over 2,200 American Legion posts and an estimated 122,000 members in 54 departments within 50 states, two U.S. territories, and two foreign countries. The American

Legion Riders are members of the Legion Family, The American Legion, the Sons of The American Legion, and the American Legion Auxiliary. The ALR is organized into chapters sponsored by individual American Legion posts. ALR members are motorcycle enthusiasts who promote motorcycle safety, volunteer their time by supporting their communities, and participate in organized rides that bring awareness to The American Legion and various veteran causes and youth scholarships.

Annually, the national organization and the ALR advisory committee plan and execute one of the country's largest organized motorcycle runs, The American Legion Legacy Run, held the week before the national convention. Riders from all over the country and overseas participate in this five-day, 1,100-mile ride that treks across the countryside of America.

During the multiple stops along the way, donors present donations to The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund. This fund provides needs-based scholarships to children of 9/11 veterans who were either killed in action or assessed with a 50% or higher service-connected disability rating from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Since 2006, the annual Legacy Run has conducted 17 consecutive Legacy Runs, traveled over 23,500 miles, and raised more than \$17 million for The American Legion Legacy Scholarship fund. In 2023 the Legacy Scholarship Fund has been deemed fully funded. The Legacy Run will shift its fundraising efforts to The American Legion's Veterans & Children Foundation (VCF). Back in 2019, when the government shut down, and members of the U.S. Coast Guard were not paid, it was the Temporary Financial Assistance Fund under VCF that paid out over \$1M in grants to enlisted E-5 and below with kids to help bridge the gap until congress voted to resume basic pay for the Coast Guard members. The Riders have always supported the kids of veterans, and VCF falls right in line with their passion.

National Emergency Fund -- Since 1989 the National Emergency Fund has provided over \$10 million in grant assistance to American Legion and Sons of the American Legion (SAL) members and American Legion posts across the nation. From January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2022, The American Legion provided \$261,762 in grant monies to Legion and SAL members and to American Legion posts. During the same period, the National Emergency Fund received donations totaling over \$544,018. This prepares us to support future natural disasters.

Every dollar contributed to the fund is used for providing financial assistance to members of The American Legion family. The grants are to be used for immediate needs – lodging, food, and clothing – and not as a substitute for insurance. In order to qualify, members must have been displaced or evacuated from their primary place of residence and be a member in good standing at the time of loss. Monies to support the administrative costs of maintaining this fund and to conduct fundraising are absorbed through existing budget areas.

The National Emergency Fund is unique, and members know they can turn to The American Legion for immediate financial assistance, without payback. Through the generosity of American Legion and Sons of The American Legion members, the National Emergency Fund will continue to meet the needs of our Legion family in the aftermath of local, state, and natural disasters.

Consolidated Post Reports -- The Consolidated Post Report (CPR) was developed in 1975 to document the various activities a specific post has accomplished during the twelve-month reporting period, July 1st through June 31st. The CPR may be the most important post document submitted each year. The combined information is referenced when the National Commander and others speak to our representatives and validates our ability to testify on behalf of all veterans. An individual post story and impact is amplified when we

speak with a collective voice. During the 2022-2023 reporting year, 67.3% of posts submitted a CPR.

Throughout the reporting year, American Legion post members provided:

- 430,994 volunteer hours provided to our communities
- 100,784 pints of blood donated by 59,835 American Legion members
- 427,467 community service hours at a cost of \$12,585,143
- 143,229 funeral honors performed at a cost of \$2,478,727
- 1,642 American Legion baseball teams sponsored at a cost of \$5,053,093
- 1,919 Scout units sponsored representing 41,610 Scouts at a cost of \$2,002,090
- \$12,714,490 donated to school assisted programs and scholarships
- 2,336 Local Oratorical contestants sponsored at a cost of \$314,829
- 15,994 Boys State Sponsored at a cost of \$54,151,198
- \$711,106 donated to the Temporary Financial Assistance
- \$606,240 donated to the National Emergency Fund
- \$3,569,904 in total donations to Children and Youth activities

The National American Legion College -- National American Legion College (NALC) annually hosts many talented, ambitious Legionnaires at the National Headquarters in Indianapolis for a week of intensive training. They are taught the core values and contributions of the organization and are challenged to think critically and creatively, working as a team in confronting issues and challenges within communities and The American Legion. Upon graduation, the students return to their departments with enhanced knowledge and appreciation for The American Legion. Graduates also stay in contact with each other through social media and networking at National American Legion meetings and events.

Candidates for the NALC are veterans who demonstrate the potential or demonstrate their ability to take on higher leadership roles and responsibilities. Applicants are nominated by their respective departments and ranked by a four-person selection committee comprised of a past national commander who chairs the committee and three NALC graduates, one from the last three graduating classes. Annually the committee reviews and ranks more than 75 applications. The highest-scoring applicants fill the 55 seats available. The remaining applicants are placed on an alternate list based on their overall score and are used to fill vacancies in the event a student cannot attend.

In 2022, The National American Legion College graduated 55 Legionnaires from 38 departments. To date, over 900 active graduates are making a difference in leadership and membership across the country. Many graduates continue to take on various roles by either teaching, training, or mentoring their fellow Legionnaires. They serve in various leadership roles and accept appointments to serve on one of our many commissions & committees at the national and department levels. Graduates are encouraged to utilize their skills and knowledge by coordinating with their fellow graduates to develop training platforms on all levels that benefit and enhance American Legion knowledge and the issues impacting our veterans.

American Legion Training -- American Legion members have access to a range of training opportunities, both online and in-person, designed to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the organization. Encouraging training at all levels is essential for cultivating a well-informed membership base that comprehends the organization's dynamics and the significance of their involvement. The training section on the website offers downloadable materials tailored for local training at district and post levels.

A notable resource is the "Basic Training" online course. It is a self-paced program available to American Legion Family members at no cost. This program is an invaluable asset for those seeking to expand their comprehension of the nation's largest veterans

service organization. Serving as an insightful introductory course, it delves into the organization's history and mission.

"Training Tuesdays" are monthly live webinar events held on the last Tuesday of each month, providing an hour of interactive engagement open to all members. These sessions cover a diverse range of topics relevant to post and district leadership, ensuring members stay informed and well-equipped. During the annual national convention, live training sessions are conducted to engage attendees and encourage members to continue championing The American Legion's mission and values.

This year, a notable addition is the "Be The One" campaign, representing a transformative leap for American Legion members. This initiative focuses on vital aspects like destigmatizing suicide and embracing innovative health approaches.

The "Be The One" initiative breaks down barriers around discussing suicide, enabling members to better identify signs of distress, provide essential support, and facilitate veterans' access to professional assistance. This change in perspective enhances members' awareness and empowers them to actively contribute to veterans' mental health and overall well-being.

In conclusion, "Be The One" significantly elevates the expertise and empathy of American Legion members. By fostering an informed and compassionate community that can address mental health concerns and advocate novel wellness strategies, this initiative reflects The American Legion's steadfast commitment to serving veterans with excellence.

Operation Comfort Warrior (OCW) -- In 2022, Operation Comfort Warriors approved 62 grant requests totaling \$371,927.27 for veterans and organizations serving veterans' needs in 22 different states providing everything from entertainment access and essential mobility devices to critical personal care needs. In 2023 through August 14th, Operation Comfort Warriors has approved 45 grants totaling over \$335,000.

Every dollar contributed to the fund is used to:

- Demonstrate to wounded warriors that those who have come before them will continue to stand by them in their service to our great nation.
- Support individuals and programs that help wounded warriors wherever they are and in whatever stages of recovery they are in.
- Provide items and events that empower wounded warriors and their families to face their difficulties and come out stronger on the other side.

Few programs illustrate The American Legion's commitment to wounded, injured or ill military service members and veterans more than Operation Comfort Warriors. OCW defines a "wounded warrior" as those veterans who have or those service members who are still serving honorably in the U.S. Armed Forces and who have become wounded, injured, or ill. OCW supplements the high-quality care provided at military and Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities and transition units throughout the United States and abroad. OCW was established to provide those "non-essential" items not typically found as a budget line on government spreadsheets.

NATIONAL CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS ASSIGNMENT COMMITTEE

Bruce C. Feuerbach, Iowa, Chairman

The Resolutions Assignment Committee meets at least three days before the convening of the national convention. This committee has the responsibility to receive, consider and transmit all resolutions – with or without recommendation – to the appropriate

convention committee for a report to the convention. During an average year, between 200 and 300 resolutions will be assigned.

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS COMMITTEE

Hon. Vincent M. Gaughan, Illinois, Chairman

The National Constitution and By-laws of The American Legion can only be amended by the duly elected delegates at a national convention.

However, the Constitution & By-Laws Committee, established by the authority of the National Executive Committee in 1939, authorizes this committee to study and make proper recommendations concerning all matters that pertain to the constitution and by-laws, as well as matters relating to the Uniform Code of Procedure for the Organization of National Conventions of The American Legion, which provides rules and regulations for the annual national convention.

MEMBERSHIP & POST ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

Matthew D. Jabaut, Maine, Chairman

Membership and programs go hand in hand to make The American Legion an organization able to provide people and resources to serve the needs of veterans and their families.

The Committee has oversight of the implementation of the recommendations of the 21st Century Relook Committee whose charge was to update the original 21st Century report and chart the path for membership operations over the next 10 to 15 years.

Membership:

Final 2021 membership – 1,694,048

Final 2022 membership – 1,643,532

2023 membership projection – 1,505,000

60th Annual National Membership Workshop -- There were approximately 330 attendees from 52 departments that were assigned to four different groups: Programs and Membership, Member Engagement, Recruitment and Retention, and District Commander. The workshop was a great success, with those telling us via our survey they enjoyed training pertaining to growing and retaining membership at the post level featuring American Legion programs, as well as briefings on Be The One initiative.

The goal of the workshop remained the same as in the past and that is to provide these essential membership workers with the tools, knowledge, and the desire to conduct an effective American Legion membership program. Whether they are involved in membership recruitment or program implementation, the workshop teaches Legionnaires to help veterans and provide communities the essential programs to maintain a quality of life for which all veterans fought and served to preserve.

When the workshop concluded, the attendees were prepared to face day-to-day membership challenges with a better understanding of The American Legion as it relates to matters involving the ability to recruit new members and retain the ones who are already members.

New Post Development/Revitalization -- The Membership & Post Activities Committee developed a training program in January 1996 designed to assist posts, districts, and departments in developing and revitalizing posts. The program provides training workshops to interested volunteers, along with practical, hands-on field application.

The success of the program is evident, based on the many post and district revitalizations and new posts developed in the past 25 years. Many departments have succeeded in revitalizing posts without any direct assistance from National Headquarters staff. Whether departments request field assistance or just send members to the training workshop, positive results follow if they adhere to the guidelines established. All

departments are encouraged to participate in this program. However, success requires a commitment from every level of leadership.

LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

James LaCoursiere, Jr., Connecticut, Chairman

Julia Mathis, Virginia, Director

This report covers the activities of the Legislative Commission from August 26, 2022, through August 26, 2023. During this period, the Commission met one time to review the legislative program and to make recommendations to the National Executive Committee. Reports of these meetings are contained in the published proceedings of the National Executive Committee.

PURPOSE, PERSONNEL, AND ORGANIZATION

The Legislative Commission represents The American Legion before the Congress of the United States on all legislative matters in which The American Legion is officially interested. The Commission also assists the National Executive Committee in formulating an appropriate legislative program for each session of Congress. The Commission consists of 35 members and 5 National Executive Committee liaisons.

To further assist the Commission in its work, the National Executive Committee created the National Legislative Council in 1975, composed of Legionnaires whose judgment and advice are respected by their Members of Congress. There is one council member for each Member of Congress. A Council Chairman heads the Council, and is assisted by a Vice Chairman in each Department. The Chairman, Vice Chairmen, and general membership of the Council are appointed by the National Commander upon recommendation by the Departments.

The professional staff of the Commission (the Legislative Division) concentrates on implementing the legislative mandates of The American Legion; these mandates are expressed in resolutions adopted at the annual National Convention and by the National Executive Committee at each of its regularly scheduled meetings. The Legislative Division is located in Washington, DC, and consists of the director, a senior legislative associate, two legislative associates, a legislative associate/grassroots coordinator, and a legislative coordinator. The director and associates are registered lobbyists and submit semi-annual lobbying reports to Congress; in addition, the Legion submits quarterly reports on legislation which our organization lobbies Congress. Because The American Legion is a federally chartered organization, an annual report is also prepared and submitted to Congress.

118th Congress, 1st Session

The 1st Session of the 118th Congress began on January 3, 2023. In June, Congress passed, and President Joe Biden signed the Fiscal Responsibility Act into law, an agreement extending the federal debt ceiling until 2025. It also holds 2024 federal spending to 2023 levels, allows a 1% increase in 2025, and redirects unspent COVID-19 relief funds. Notably, the act places stricter guidelines on SNAP and TANF recipients and repurposes funds originally meant for IRS audits of high earners.

The agreement comes after months of on-and-off negotiations between the White House and Congressional leaders. U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury) Secretary Janet Yellen warned that, without Congressional action, the U.S. government was likely to default on its debt obligations as soon as June 5, which would cause a potentially catastrophic economic fallout across the country and around the world.

On July 27th, the *FY24 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act* passed the House by a vote of 219-211. This legislation includes a total of \$317.441 billion in funding for the Department of Defense (Military Construction and Family Housing), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and related agencies. Of the total,

\$155.701 billion is provided as discretionary funding, and \$161.740 billion is provided for mandatory programs. Of the discretionary total, \$17.474 billion is for Department of Defense military construction projects, nearly \$800 million above the President's Budget Request. The bill also fully funds the Department of Veterans Affairs for Fiscal Year 2024 by appropriating \$137.755 billion in discretionary funding in addition to the \$20.268 billion included in the *Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023* for the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund. It also includes a total of \$471.7 million for the four related agencies.

Lastly, Congress continues consideration of the *Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)*. In July 2023, the House of Representatives passed its version of the bill by a margin of 219-210. The Senate version also passed by a wide margin of 86-11, but the full chamber has not yet considered it. The Senate will be in recess for all of August and is not likely to pass the bill until later this year. As Congress returns from recess, both chambers of Congress will begin working to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill.

VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION

In October, President Biden signed the *Solid Start Act of 2022*, which permanently authorizes and expands VA's Solid Start Program. The Solid Start Program aims to educate newly separated servicemembers about their benefits, healthcare, and rights by requiring VA to contact veterans three times within the first year of separation.

The American Legion's push to pass the *Major Richard Star Act* continued into the 118th Congress, in order to support the over 50,000 medically retired veterans who are denied their full retirement pay and disability compensation. By August recess, the bill had over 326 cosponsors in the House of Representatives, and 70 cosponsors in the Senate. These numbers exceeded the sponsorships of the previous Congress and can be attributed to a sustained advocacy push from The American Legion, VFW, and other veteran service organizations (VSOs) and military service organizations (MSOs).

On November 16, 2022, the Legislative Division submitted a Statement for the Record (SFR) to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on implementing the *Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT Act of 2022)*. In its SFR, The American Legion focused on implementing Section 804, the *Camp Lejeune Justice Act (CLJA)*. This law provides another means of recourse for veterans and their families by allowing those exposed to toxic water at Camp Lejeune to pursue judicial relief. While the passage of this historic legislation was a watershed moment for the veteran community, bad actors have emerged to take advantage of veterans and their access to new benefits.

The American Legion has long supported the CLJA and was encouraged to see its inclusion in the PACT Act earlier this year. Notwithstanding that support, we are advocating modifying the language to streamline implementation and protect veterans from the actions of unscrupulous actors – and to limit legal fees, eliminate vague, impractical, and unrelated offsets, and ensure that no veteran loses access to healthcare or disability benefit payments.

On December 7, 2022, the Legislative Division submitted an SFR to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs to discuss ensuring the effective implantation of the PACT Act. Again, The American Legion focused on the CLJA portion of the PACT Act and ensuring that veterans and their families are not charged exorbitant fees when pursuing legal action.

In early March, The American Legion participated in a roundtable with Congressional staff, fellow VSOs, and unaccredited claims companies to discuss potential legislation to address the long-standing issue of predatory actors charging veterans to file their claims. This is especially relevant after the passage of the PACT Act, resulting in a significant increase in veterans filing disability claims with VA. The American Legion believes in pursuing legislation to enforce penalties on these unaccredited claims companies. Veterans

should never have to pay money to access the benefits they earned, especially when VA-accredited service officers offer their services free of charge.

On March 29, 2023, Legislative Director Lawrence Montreuil testified at a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) hearing to discuss pending legislation. In his testimony, he discussed the importance of passing H.R. 1139, the *GUARD VA Benefits Act*, which would penalize unaccredited companies for charging veterans to assist them with filing their disability claims. He also voiced The American Legion's support for legislation to expand survivor benefits, decrease the claims backlog, and other important issues.

That same day, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Director Tiffany Ellett testified at a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing to discuss pending legislation. During the hearing, Ellett used her personal experiences to emphasize the importance of VA care by decreasing wait times and expanding access to care. She also noted the importance of improving VA's Caregiver Program and expanding it to cover the care for veterans with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

In early June, The American Legion participated in a roundtable with Congressional staff, fellow VSOs, and various gun control advocacy groups to discuss H.R. 705, the *Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act*. Under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) interpretation of current law, if the VA appoints a fiduciary to help a veteran (or beneficiary) manage their VA benefits, then VA is required to send their name to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). Hundreds of thousands of veterans and their family members have been denied their constitutional right to bear arms because of this practice. The *Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act* would prohibit VA from sending information on veterans (or beneficiaries) who are assisted by a fiduciary to NICS without a judicial ruling that they are a danger to themselves or others. This would ensure that veterans are afforded the same due process that every other American receives before any action is taken that would deprive them of one of the constitutional rights that they fought to protect.

On June 21, 2023, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Director, Tiffany Ellett, testified at a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing to discuss pending legislation. In her testimony, she expressed support for both the *VA Zero Suicide Demonstration Act of 2023* and the *PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act*, noting the Legion's efforts on both fronts. She also shared her own experiences losing friends and loved ones to suicide, why it's so critical to stem this tide in the veteran community and beyond, and how The American Legion is working toward that goal.

On July 12, 2023, Veterans Benefits Policy Analyst, Joshua Hastings, testified at a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing to discuss pending legislation. Specifically, he urged lawmakers to pass H.R. 4278, the *Restore Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability Act*, which amends the U.S. Code to modify personnel action procedures with respect to employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs. This legislation clarifies and reinforces critical authorities initially granted in 2017 and introduces a supremacy clause to close the loopholes revealed in recent court rulings and labor union disputes, thereby reinstating the heightened accountability established by the bipartisan *Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017*.

The American Legion remains focused on veterans who suffered from toxic exposure and are not currently covered by the PACT Act. Servicemembers deployed to the Panama Canal between 1958 and 1999 may have been exposed to frequent use of herbicides such as Agent Purple and Agent Orange, with at least 400 veterans who have developed health conditions synonymous with toxic exposure. In August, The American Legion released a letter of support for the *Panama Canal Zone Veterans Act*, which would grant these veterans the same health care and benefits access as those covered under the PACT Act.

VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

Since September 2022, The American Legion has testified three times before the House of Representatives on veterans employment and education. The National Legislative Division has broadened American Legion advocacy for veterans employment into six separate areas: improving the transition assistance program, expanding the VA Home Loan program, addressing veteran homelessness, financial protections against predatory lenders, prioritizing veterans in federal contracting, and improving the GI Bill.

The American Legion has continued to advocate for the reintroduction of the *Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act*. Due to changes to how the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) calculates the program's costs, this legislation may be significantly more expensive in the 118th session of Congress. This bipartisan legislation would expand eligibility criteria for certain education benefits. Current law defines the term "active duty" as those individuals who are on full-time duty in the active military service of the United States, including full-time training duty, annual training duty, and attendance, while in the active military service, at a school designated as a service school by law or by the Secretary of the military department concerned. While the bill did not pass in the 117th Congress, The American Legion is currently advocating for its reintroduction in the 118th.

On December 14, 2022, Employment & Education Director Joseph Sharpe testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) hearing, "Discussion Draft, the VA Housing Loan Forever Act of 2022." In his testimony, Sharpe expressed support for a servicemember or veteran having the authority to transfer their Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Home Loan Guaranty benefit to family members.

On March 30, 2023, Employment & Education Policy Analyst Matthew Brennan testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity hearing to discuss pending legislation. Brennan voiced The American Legion's support to pass H.R. 1669, the *VET-TEC Authorization Act of 2023*. Originally established as a five-year pilot program in 2017, the Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET-TEC) program has assisted nearly 12,000 veterans seeking careers in high-tech industries. He also offered further support to H.R. 291, the *Vaccine Discharge Parity Act*, which seeks to restore education benefits for service members who received a general discharge under honorable conditions for refusing to receive the COVID-19 Vaccine, and H.R. 291, the *Healthy Foundations for Homeless Veterans Act*, which would permanently authorize the use of certain funds to improve flexibility in the provision of assistance to homeless veterans.

On June 14, 2023, Employment & Education Policy Associate Ricardo Gomez testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity hearing to discuss pending legislation. Gomez voiced The American Legion's support to pass H.R. 491, the *Return Home to Housing Act* which seeks to grant the VA the use of funds to improve flexibility for assisting homeless veterans. In addition, Gomez expressed support for H.R. 3898, the *Transcript Assurance for Our Heroes Act*, which addresses the impact of school closures on veterans, including their access to their academic transcripts in the wake of abrupt school closures.

To ensure the success of future veteran entrepreneurs, The American Legion drafted a coalition letter of support for the *Veterans Entrepreneurship Training Act of 2023*. The *Veteran Entrepreneurship Training Act* seeks to codify the successful Boots to Business program, a training course administered by the Small Business Administration, which teaches veterans and their families the fundamentals of business management, including market research, organizational design, and financial planning. Due to the National Legislative Division's efforts and the tireless efforts of Legionnaires, this pivotal legislation passed the House unanimously by a vote of 411-0. The American Legion is currently working with the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship to secure its passage through the Senate.

NATIONAL SECURITY

In the time period between the 2022 and 2023 National Conventions, the Legislative Division's National Security team has focused on legislation to assist Afghans with temporary status to apply for permanent legal residency and to improve and update the Special Immigrant Visa process for Afghans who served alongside U.S. servicemembers; legislation that would improve naturalization procedures for non-citizens in the Armed Forces and provide protections from deportation for non-citizen veterans; legislation that repeals outdated Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMFs); legislation to improve military quality of life for U.S. servicemembers; and the FY2024 National Defense Authorization Act as a vehicle for Legion legislative priorities. Each of the above is addressed in more detail below. Fourteen bill reviews were completed of legislation that falls within the purview of the National Security Commission.

In March, The American Legion held a press conference to advocate for the repeal of the 1991 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force, or AUMFs. National Security Director Mario Marquez opened the press conference to represent The American Legion's support for this legislation as well as share some personal anecdotes as an Iraq War veteran. He was followed by Sen. Kaine (D-VA) and Sen. Young (R-IN), who are the respective co-leads in the Senate. Later in the month, the Senate voted to pass the legislation, and it now heads to the House of Representatives, where it has garnered strong bipartisan support. The American Legion is now working with Congressional staff to determine the best path forward.

In April, The American Legion co-signed a letter with other Veteran and Military Service Organizations demanding the full restoration of the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for active-duty servicemembers, which was reduced to 95% in 2019. This will strengthen the financial security and wellbeing of active-duty servicemembers and their families, therefore increase overall force readiness.

The American Legion continues to advocate for legislation to assist Afghans with temporary status to apply for permanent legal residency. In the 118th Congress, we are continuing our advocacy efforts with the *Afghan Adjustment Act*, which is modeled after bipartisan bills that Congress has passed in the wake of the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. Specifically, the *Afghan Adjustment Act* would expand eligibility for special immigrant visas to certain Afghan nationals and allow Afghans who have short-term humanitarian parole status to apply for permanent legal status if they submit to additional vetting.

In July, Representative Takano reintroduced the *Veteran Service Recognition Act*. This legislation would streamline the naturalization process for non-citizen servicemembers and veterans, as well as create pathways for deported veterans to reobtain residency status. In the previous Congress, the *Veteran Service Recognition Act* passed the House of Representatives without a single Republican vote, dooming its chance of passage in the Senate. In a positive development, this year the bill was introduced with two Republican co-sponsors: Representative Salazar (R-FL-27) and Delegate Radewagen (R-AS). With the bill obtaining bipartisan status, The American Legion has begun an advocacy campaign to secure more Republican co-sponsors, as well as introduction in the Senate.

In July, the House of Representatives and Senate passed the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which essentially authorizes all Pentagon and National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) weapons, salaries, and support, and outlines the U.S. national security strategy for the year ahead. This year's House-passed and Senate-passed version of the bill was more than 1,300 pages long and authorizes more than \$850 billion for spending on defense programs at the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and other defense-related programs. Among the Legion-supported amendments adopted were ones that:

- Provides for a 5.2 percent pay raise for both military servicemembers and the DOD civilian workforce, and helps lower housing, healthcare, and childcare costs for military families.

- Establishes a comprehensive training, advising, and institutional capacity-building program for the military forces of Taiwan.
- Authorizes improvements to the quality and oversight of military enlisted barracks, including the replacement of substandard barracks.
- Report annually on service member and military family overdoses and related data, including demographic data, substances involved, number of intentional overdoses, whether or not service members were prescribed naloxone before a non-fatal overdose, previous prescriptions, co-morbid mental health diagnoses, previous overdose history, referral to treatment, participation in treatment, history of positive drug tests, analysis of discernible patterns in overdoses, existing and anticipated response efforts, access to treatment, and available treatment programs.
- Feasibility study on the possibility of certain professional credentials held by service members becoming transferrable post-discharge to civilian life.

Congress is set to return in September to deliberate upon the final version of the FY24 NDAA bill during the Conference Committee. The National Legislative Division is working with Congress to ensure the Legion-supported amendments remain in the bill's final version that passes Congress and reaches the president's desk.

AMERICANISM

Representative Steve Womack introduced House Joint Resolution (H.J.Res.) 73 as a constitutional amendment to protect the flag. The legislation was then assigned to the House Judiciary Committee for consideration, which now boasts 7 cosponsors. A Senate companion measure was introduced by Senator Steve Daines on June 14, 2023 (Flag Day) as Senate Joint Resolution (S.J.Res.) 34.

Furthermore, The American Legion is currently working with the office of Rep. Womack on reintroducing the *Flag Code Modernization Act*, which would amend the United States Flag Code to reflect current, accepted patriotic practices. The American Legion passed Resolution No. 19: *Flag Code Amendment* in 2016 to codify these patriotic practices.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

The American Legion has worked with Senator Maggie Hassan (NH) and Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (TX-18) to pass legislation requiring VA to establish a "Buddy Check Week" for the purpose of outreach and education concerning peer wellness checks for veterans.

In December 2022, Congress included the *Support The Resiliency of Our Nation's Great (STRONG) Veterans Act of 2022* in the FY2022 omnibus package. This bill addresses mental health issues by updating training for VA workforce and Veterans Crisis Line staff, implementing pilot programs to examine Veterans Crisis Line facilitation to increase use among high-risk veterans, conducting studies and research on best practices, and providing outreach to veterans regarding mental health resources. It also includes a provision to designate one week each year as "Buddy Check Week" for outreach and education concerning peer wellness checks for veterans.

Since then, the Legislative Division has taken a leading role in these efforts by implementing Buddy Checks with other Legionnaires and veterans. Now, the Department of Veterans Affairs is in the process of implementing its own annual VA Buddy Check Week, after American Legion advocacy. Furthermore, on June 19, 2023, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Director Tiffany Ellett testified to the merits of the Buddy Check Week to a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing on pending legislation.

MARKETING COMMISSION
Paul A. Evenson, South Dakota, Chairman
Mary Jo Dial, Indiana, (ALA), Director

The Marketing Commission of The American Legion strategizes, promotes, and ensures ground-up membership growth, robust organization-wide fundraising, partnership curation and corporate collaboration, brand awareness, and issue elevation. During the 2023 calendar year, The Marketing Commission of The American Legion prioritized three key buckets of its strategic plan: showcasing the value of membership, ending the stigma surrounding veteran mental health, and increasing the positive perception of The American Legion's brand.

Earning The American Legion's 1.6 Million Membership

Despite the nation's decreased veteran population, The American Legion has proudly earned the continued membership of 1.6 million veterans in posts, districts, and departments across the country. To ensure The American Legion continues to earn the trust of its members, The Marketing Commission has successfully built a long-term initiative to define and showcase the value in The American Legion brings to those among its ranks.

To do so, The American Legion continues to increase and elevate the availability of resources provided to legionnaires through a variety of tools, to include partnerships with corporate collaborators, veteran-owned businesses, veteran-friendly employers, and more. In 2023, The Marketing Commission brought forth opportunities adopted by The National Executive Committee of The American Legion:

- **Res. 4 – NEC, May 2023:** Building upon The American Legion's long-standing partnership with United States Automobile Association (USAA) to provide legionnaires access to USAA's top-rated insurance and financial services.
- **Res. 2 – NEC, Aug. 2023:** Establishing a new strategic partnership with Wellcare, a Centene Corporation to provide innovative solutions that complement the benefits veterans receive through their VA healthcare via Medicare.

The Marketing Commission of the American Legion has also provided significant groundwork and inroads to attract new members and engage new audiences within the veteran community that have not historically joined as members. To engage new prospective members, The Marketing Commission embraced innovation with its paid and organic digital channels while working to maximize its successful partnerships with INDYCAR and Chip Ganassi Racing. During the INDYCAR season, The American Legion retooled and refined the significant visibility of its racing partnerships by localizing and personalizing its presence at events.

Be The One: Tackling America's Veteran Mental Health Crisis

Since 1919, The American Legion has been the voice of America's veterans and worked to solve the greatest challenges servicemembers, their families, and the veteran community face – as seen through The American Legion's pivotal role in helping establish the Department of Veterans Affairs, ensuring the GI Bill was signed into law, resources provided for veterans impacted by Agent Orange, passing the PACT Act, and many more meaningful strides in between.

Today, American veterans are facing their greatest battle of all in communities across the country – an estimated 22 veterans lose their battle to suicide each day on American soil. The American Legion launched its greatest feat to date – destigmatizing asking for help, ensuring veterans know it's okay to not be okay, and, ultimately, striving to end veteran suicide through the Be The One initiative. The Marketing Commission of The American

Legion is working diligently with stakeholders across Capitol Hill, across wide-ranging industries, and throughout communities across the country.

With a significant presence at key community and cultural events across the country, The American Legion's Be The One initiative achieved its initial milestone of saving just ONE in 2023. An active duty servicemember came forward to the Legion's Be The One display at an INDYCAR race to ask for help. Similar stories are told at legion posts across the United States. The Marketing Commission is proud of the milestones achieved thus far towards ending the stigma of asking for help and remain focused on changing the conversation surrounding mental health in the veteran community by continuing to raise awareness, educate communities, and foster communities starting within The American Legion family.

During 2023, The Marketing Commission continued its lifesaving prioritization of Be The One by passing hallmark resolutions to change the conversation and encourage veterans to ask for help:

- **Res. 13 – NEC, May 2023:** Formally observing the first day of every month as "Be The One" Day to signal The American Legion's commitment to ending veteran suicide and destigmatizing asking for help.
- **Res. 1 – NEC, July 2023:** Joining a coalition of corporations, foundations, nonprofits, and fellow veteran-focused organizations across the spectrum, The American Legion took a significant step toward expanding its resources and entering the next phase of its Be The One initiative.

The Voice of the American Veteran

Since 1919, The American Legion has ensured the voice of the American veteran is prioritized in the nation's most important conversations. Founded upon the four key pillars of Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth, The American Legion's legacy is derived by the common goal of veterans strengthening America. The Marketing Commission of The American Legion is continuing to embrace and foster community at every level of membership – honoring the veterans who came before, celebrating the historical milestones legionnaires led the way toward, and investing in the voice of the next generation of American veterans is heard.

The Marketing Commission is continuing to partner with leaders across The American Legion to tell the story of the American veteran, establish a face to the veterans comprising all levels of membership, and, most importantly, thanking veterans at events hosted across the country through the mobile marketing unit's presence and present veteran service officer resources. With continued investment in the brand of The American Legion with a wide, yet targeted, series of impactful audiences and in elevating key issues important to veterans on Capitol Hill, veterans are increasingly motivated to become legionnaires and engage in their posts and communities across the country.

The American Legion Legacy

The Marketing Commission remains committed to preserving and continuing to build upon The American Legion's more than 100 years of service and leadership to country – that of veterans strengthening America for generations to come. Guided by long-term strategic plans and objectives to ensure effective, cohesive, and meaningful strides toward innovation, The Marketing Commission of The American Legion has also reached additional operational efficiency and resource prioritization milestones during the 2023 calendar year. A push towards modernization and innovation has also resulted in maintaining the integrity of The American Legion brand, while allowing for movement toward achieving other important objectives down the road.

EMBLEM COMMITTEE
Robert "Bob" K. Burke, Massachusetts, Chairman
Mitchell E. Reed, Indiana (SAL), Director

The American Legion emblem is the exclusive property of the National Headquarters. The sale of the emblem, emblem pins, merchandise carrying the emblem and other items of organizational equipment is the responsibility of the National Headquarters in Indianapolis. The following tables show gross sales, net earnings, etc., for the entire calendar year 2022 and for the first six months of 2023.

January 1 to December 31, 2022
 (12 months)

Gross Sales \$ 14,466,090
 Cost of Goods Sold 8,284,747
 Overhead 3,759,186
 Operating Profit \$ 2,422,157

Total number of 2021 orders processed was 106,185.

January 1 to June 30, 2023
 (6 months)

Gross Sales \$ 9,055,018
 Cost of Goods Sold 4,960,610
 Overhead 2,035,905
 Operating Profit \$ 2,058,503

Total orders processed for first 6 months of 2023 was 64,826.

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
David F. Wallace, Virginia, Chairman
R. Jeffrey Stoffer, Montana (SAL), Director
Henry Howard, Indiana, Deputy Director

The American Legion Media & Communications Commission oversees the majority of print and digital media products and services delivered from National Headquarters, including the monthly magazine, website, podcast, social media channels, e-newsletters, documents, physical displays and more. Division staff members are also called upon to assist leadership, as well as other commissions in the organization, with special projects and initiatives.

In addition to fulfilling obligations for dozens of print and digital media products, Media & Communications staff members are called upon by the commission to promote initiatives of the national commander, volunteer leadership, American Legion departments and other National Headquarters areas. Resolutions passed by the American Legion's National Executive Committee and National Convention are also converted into media elements to inform the organization's various audiences. The Media & Communications Commission also supports and helps coordinate marketing initiatives, charitable giving outreach and corporate relationships.

The flagship of the media program is *The American Legion Magazine*, the nation's most widely circulated veterans magazine, according to an independent audit. With a

circulation of more than 1.5 million households and a monthly readership exceeding 3 million, *The American Legion Magazine* ranks No. 1 in male readership, according to independent researcher GfK MRI. That means male subscribers have read three out of the last four issues more often than male readers of the other nearly 200 U.S. magazines surveyed. Its content is general interest, driven by the organization's main areas of engagement – patriotism, defense, veterans, children and youth, national and international affairs.

The Media & Communications program draws most of its revenue from advertising sales into the magazine while additional revenue comes from the website, e-newsletters, its Tango Alpha Lima podcast and other media products. A \$3 per-member allocation offsets a portion of the magazine's production and distribution cost.

The American Legion Media & Communications Commission's primary responsibilities include:

- **Print.** This category includes *The American Legion Magazine*; The American Legion Annual Report; The American Legion National Convention Guide; the National Commander's Testimony to Congress; brochures and internal documents, along with additional print media as assigned from national leadership; and other specialty products. Additionally, the division fulfills editing and design needs of more than 200 brochures and documents.
- **Web.** The American Legion national website at www.legion.org is the nation's most-visited veterans service organization website and serves as a gateway to virtually all American Legion media products and channels, receiving approximately 600,000 unique monthly visitors, and growing. The website offers news, videos and photography; entry points for transactional engagement through donations, membership and merchandising; entrance to special-interest microsites such as Legiontown USA, where veterans and family members are invited to create and share their own content; and the American Legion Basic Training module. Legion.org is also the gateway to the organization's interactive and transactional platform supporting American Legion Baseball. The American Legion's video portfolio, called LegionTV, houses the organization's current video content in one microsite.
- **E-mail.** The commission oversees delivery of a portfolio of popular e-newsletters, including the American Legion Online Update and Monday Briefing, which reach more than 1 million subscribers two times a week. Other e-newsletters include the monthly digital Dispatch, Flag Alerts, The American Legion Riders, The American Legion Baseball Dugout and Tango Alpha Lima.
- **Social.** The American Legion has a fast-growing network of social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram and Threads. The American Legion's Facebook community is a little over 206,000 followers, and the national Twitter following has more than 117,000 followers. The Legion's Instagram following has grown to more than 21,000, and LinkedIn followers number more than 43,000.
- **Podcast.** The American Legion's Tango Alpha Lima podcast features weekly episodes that typically alternate between a roundtable discussion covering issues of interest to the military community by the co-hosts to interviews with featured guests, along with scheduled special episodes addressing timely topics, such as career transitions or veteran suicide prevention. The number of audio downloads to the podcast has grown from 48,307 in 2021 to 112,499 in 2023.
- **Smartphone apps:** The American Legion Media & Communications Division has produced and developed a portfolio of smartphone mobile apps, including a general American Legion app introduced in 2014 that has generated more than 77,000 downloads; an American Legion World Series app, which has been downloaded more than 17,000 times; along with an annual National Convention

app and a Sons of The American Legion app. The national convention app soared in download numbers in 2023, from 1,293 to 6,272.

- **Speech writing and other functions.** The commission oversees Media & Communications staff support in drafting sample speeches for local use, as well as remarks from the national commander and other top leaders. Also among the functions of this area of work is the crafting of logbooks – or scripts – to guide national conventions, meetings, conferences and other national events.
- **Supporting posts, departments:** The commission directs staff members to work with American Legion departments and posts with media tools and resources to promote various events, programs and activities of The American Legion, including Buddy Check toolkits, videos, posters, flyers and other materials.
- **Physical.** The American Legion Media & Communications Commission directs staff to produce a variety of physical displays, including parade floats, plaques, billboard designs, convention booths, banners, posters and other forms of physical media for the organization.

The goal of this integrated approach to American Legion media is to maximize efficiencies, resources and talents to deliver the organization's message in a well-branded, effective strategy that aims to improve awareness, generate membership, inform visitors, stimulate interactions and ease transactions.

Overall, the media and communications program is built to replicate and represent the values and interests of The American Legion, from the individual member to the local post to the state department to the national headquarters, and beyond.

NATIONAL SECURITY COMMISSION

Matthew J. Shuman, Arizona, Chairman

Mario Marquez, Philippines, Director

This report summarizes the commission's actions since the 103rd National Convention on issues important to the National Executive Committee.

The Commission, the NEC Liaison Team and the Division Staff met virtually on Tuesday 4 October 2022, a quorum was met, and Steven A. Brennan chaired the meeting. The commission discussed our priorities, the progress we are making, and other matters of importance to National Security. We reviewed six resolutions: one held over from the Spring NEC; four referred from the National Convention; and one new resolution from the Department of Michigan.

Resolution No. 14

Subject: Correction of Military Records

Origin: Convention 2022 (CA)

Recommend transferring to the Internal Affairs Commission.

Resolution No. 2

Subject: Policy on Taiwan

Origin: Convention 2022 (AK)

Recommend "Hold for Further Study."

Resolution No. 22

Subject: Clarifying Definition of Incident to Service

Origin: Convention 2022 (CA)

Recommend "Hold for further Study."

Resolution No. 45

Subject: Establish Separate Paramedic/Emergency Medical Technician Award

Origin: Convention 2022 (SD)

Recommend "Hold for Further Study."

Register Resolution No. 2824

Subject: Full Funding of the United States Military

Origin: Department of Michigan DEC

Recommend "Hold for Further Study."

Resolution No. 24

Subject: Revocation of U.S. Military Awards to Russian Military Personnel

Origin: Spring NEC 2022 (National Security Commission)

Recommend "Withdraw"

Since the 2022 national convention, the commission held discussions with various Departments on why their resolutions were rejected at the convention and ways forward (if the Department still feels strong about the issue). When a Department submits a resolution, Chairman Brennan wants to ensure there is closure on the hard work the Department did.

To support the commission, the National Security Division staff worked diligently on various resolutions that were referred for study to the commission. As an example; staff members traveled to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD to conduct research involving the United States Navy and issues surrounding the Correction of Military Records for incidents that occurred during World War II for two incidents: the "Port Chicago Fifty" and the "Philadelphia Fifteen".

During this same period, (which is a high priority for the commission) the staff completed administrative edits on the American Legion's Quality of Life Assessment Program procedural handbook. The handbook, similar to the "System Worth Savings Program" procedural manual, will guide the commission in the execution of quality-of-life assessments we plan to conduct at U.S. military installations across the United States, tentatively beginning during 2023. Additionally, staff continued to compile research and information involving the most common issues that impact military quality of life.

Engaging with the military community is critical to the American Legion's efforts in leading advocacy for quality-of-life matters. On September 27, 2022, Director Marquez attended the North Carolina (NC) Defense Summit in Raleigh, NC, hosted by the NC Military Affairs Commission. During the summit he attended briefs on issues ranging from military construction and privatized housing to discussions involving the best practices when advocating for the military installation community. Events such as this will be key to not only build relationships with those engaged in the military community, but also to maintain currency on the multitude of issues that impact quality of life.

Relations between the American Legion and the Republic of China (Taiwan) date back approximately seven decades, but engagement between the two has significantly increased over the past 5 years when several National Commanders visited Taiwan. The rock-solid relationship was demonstrated during the COVID pandemic in 2020 when National Commander Oxford accepted a donation of 250,000 masks from Ambassador Bi-khim Hsiao at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO) in Washington D.C.

More recently, National Vice Commander (NVC) Paul Kennedy, supported by the Division staff, attended the Taiwan 111th National Day where Representative to the United States Ms. Bi-khim Hsiao and NVC Kennedy exchanged gratitude for the great relationship and support between both organizations.

Our priorities moving forward are: researching resolutions listed on Addendum A and have recommendations for the Spring NEC; continuing development of the Commissions' Quality of Life Program; continuing discussions with key Subject Matter Experts in the

field of National Security so we can have a true group of experts; and reviewing eligibility and criteria for our National Law Enforcement and National Firefighter of the Year Awards (based upon numerous resolutions that were written by Departments).

Conclusion: The National Security Commission (including our seven committees and council) are excited on the progress we are making and how there is more interest in our National Security Pillar. We will continue to work with our National Security "Council" on getting pertinent information to the Departments/District/Counties and Posts. We sincerely appreciate the support this commission is getting and the participation by our Legionnaires. I would also like to thank the National Commander, the National Adjutant and the Washington and Indianapolis Staff for their outstanding support and cooperation during the past year.

**The American Legion National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola
Official Travel to the Pacific December 4-15, 2022**

The American Legion National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola led a delegation on official travel to Hawaii and Okinawa, Japan from December 4-15, 2023. The delegation went to several Pearl harbor attack commemorative events, visited the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, visited with Department of Hawaii and Philippine Legionnaires and conducted office calls with military leaders in Okinawa.

In Hawaii, Commander Troiola attended two ceremonies in remembrance of the attack at Pearl Harbor. Commander Troiola visited Tripler Army Medical Center and the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Headquarters. Commander Troiola also visited the USS Arizona and a wreath laying ceremony at the Punchbowl Cemetery of the Pacific. The delegation then flew to Okinawa, Japan where Commander Troiola met with the Commanding General, III Marine Expeditionary Force and received operational and quality of life briefings. Commander Troiola met with veterans from the Okinawa and South Korea Legion posts as well as the USO and other support organizations. Commander Troiola spent his final days in Okinawa talking to Navy Sailors at White Beach and touring the Marine Corps' Jungle Warfare Training Center.

**ADVANCE REPORT
OF THE
NATIONAL SECURITY COMMISSION
TO THE
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
February 26 – March 1, 2023**

The National Security Commission, chaired by newly appointed Matthew Shuman of Arizona, convened on February 27th during the 63rd Annual Washington Conference at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C. The following report is a summary of this session:

The Commission was honored to welcome National Commander Vincent Troiola. The National Security Commission was honored by his attendance and very appreciative of his participation.

National Commander Troiola shared his enthusiasm and support for National Security's Quality of Life program. He spoke briefly about his visit to Red Hill, Hawaii where he saw firsthand the effect the contaminated water has had on servicemembers and their families. Stressing the importance of quality of life, the Commander closed his remarks with, "How can you focus on the mission abroad if you can't fight the missions at home?"

The program proceeded in the following sections:

Morning:

- Opening remarks and roll call
- Pat McGuigan, Military and Veterans Legislative Assistant, Office of U.S. Senator John Boozman
- The Honorable R. Clarke Cooper, Former Assistant Secretary of State
- Vickie Koutz, American Legion Auxiliary National President

Afternoon:

- Division Legislative Update, Jeff Steele, National Security Policy Analyst, National Security Division
- The Commission reviewed four resolutions
- Business for the good of The American Legion

I. Pat McGuigan, Military and Veterans Legislative Assistant, Office of U.S. Senator John Boozman

Mr. McGuigan opened his remarks by stating that military quality of life is what's most important as a part of national security. He also stressed the importance that volunteers play in advocating for servicemembers and veterans. In an anecdotal example, Mr. McGuigan explained how a volunteer from Mena, Arkansas brought to the attention of Senator Boozman that a certain herbicide used in Thailand by the military should be included in the PACT Act legislation under consideration by Congress. Before the bill's passage, Mr. McGuigan and his colleagues worked to conduct research and ultimately conclude the herbicide use at that location should be listed under the toxic exposure list. In conclusion, Mr. McGuigan reiterated that voices and votes matter.

II. The Honorable R. Clarke Cooper, Former Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs at the US Department of State; Atlantic Council Non-resident Senior Fellow

Secretary Cooper discussed America's role in the world and the navigation of global interests. Cooper argued that the United States has a global role and must prove to be the preferred partner. He states that the world is currently in a state of disruption, with many nations looking to partner with America on matters of defense and security not as an imperative, but as one of several options. He also notes that the NATO alliance is being tested by Russia's aggression in Ukraine, China's growing influence, and the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Cooper argues that the United States must act to restore its position as the world's preferred partner. He calls for the US to take concrete actions to demonstrate its commitment to its allies and partners, such as by providing them with security assistance and supporting their economic growth. He also calls for the US to work to resolve global challenges such as climate change and poverty. Cooper's speech is a call to action for the United States to reassert its global leadership role. He argues that the US must take concrete actions to demonstrate its commitment to its allies and partners, and to work to resolve global challenges. He concluded by saying that the U.S. can offer other nations something a transactional purchase from Russia or China never will: friendship. Noting that security assistance to fellow democratic states like Ukraine is not limitless or burden sharing by treaty allies like NATO states is not only a concept, "looking further into 2023 and at the current Congress, there are leadership affirmations of support for our partners and allies to blunt the narrowminded noise of isolationism, but there will also be fair expectations of shared efforts to address shared adversity."

III. Vickie Koutz, American Legion Auxiliary National President

President Koutz, a strong advocate of POW/MIA outreach, opened her remarks by asking the room to take the time to stop and think about the families who are still waiting for their loved ones to return home. "Those who don't understand what it means, think that

everyone has returned home and is buried in a cemetery," she said. "But that is not the case. Our members have been raising awareness for our nation's prisoners of war and missing in action. (Troops') remains from previous wars are still being found to this day. And those families are getting the closure they so desperately deserve." She implored volunteers to continue to spread awareness of the efforts made by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) who is currently working to identify and retrieve the remains of over 81,000 servicemembers. Last November, President Koutz joined Team Long Road, a pair of veterans who embarked on a cross country endeavor to raise awareness for POW/MIA.

In her closing remarks, she expressed the need of family members to contact DPAA at DPAA.mil to assist in the efforts by providing pictures, DNA, and any supporting documents that can help in identifying our servicemembers.

IV. Division Legislative Update, Jeff Steele, National Security Policy Analyst, National Security Division

Mr. Steele provided a legislative update on the 118th Congress and American Legion legislative priorities with national security implications relevant to the National Security Commission. He mentioned that gridlock will likely complicate the passage of major legislative initiatives in Congress, but there are areas of consensus, particularly in foreign policy and defense, where progress is likely. He also calls attention to three legislative priorities: foreign assistance to Ukraine, the war in Ukraine and issues in the US defense-industrial base, and tensions between China and the US. Mr. Steele stressed the importance of providing for the common defense, maintaining strategic readiness, and confronting Russian aggression, while urging both parties to find common ground on these issues.

V. Resolutions Review & Discussion

Chairman Shuman recognized Chairman Liz Hartman (NC) from the Foreign Relations Committee who introduced **Resolution No. 2: Policy on Taiwan** from the Department of Alaska. Chairman Hartman read the resolve clauses and recommended rejection of the resolution. National Security Staffer Jeff Steele explained the position to reject the resolution is based off advice from conversations between American Legion National Security staff and the Taiwanese embassy who advised that we maintain the status quo and furthermore that the Legion needs to be a voice of constraint. Chairman Hartman made a move to open the floor for debate. There was no debate on the topic. Chairman Hartman made a motion to vote to reject Resolution No. 2. The motion was seconded. Chairman Hartman called for a voice vote in the affirmative "aye" votes. The commission unanimously voted "aye" to reject. There were no "nay" votes. Resolution was recommended for rejection.

Chairman Shuman recognized Chairman Liz Hartman (NC) from the Foreign Relations Committee on **Resolution X: Support of the Afghan War Commission**. Chairman Hartman read the resolve clauses and recommended adoption of the resolution. National Security Staffer Jeff Steele explained that the panel will consist of 14 policy experts and will meet over the course of 4 years to study the entirety of the war in Afghanistan, the Authorization of Use of Military Force (AUMF) and also include the lead up to the war and the pull out in August 2021. Additionally, he explained the Legion's support for the Commission is important because we would like to have Director Marquez testify on the record before the commission. There was no debate on the resolution. Chairman Hartman made a motion to adopt the resolution. The motion was seconded. Chairman Hartman called for a voice vote. The commission unanimously voted "aye" to adopt. There were no nay votes. Resolution was recommended for adoption.

Resolution No. 22: Clarifying Definition of Incident to Service. Chairman Shuman read the resolve clauses then recognized Director Marquez. Director Marquez read from the fact sheet provided by the Department of California. He explained the Feres doctrine places restraints on the Federal Torts Claim Act (FTCA) which states a servicemember cannot

sue the government for injuries sustained during war. He further explained this will unlikely get support from Congress and that by changing the law it could open the door to fraudulent lawsuits against the U.S. military.

Arizona member Hanely asked if this is similar to the Camp Lejeune incident. Legislative Director Montreuil explained they are different and that the FTCA has caps on fees ranging from 22-25% and would not impact those issue areas. Chairman Shuman called for debate on the resolution. There was no debate. Chairman Shuman called for a vote. The commission unanimously voted "aye" to adopt. There were no nay votes. Resolution was recommended for adoption.

Chairman Shuman recognized Chairman Wehrli (FL) of the Homeland Security and Law & Order committee who introduced **Resolution No. 45: Establish Separate Paramedic/Emergency Medical Technician Award**. Chairman Wehrli read the resolve clauses and recommended rejection of the resolution. Chairman Wehrli explained the Firefighter/EMT award was established in 2012 and that EMT's are already eligible for this award. Another factor is that the Finance Commission may not fund the establishment of another award. Chairman Wehrli made a motion to open the floor for debate. The first comment from John Digilio, Jr. (NY) mentioned that stand alone fire departments. Angela Gomon (LA) said that paramedics and EMTs are different from firefighters and that those three entities works together. Sara Tobin (CO) said EMTs have higher training and they are different than a paramedic. Dennis Fitzgerald (GA) voiced support for all three awards. Dave Johnson (IL) said that without private sector medical companies that provide paramedic/EMT services, fire departments would suffer. Chairman Shuman asked that volunteers who support the establish of a separate award get in contact with Chairman Wehrli and show how the award is different than the existing Firefighter/EMT of the Year award. Given the debate, Chairman Shuman made a motion to hold the resolution for further study. The NS Commission voted in favor of holding for further study.

VI. George Wehrli (Florida), Law and Order & Homeland Security Committee Chairman, update on the Regional and National Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter of the Year Awards

On February 27th, 2023, the Law and Order & Homeland Security Committee convened to vote on the annual Law Enforcement Officer and Firefighter of the Year Awards, where it selected the regional winners. The Committee, chaired by Chairman George Wehrli (FL), selected five recipients for each category as follows:

Regional Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Winners for 2023:

- New England Region - Andrew Sheffer of New Hampshire
- Southern Region - Steven Holt of Tennessee
- Central Region - Tyler Dailey of Maryland
- Western Region - Tammy Bozarth of Colorado
- Midwest Region - Audrey Arbuckle of Nebraska

Regional Firefighter of the Year Winners for 2023:

- New England – John DeBisschop III of Connecticut
- Southern Region - Erick Ubiles of Florida
- Central Region - Marcus Collins of Indiana
- Western Region - Anthony Saccente of Oregon
- Midwest Region - Brian Maas of North Dakota

The National winners will be announced at 2023 American Legion National Convention.

VII. Commander's Call National Security Speakers

The National Security Division arranged for and facilitated four national security-related speakers for the Commander's Call on Tuesday, February 28, 2023. Summaries of their remarks follows:

Oksana Markarova, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the United States

Ambassador Markarova thanked The American Legion for their support of Ukraine's resistance efforts against the Russian invasion of her country. The Legion passed Resolution No. 1 in February 2022, which called for continued aid to Ukrainian forces and a peaceful conflict resolution. Markarova praised the Legion's support, including specific help from individual Legionnaires, and stressed that Ukrainians want to live in a free and independent country. She also praised the current and former members of the Ukrainian military who have fought against the invasion. Markarova emphasized that Ukraine will fight until it wins, despite the fear caused by the atrocities committed by Russian forces.

Brigadier General Stephen J. Lightfoot, Director of Capabilities Development Directorate, U.S. Marine Corps

Brigadier General Lightfoot emphasized the importance of recruiting and retaining the best young men and women for the success of the military during The American Legion's Washington Conference. He highlighted the need to provide Marines with what they need to fight and win any mission and sought The American Legion's assistance in engaging with the nation's youth and talking about the benefits of service. BGen Lightfoot also mentioned that less than a quarter of those wanting to enlist actually qualify, and The American Legion can help by providing a spark of motivation to young people. He listed the urgency of modernization and strengthening amphibious capabilities as two pressing needs for the Marines. BGen Lightfoot expects that the next major conflict will not be the USMC vs. China but will be a joint and partnered force bringing the hammer down on those that seek to do the US and its allies harm.

The Honorable Earl Blumenauer, U.S. representative for Oregon's 3rd congressional district

The American Legion is urging Congress to reintroduce and pass the Afghan Adjustment Act, which would grant permanent legal status to Afghan refugees and improve the Special Immigrant Visa process for Afghans who served alongside U.S. servicemembers. Last year, Rep. Blumenauer introduced this bipartisan legislation, which the American Legion supports. Blumenauer thanked the American Legion for their support and emphasized the obligation to those who risked their lives to help Americans. He recalled a moment at an airport with an Afghan interpreter and an American captain, demonstrating the importance of not turning our back on those who put their lives on the line for us.

Matthew Shuman (AZ), Chairman, The American Legion National Security Commission

Chairman Shuman gave remarks regarding the commission's commitment to policies and initiatives that aim to protect the national security of the United States and its citizens. The commission supports a strong national defense and advocates for the well-being and support of military personnel. Legislative advocacy plays a major role in their work, and they have identified three priorities with national security implications for the 118th Congress: ensuring an excellent Military Quality of Life, supporting Afghan allies, and ensuring the Coast Guard is paid during government shutdowns. The commission urges Congress to pass legislation to address these priorities.

VIII. Other Washington Conference Associated Activities

The National Security Division helped plan, facilitate, and staff the ANAVICUS breakfast and related wreath laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. National Security Staff assisted the Legislative Division with escort duties for assigned Commander's Call guest speakers. National Security Staff also assisted the Legislative Division with activities associated with National Commander's testimony before the Joint House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing as well as attending the hearing.

REPORT OF NATIONAL SECURITY COMMISSION TO THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MAY 10-11, 2023

The 63rd Annual Washington Conference was addressed in our Advanced Report. After Washington Conference, the National Security Commission, its seven committees, and the Council continued to stay updated on issues involving the national security portfolio. The National Security Resolution Screening Committee and Commission met on Wednesday, April 26, and Monday, May 1, respectively, to review resolutions to be brought forward to the National Executive Committee for consideration.

National Security Resolution Screening Committee

- Matthew Shuman (AZ), Committee Chairman
- James Grenier Jr (VA)
- Devell Durham Jr. (NC)
- Gary Walker (WA)
- Elizabeth Hartman (NC)
- Theresa L. Pucket (VA)
- Richard Keiser (NY)

The National Security Resolution Screening Committee reviewed and provided recommendations on the following resolutions:

- **Register Resolution 2824:** *Support Full Funding of All Branches of the Military, to Include National Guard and the Reserve Forces - Receive & Record*
- **Resolution 2829:** *Expand the Reduced Retirement Age for Reserve Component Servicemembers - Approve*
- **Resolution 2831:** *U.S. Border Patrol and National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year – Receive & Record*
- **Resolution 2837:** *Department of Defense Budget – Approve*

Additionally, the Committee was briefed by staff and reviewed resolutions which were heard by the commission during Washington Conference.

- **Resolution No. 2: Policy on Taiwan** - The commission unanimously voted "aye" to reject. There were no nay votes. The NS Commission voted to reject.
- **Resolution No. 22: Clarifying Definition of Incident to Service** - The commission unanimously voted "aye" to adopt. There were no nay votes. The resolution was recommended for adoption.
- **Resolution No. 45: Establish Separate Paramedic/Emergency Medical Technician Award** - The NS Commission voted to recommend hold for further study.
- **Resolution X: Support of the Afghan War Commission** - The commission unanimously voted "aye" to adopt. There were no nay votes. The resolution was recommended for adoption.

National Security Commission Meeting

Presiding was Chairman Matthew Shuman (AZ)

Vice-Chairman: Kenneth Trumbull (IL)

The Committee Chairman present included: James Grenier Jr (VA), Thomas Schottenbauer (MN), William Flanagan (IL), George Wehrli (FL), Elizabeth Hartman (NC), and 18 Commission members.

RESOLUTIONS

Commission Chairman Matthew Shuman (AZ) led a discussion on the following resolutions to make recommendations to the Spring 2023 National Executive Committee:

Title: Clarifying Definition of Incident to Service

Origin: Resolution No. 22 (CA) 2022 National Convention

National Security Commission recommendation: The Commission moved and seconded to present this resolution to the 2023 Spring National Executive Committee for consideration. Motion carried.

Title: Expand The Reduced Retirement Age For Reserve Component Servicemembers

Origin: Register Resolution No. 2829 (IN) DEC

National Security Commission recommendation: The Commission moved and seconded to present this resolution to the 2023 Spring National Executive Committee for consideration. Motion carried.

Title: Department of Defense Budget

Origin: Register Resolution No. 2837 (MI) DEC

National Security Commission recommendation: The Commission moved and seconded to present this resolution to the 2023 Spring National Executive Committee for consideration. Motion carried.

Title: Afghanistan War Commission

Origin: National Security Commission

National Security Commission recommendation: The Commission moved and seconded to present this resolution to the 2023 Spring National Executive Committee for consideration. Motion carried.

Key Commission Updates:

Military Quality of Life's Base Assessment and Servicemembers Experience (BASE) Program

Since Washington Conference, the National Security Commission has made progress in formulating the BASE Program founding documentation. To start, we have created a BASE Program pamphlet that has been reviewed by Legion leadership and is being printed for distribution at the Spring NEC meeting. Additionally, we have drafted the BASE program guidebook, which contains the necessary information on how to conduct a BASE visit. Intended for internal American Legion Staff use, the finished product will inform current and new staff on how to perform a BASE visit from the ground up, including preparation, execution, and follow on reports. The National Security Division has also drafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for each military branch that guides the responsibilities of both The American Legion and the service branch. The MOU is

currently in the process of being reviewed by our National Judge Advocate. Once approved, they will be reviewed by the respective military branches for signatures.

The National Security Division has created site selection criteria document that outlines six different metrics to consider when choosing an installation to visit. In coordination with military department leadership, we have drafted site selections for 2023, which will include three to four base visits: one remote location, one urban/large city location, and one or two bases in rural/suburban. To accompany the short list of 2023 base visits, we have put together a more extensive list of 10 installations that include each military branch (and Coast Guard), including locations that senior military leaders recommended.

In preparation for informing our base installation visits, the staff has written research papers on various topics, including military healthcare, housing, recruitment and retention, childcare, and food insecurity. These research papers are crucial to giving the staff and future Department-level participants a full-understanding of the current quality of life challenges, so that we can ask the right questions when visiting installations.

The National Security Commission and Division will continue research to capture the impact that quality of life issues continue to have on the readiness and combat effectiveness of our military. Staff will continue building the research and data in the military quality of life portfolio with the intent of testifying on appropriate matters when the opportunity arises during 2023.

Efforts in supporting our Afghan Allies

In the U.S. military, there is a code: "No one left behind." For two decades, members of the U.S. Armed Forces fought shoulder-to-shoulder with brave Afghan allies who served with and protected Americans, fighting for the freedom of Afghanistan and its people. The United States must honor its promises and provide genuine, lasting protection for the Afghans who have made it safely to the United States and those who were left behind. The American Legion urges Congress to reintroduce and pass legislation granting permanent legal status to Afghan refugees and improving the Special Immigrant Visa process for Afghans who served alongside U.S. servicemembers. National Security staff remain engaged in the advocacy and reintroduction of updated legislation to address this important matter.

Iraq AUMF Repeal Advocacy and Press Conference

On March 29, 2023, the US Senate passed Legion-supported legislation to repeal the 1991 and 2002 Iraq Authorizations for the Use of Military Force (AUMFs). Before the final vote, The American Legion held a press conference on Capitol Hill with Senators Todd Young of Indiana and Tim Kaine of Virginia, who led the bipartisan effort. Leading the press conference was American Legion National Security Director Mario Marquez, who served four combat tours in Iraq. The bill goes next to the House of Representatives, which has passed similar legislation several times in recent years.

2023 marks the 20th anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The conflict was declared over in 2011, but the law that authorized it is still on the books, as is the one authorizing the Persian Gulf War, the 1990–1991 campaign in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Repealing the Iraq War AUMFs is an important step toward rebalancing the division of constitutional war powers between an executive branch that has often usurped Congress's war powers and a legislative branch that has all too often ceded them. It is also a way to honor the service and sacrifices of our brave servicemembers who fought and died in these wars.

Legislative updates

The legislative focus of the National Security Division in the 118th Congress, which convened on January 3, 2023, has been along two tracks: development of national security

legislative priorities for the current Congress, bill reviews relevant to the national security portfolio. Each is addressed below.

National Security Legislative Priorities

Two National Security priorities are included in the Legion's main legislative agenda for the first session of the 118th Congress:

1. **Military Quality of Life**

The U.S. military's greatest resources are individual servicemembers and their families. Without highly qualified and committed men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrent necessary to defend our nation. Factors contributing to the quality of life include proper compensation, career development, appropriate housing, quality healthcare, reasonably priced commissaries, and access to affordable daycare. The American Legion urges Congress to pass legislation that would increase access to childcare for military families, increase appropriations to address matters involving servicemember food insecurity, and increase funding to renovate military housing.

2. **Pay the Coast Guard**

U.S. Coast Guard personnel carry out vital national security missions. Still, they are the only U.S. branch of the Armed Forces that works without pay during government shutdowns due to their status under the Department of Homeland Security. The common threat of government shutdowns brings severe and unnecessary hardship on these men, women, and their families. The American Legion urges Congress to reintroduce and pass the *Unwavering Support for Our Coast Guard Act*, which would guarantee that Coast Guard personnel are paid without delay, even in the case of a government shutdown.

Bill reviews

- **H.R.2537 - BAH Restoration Act**
The bill would mandate that the Department of Defense restore the full basic housing allowance (BAH) benefit from covering 95% to 100% of housing costs and increase access to affordable housing, on and off base.
Legion position: Recommended Support
- **S. 497 – Military Family Nutrition Access Act**
This bill aims to reduce hunger in the military by amending the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 and directing the U.S. Department of Agriculture to exclude Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) when calculating Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility for military members and their families.
Legion position: Recommended Support
- **S. XX – Military Housing Readiness Council Act**
This bill would amend Title 10, United States Code, to create a Department of Defense Military Housing Readiness Council. The Council would comprise various interested parties such as representatives of the armed services, spouses, and MSO/VSO groups. These members would be mandated to conduct oversight of military housing, collect public complaints, and report their work to Congress.
Legion position: Recommended Support
- **H.R. XX – Jax Act**
This bill provides service credit for military members that served in female Cultural Support Teams (CST) in Afghanistan and Iraq between 2010 and 2021. CSTs were female soldiers who supported Army Special Operations combat forces with the primary task of engaging the female population in an area when it was deemed culturally inappropriate if performed by male counterparts.

Legion position: Under review

**The American Legion National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola
Official Travel to Europe June 1-15, 2023**

The American Legion National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola led a delegation on official travel to France, Belgium, and Germany from June 1-15, 2023. The delegation went to Normandy to honor World War II heroes, engaged with NATO leadership in Brussels, and visited U.S. military bases in Germany.

In Normandy, Commander Troiola paid homage, in ceremonies commemorating the 79th D-Day anniversary, to combat officers who led U.S. troops in the World War II liberation of Normandy, France. He did so in the company of multiple U.S. officers leading America's military today, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley. In Brussels, Belgium, the delegation met with NATO officials to discuss the rapidly evolving security challenges in Europe and how The American Legion can support those efforts. In Germany, the delegation made visits to military bases to take a first-hand look at how U.S. servicemembers and their families are being supported.

**VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION COMMISSION
Autrey B. James, California, Chairman
Tiffany Ellett, Virginia, Director**

National Convention
August 2022
Milwaukee, WI

Resolution Number	Title	Origin
6	Increase Cancer Screenings by the VA	MT
9	Burial Allowance Following Hospice Care	MI
11	Value of Lay Evidence	VA
31	Care in the Community Eligibility for Cancelled Appointments	MN
32	Behavioral Health Autopsy Program Updates	MN
33	Disability Rating Criteria	MN
43	Expedite Burial Eligibility Verification	TX
54	Expansion of Eligibility for Pension Benefits from the VA	OH
64	Codification of The VA Solid Start Program	IL

National Executive Committee Meeting
October 2022
Indianapolis, IN

Resolution Number	Title	Origin
12	Implementation of the MISSION Act	NY
13	Redefine "Child" in Title 38, Code of Federal Regulations	DE
14	Access to Care	VA&R
15	Oversight of Camp Lejeune Justice Act	VA&R
16	Furthering Research Pertaining to Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTC), and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	VA&R
17	Improvement of the Travel Claims Process	VA&R
18	Mental Health Programs for Justice-Involved Veterans	VA&R

Resolution Number	Title	Origin
19	Physician-led Health-Care Teams	VA&R
20	National Standards of Practice	VA&R
21	Amend the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act	VA&R

National Executive Committee Meeting
May 2023
Indianapolis, IN

Resolution Number	Title	Origin
14	Electronic Health Record	VA&R
15	VA Appointment Notifications	PA
16	Eliminate Two-Year Time Limit for Applications for Nonservice-Connected Burial Allowances	PA
18	Written Informed Consent	VA&R
19	Protection of Veterans' Disability & Compensations	VA&R
20	Veterans' Whole Health	VA&R

Commission/Committee Meetings

VA&R Commission Meetings

Members of the VA&R Commission held three meetings during this program year. On August 27, 2022, the Commission met during the 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. On February 26th, 2023 the Commission met in conjunction with the 63rd Annual Washington Conference. Lastly, the VA&R Commission met on May 1st, 2023.

At the first annual meeting during the 103rd National Convention, the VA&R Commission held its meeting in Milwaukee Wisconsin on Saturday, August 27, 2022. The following officials addressed the Commission: Dr. Paul R. Lawrence, Under Secretary for Benefits, Veterans Benefits Administration, U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); Dr. Linda Torres, Health Advisor to the Under Secretary for Health, Veterans Health Administration (VHA), VA; Lee Becker, Chief of Staff, Veteran Experience Office, VA; Dr. Jennifer MacDonald, VA Mission Act Lead, VA; Dr. Kameron Matthews, Deputy Under Secretary for Health & Community Care, VA; and Randy C. Reeves, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Administration.

The second annual meeting for the VA&R Commission was held during the 2023 Washington Conference at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C. on Saturday, February 26, 2023. The following officials addressed the Commission: The Honorable Matthew Quinn, Undersecretary for Memorial Affairs, Department of Veteran Affairs; Alfred Montoya, Acting Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Support Services, VHA, VA; The Honorable Jaime Areizaga-Soto, Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals, VA; and Dr. Shereef Elnahal, Undersecretary for Health, VHA, VA. The third and final annual meeting was held virtually on May 1st, 2023 to discuss VA&R Commission business prior to the spring National Executive Committee meeting held the same month.

Health Administration Committee Meetings

Members of the Health Administration Committee met twice during this program year. The first meeting was held on August 27, 2022, during the 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where Dr. Linda Torres, Health Advisor the Under Secretary for Health spoke about National Standards of Practice and developments that VA is making for 50 healthcare occupations. The VA's new standards of practice sets a standard for a

medical provider to practice in VA which may differ from the standard of practice permitted by state licensure.

Members met again during the 63rd Annual Washington Conference on February 26, 2023, in Washington D.C. Dr. Kenneth Kizer, MD from the American Academy of Ophthalmology, discussed the threat of patient safety for veterans who receive eye surgery in the VA from medical providers that are not trained medical doctors. Optometrists do not receive the same surgical training as ophthalmologists and only a few states allow optometrists to perform invasive procedures. Lastly, Dr. Paul Limburg from EXACT Sciences gave a presentation about new and improved ways of detecting cancer early on. There are many noninvasive ways to detect and screen for cancer and provide treatable solutions for early-stage detection.

National Cemetery Committee Meetings

Members of the National Cemetery Committee met twice during this program year. The first meeting was held on August 27, 2022, during the 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The second meeting took place in conjunction with the 63rd Annual Washington Conference on February 26, 2023.

The first meeting was held in the Wisconsin Center, Room 102, Sections C-D, First Floor where the committee was addressed by Mr. Jay Dalrymple, Director for the National Cemetery Scheduling Office and the Deputy Director for Field Programs, National Cemetery Administration, VA. The second meeting was held at the Washington Hilton, Lincoln West room, Terrace Level where the committee was addressed by Mr. Robert Dalessandro, Deputy Secretary, American Battle Monument Commission.

TBI/PTSD Committee Meetings

Members of the TBI/PTSD Suicide Prevention Committee met twice during this program year. The first meeting was held on Aug 26, 2022, during the 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where Alex Silva from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) discussed how its organization is the world's largest funding source of suicide prevention research and how it provides ongoing free education and loss supports throughout both American cities and internationally abroad overseas. Lastly, AFSP touted how its city-wide Out of-the-Darkness community walks campaign brings awareness of and addresses the stigma of seeking mental health supports.

Members met again during the 63rd Annual Washington Conference on February 26, 2023 in Washington D.C., where Mrs. Donna-Marie Drucker, of the Oregon Firearm Safety Coalition, discussed preventing military firearm suicides through voluntary community-led strategies to enhance evidence-based or practiced-based approaches to change the conversation with community stakeholders. She discussed various community grants available to curb veteran suicides and encouraged for more funding for alternative offsite storage options and the need to advocate for Safer Harbor and gun sitting policies at the state and federal levels.

Veterans Benefits Committee Meetings

Members of the Veterans Benefits Committee met twice during this program year. The first meeting was held on August 27, 2022, during the 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The second meeting took place in conjunction with the 63rd Annual Washington Conference on February 27, 2023.

At the first annual meeting, during the 103rd National Convention, the VA&R Commission was addressed by the following officials addressed the Committee: Paul Sullivan, Director of Veteran Outreach at Bergmann and Moore, and Forrest Gibbes, Executive Director of Grace Rose Health Consultants.

The second annual meeting was held at the Washington Hilton, Lincoln East & Monroe, Concourse Level, on Monday, February 27, 2023. The following officials addressed the Commission: Barbara C. Morton, Deputy Chief Veterans Experience Officer

at the VA, and Jeanine M. Gilson, Acting Senior Advisor for Strategic Initiatives at the Veterans Benefits Administration.

Awards

William F. Lenker National Service Trophy

National Executive Committee 2006, Resolution No. 2, Revised Rules Governing the Award of The William F. Lenker National Service Trophy, established the current rules governing the National Service Trophy. This award is to be presented annually to the Department of The American Legion that excelled in the welfare and rehabilitation work for war veterans and their dependents. At the 103rd National Convention, in Milwaukee WI, The Department of Oregon received the award for 2022.

VA Health-Care Provider and Physician of the Year

National Executive Committee 2017, Resolution No. 7, *VA Health-care Provider of the Year*, and Resolution No. 8, *VA Physician of the Year*, established the awards presented by The American Legion. These awards recognize the contributions VA health-care providers and physicians have to the veterans they serve. At the 2023 Washington Conference, Physician’s Assistant Gobin Tarchand, Minneapolis VA Health Care System, and Dr. Patricia Dickmann, Minneapolis VA Health Care System, received the awards for 2022, respectively.

VA Voluntary Service Award

National Executive Committee 2015, Resolution No. 21, *Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Award*, established the award presented by National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission. This award is presented to the outstanding volunteer hospital worker from the department of the National Commander at the Washington Conference. Due to most VA Health Care facilities still not being fully open to volunteers, no award was presented for 2022.

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division

Vision Statement

To ensure that all veterans have access to the complete range of services they have earned through their honorable service, and to guarantee that the services they receive is of the highest possible quality, delivered by public servants who honor and respect the veterans who have guaranteed their right to live in a free and secure society.

Mission Statement

To assist all veterans either personally, or through our network of service officers, departments, posts, stakeholders, federal partners, or any other service that is empowered to assist, and to support the VA&R Commission by following our guiding resolutions, our outline of authorizations, our bylaws, and our charter.

Who We Serve

We serve veterans and their families directly or indirectly through the VA&R Commission, its committees, and subcommittees.

Our Services

We assist veterans with:

- Access to high quality and timely healthcare through the VA
- Processing service-connected disability claims and appeals
- Certifying, training, and tracking American Legion accredited service officers

- Assisting with representation before Veteran Law Judges, Veteran Law Courts, Decision Review Officers located at VA Regional Offices
- Coordinating and organizing VA volunteer hours
- Access to debt management services when resulting from VA overpayments
- Assistance and representation before Military Evaluation Boards, Military Discharge Review Boards and Physical Evaluation Boards
- Access to combat veteran pensions for indigent veterans
- Assistance with insurance and pension programs through the VA
- Assistance with mortuary affairs provided by VA
- Onsite representation and site visits at VA Medical Centers and Regional Offices around the country and abroad

Additional Duties

While our primary duties involve direct veteran representation, the VA&R Division supports the VA&R Commission and its Committees administratively at all meetings and gatherings of The American Legion to include National Executive Committee meetings, National Convention, Washington Conference, and as required.

The Division staff also participate in congressional research and testimony; evaluation of policy in relation to veteran law; attendance at professional briefings, seminars, workgroups, and similar types of sessions at both the national and local level.

We conduct regular visits to VA medical facilities and Regional Offices to analyze their strengths and weaknesses. And we host two resident service officer training courses annually, that teach and refresh a range of advanced skills for claims processors.

The Division director oversees and manages a contractual relationship with the law firm Bergmann and Moore, LLC, the foremost authority of veterans’ law in the nation. Services range from training to legal representation of our veteran claimants, to amicus and Supreme Court briefs written and submitted on behalf of The American Legion.

Core Values

- To be well informed – Assist and educate our members and the VA&R Commission on the latest and most relevant information regarding the large portfolio of services we provide.
- To be well spoken – Speak professionally by reflecting the voice and intent of our members.
- To be well mannered – Appropriately represent The American Legion from the highest levels of government to the general public.

Personnel and Organization
National Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

Director	1
Deputy Director for Benefits & Claims Services	1
Deputy Director for Health Policy	1
Veterans Programs Manager	1
Benefits Policy Analysts	2
Health Policy Analysts	5
Claims Service Coordinator	3
Administrative Assistant	1
VA Board of Veterans Appeals, Washington D.C.	
Team Lead, BVA	1
Disability Claims Specialist	8

John H. Geiger Operations Center, Indianapolis, IN	
Team Lead, BVA	1
Veteran Service Officers	2
Disability Claims Specialist	9
VA Regional Office, St. Paul, MN	
Team Lead, PMC	1
Veteran Benefits Specialist	2
VA Regional Office, Philadelphia, PA	
Veteran Benefits Specialist	1
	<i>Total</i>
<i>VA&R Division Staff</i>	<i>40</i>

Legislative Activities

The VA&R Division staff participated in a total of eleven (4) hearings:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Committee/Subcommittee</u>	<u>Testimony</u>	<u>Subject</u>
29-Sep-22	House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health	SFR	Veteran Suicide Prevention: Capitalizing on What Works and Increasing Innovative Approaches
29-Mar-23	House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health	Tiffany Ellett	Pending Legislation
19-Apr-23	House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations	SFR	Pending Legislation
21-Jun-23	House Veterans Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health	Tiffany Ellett	Pending Legislation

Informational Services and Distribution

The American Legion has several pamphlets and brochures available upon request to veterans and organizations in need. The VA&R Division offers the following publications:

- *2015 Report on Veterans Benefits Centers & Special Purpose Visits*
- *2017 Report on System Worth Saving*
- *2018 System Worth Saving Executive Report*
- *2019 Mental Health Survey Executive Report*
- *System Worth Savings Executive Report*
- *Gulf War Era Benefits & Programs*
- *Know your Benefits*
- *Longman-Gordon Report – VA Healthcare: A System Worth Saving*
- *Missing In America Project Brochure*
- *Post Service Officer Guide*
- *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*

- *Service Officer Code of Procedure*
- *The Road Home – Treatment of TBI and PTSD*
- *The War Within – Treatment of Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress*
- *Veterans Affairs Service Brochure*
- *Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Handbook*
- *What To Do before a Veteran Dies*
- *What you can to help prevent veteran suicide*

Claims Services

The Claims Services staff improves the quality of veterans' lives through representation of veterans seeking, or appealing, claims for disability benefits and ensuring a fair and thorough claims development through collaboration with VA Regional Offices (VARO) and the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

The VA implemented the Appeals Modernization Act (AMA) of 2017. The AMA was signed into law Aug. 23, 2017. Under the act, Veterans will now have three options for claims and appeals: (1) supplemental claim; (2) higher-level review; or (3) direct appeals to the Board of Veterans' Appeals. All decision reviews submitted after February 2019 fell under the new system. Under the AMA, VA's goal is to complete supplemental claims and higher-level reviews averaging 125 days. Decisions appealed to the Board under its direct docket will average 365 days. Under the legacy process, appeal resolutions averaged three to seven years. The new law: modernizes the current claims and appeals process, includes three review options for disagreements with decisions, requires improved notification of VA decisions, provides earlier claim resolution, ensures you receive the earliest effective date possible, and preserves the opportunity for an in-person hearing.

On August 10, 2022, President Biden signed the Honoring Our PACT Act (PACT Act) into law. The legislation expands VA's healthcare treatment and benefits to veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. VA&R has seen an increase in, and backlog of, PACT Act-related claim emails and phone call inquiries and request for assistance. VA&R Claims Services recognizes that the VA, Veteran Service Organizations and County Veteran Service Offices across the United States were not prepared for the volume of PACT Act-related claims and inquiries that have been generated.

Legion National Headquarters has two Veteran Service Officer (VSO) located in the Washington, D.C. and Indianapolis, Indiana offices to respond to the increasing volume of PACT Act inquiries. The National VSO's priority is to ensure veterans are referred to their local VSO for assistance with their claim and benefit support. The National VSO had determined that the Office of General Counsel (OGC) Accredited Veteran Service Officer List for the American Legion is not current and that County Veteran Service Offices (CVSO) in some areas are understaffed or have inexperienced VSOs which causes an increase in calls to the National VSO. VA&R is working with the Department Adjutants and Department Service Officers (DSO) to update the OGC list of current VSOs accredited under the American Legion accreditation process and to determine where voids have occurred.

Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA)

Veterans Disability Claims Specialists primarily represent appellants before the BVA. They review VA electronic claims files, interview veterans and surviving spouses in preparation for in-person or virtual hearings, write informal hearing presentations (IHPs), and act as counsel on behalf of appellants at their BVA hearings. In addition, claims specialists engage in the critical function of providing assistance to claimants requesting help with claim issues.

During this program year, The American Legion's Board (BVA) Unit prepared over 12,500 informal hearing presentations (IHPs) for a monthly average of about 1,046. In

addition, Veterans Disability Claims Specialists assisted veterans with a total of 156 hearings before a Veterans Law Judge. For the 10,839 appeals that received BVA dispositions, over 30 percent were granted, almost 49 percent were remanded to the agency of original jurisdiction for further development, and only 16.5 percent were denied. For BVA appeals decided during the program year resulting in favorable decisions following submission of an American Legion IHP, we have documented retroactive payments of over \$66,000,000.

As of June 30, 2023, there were 270 legacy cases and 326 AMA cases assigned to the Legion's Board Unit (18 claims specialists, 2 team leaders and 2 administrative staff).

The American Legion has again found that some VAROs fail to develop veterans' claims adequately and deny them without sufficient cause. We note that at BVA lay evidence is routinely given proper consideration, often leading to a favorable decision. However, VARO Rating Veterans Service Representatives rarely rely on lay evidence in making rating decisions. The VBA's lack of proper claim development and general unwillingness to give appropriate probative value to lay evidence results in further adjudication of those claims, thus extending the time appellants must wait before final decisions are made.

Through continuous professional training and thorough knowledge of VA laws and regulations, American Legion staff achieve more favorable outcomes in their advocacy efforts. The Legion's legal and training partner, Bergmann & Moore, LLC, provides critical training to new claims specialists so they may successfully represent appellants. Additionally, Bergmann & Moore's legal team provides unit and individual training that covers significant changes to federal law or regulations, and recent Court decisions that have an effect on veterans' law as well as refresher training on key topics.

Regional Office Action Review (ROAR)

After a pandemic-induced hiatus of nearly three years, The American Legion's ROAR program resumed operations, making site visits to VA regional offices (VAROs) in Columbia, South Carolina (9-10 August 2022; New York City (6-7 December 2022); Sacramento, California (7-8 March 2023) and Montgomery, Alabama (18-19 April 2023).

Before each VARO visit, the VA&R Division requested and received the VA claim numbers for about 50 disability claims that had been recently completed by the office's claims adjudicators. These files were analyzed for proper development and adjudication by attorneys from the law firm Bergmann & Moore, LLC. Results of the analyses were submitted to the division and shared with VARO leadership.

Pre-visit questionnaires were sent to regional office directors, which were completed, returned and reviewed by the division's deputy director of benefits and claims. Topics covered in the questions included 1) numbers of VA disability claims adjudicated and still pending during FY 22, 2) top three categories of errors made by veterans service representatives (VSRs) and rating veterans service representatives (RVSRs), 3) how well staff has adjusted to the National Work Queue and how the NWQ can be improved, 4) average years of experience for VSRs and RVSRs, and how long it takes to train them properly, 5) VBA's national STAR program and its degree of success in quality review, 6) types and frequency of training for claims adjudicators, 7) how claims are reviewed internally for quality of work, 8) average number of days that claims were pending, and 9) plans to improve training and quality review.

During the one and a half days for each site visit, the ROAR team conducted interviews with about 14-15 VARO staff – from the director and Veterans Service Center manager to VSRs, RVSRs and quality review coaches. Interview questions (previously sent) covered four major areas: training, productivity, quality and morale.

Typically, the first interview with the director took place at 9 a.m. on the first day and the final interview with Veterans Service Center managers/assistant directors took place at 11 a.m. the next day. In general, about 10 interviews were conducted on Tuesday with another 4-5 completed on Wednesday.

Effects of PACT Act implementation on the VA claims process were discussed at length during staff interviews. While employees at the Columbia VARO had little to say about the issue (pre-implementation), employees at the New York, Sacramento and Montgomery VAROs provided much more input. Essentially, many new employees – as well as supervisors -- were still being trained on PACT Act claims and new requirements such as Toxic Exposure Risk Activity (TERA) memos. Some workers felt overwhelmed by the amount of training they were expected to complete with tight deadlines; some employees (and supervisors) reported increased stress levels from the additional development requirements and the number of claims being filed.

The ROAR team has written reports for each site visit, based on the directors' questionnaires and staff interviews. These reports will be made available on The American Legion's website and shared with members of Congress, White House staff and VA leadership.

Department Service Officers (DSO) School

Since 1985, The American Legion has authorized the VA&R Commission to conduct Department Service Officer (DSO) schools bi-annually for accredited representatives of The American Legion. This bi-annual school represents the organization's ongoing commitment to developing a network of highly trained and experienced service officers to effectively advocate for veterans and their families.

The purpose of the DSO school is to provide current information about changes in veterans' law and, VA regulations, and VA adjudication policies. The DSO school allows American Legion service officers to improve their advocacy skills. The program of instruction includes training suitable for new service officers and advanced training on issues relating to claims processing, disability ratings, personal hearings, development of appeals, and the interpretation and application of precedent decisions by the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans' Claims and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

The American Legion conducted six sessions of DSO Schools during this program year:

- NSO: Feb: 20-24, 2023 (Virtually)
- DSO Intro: March 6-26, 2023 (Virtually)
- NSO: April 11-24, 2023 (Virtually)
- NSO: May 11-24, 2023 (Virtually)
- NSO: June 12-24, 2023 (Virtually)
- NSO: July 12-25, 2023 (Virtually)

Health Policy

The Health Policy staff ensures the VA healthcare system remains the healthcare system of choice for veterans. The Health Policy portfolio includes: Cancer, Cannabis, Caregivers, Dental, Electronic Health Record Modernization, Geriatric and Extended Care, Infrastructure, Insurance, Mental Health, Minority Health, Military Sexual Trauma, Peer Support, Pharmacy, Post Traumatic Stress, Recruitment and Retention, Rehabilitation and Prosthetics, Rural Health, Spinal Cord Injury and Disease, Substance Use Disorder, Suicide Awareness and Prevention, Traumatic Brain Injury, Telehealth, Toxic Exposure, and Women's Health.

System Worth Saving (SWS)

In 2003, then-National Commander Ron Conley visited and assessed the delivery of health care at more than 60 VA (VA) medical facilities across the country. Commander Conley assessed the delivery of health care delivered to the nation's veterans to determine if the VA health care system was a "System Worth Saving."

The following year, The American Legion passed a resolution making System Worth Saving a permanent program under the National Commander. The American Legion's National Executive Committee later realigned the program under the VA&R Commission.

Annually, commission members and staff conduct a series of site visits to VA medical facilities and regional offices. While on site, they meet with veterans, their families, and VA administrators and employees to discuss successes, challenges, and limitations. Each site visit culminates with a report that informs the members of the American Legion and provides additional insight to the President of the United States, members of Congress, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. After nearly two decades, The American Legion has conducted more than 150 System Worth Saving visits to VA facilities in the United States, its territories, and the Philippines.

The American Legion remains true to one of its original purposes stated in the original chartering documentation in 1919, “to consecrate the efforts of its members to mutual helpfulness and service to the country.” Since then, The American Legion remains committed to mutual helpfulness by ensuring that the VA continues intact and properly funded to achieve President Abraham Lincoln’s charge, “To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan.” The American Legion believes in the quality of care at VA facilities, and we stand behind our mantra that it’s a “System Worth Saving.”

Health Policy Coordinators conduct SWS site visits in Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISN) managed by the VA Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The purpose of SWS site visits is to understand what works best at medical centers, identify challenges and make recommendations to help overcome them. Health Policy staff selects VA/VHA sites through a ranked selection process and recommendations to the VA&R Commission. Health Policy staff ranks and recommends visits to VA/VHA health facilities based on requests from American Legion departments, reports from the VA Office of the Inspector General (VAOIG) and Government Accountability Office (GAO), VA’s Nationwide Access Reports, and the media. A site visit consists of a veteran’s town hall meeting, a visit to the local VA healthcare facility, and a meeting with the executive leadership team. At the end of each SWS site visit, a report is issued that is shared with the medical center, the VA secretary and under secretary of health, congressional members and the President of the United States.

A SWS site visit covers two and a half days, beginning with a veteran’s town hall meeting on the evening of the first day. The second and third days consist of a visit to the local VA healthcare facility, and meetings with the executive leadership and departmental staff to discuss challenges and best practices.

The VA&R division was able to re-launch the SWS program in 2022 and have conducted three visits to VA Medical Center’s (VAMC) since the last report was submitted in 2022:

- December 2022 – James J. Peters VA Medical Center Bronx, NY
- March 2023 – Sacramento Veterans Affairs Medical Center Sacramento, CA
- June 2023 – Tuscaloosa Veterans Affairs Medical Center Tuscaloosa, AL

TBI and PTSD Suicide Prevention Programs

In 2020, The American Legion declared suicide prevention as one of its top priorities. Increasingly concerned by the number of veterans taking their own lives, The American Legion established a Suicide Prevention Program and aligned the program under the TBI/PTSD Suicide Prevention Committee. This committee reviews methods, programs, and strategies that can be used to treat TBI and PTSD. In order to reduce veterans’ suicide, this committee seeks to influence legislation and operational policies that can facilitate quality healthcare for veterans -- regardless of their era of wartime service.

To stay informed on suicide prevention issues, the TBI/PTSD Suicide Prevention Programs Coordinator attended 22 partnership meetings or coalition workshops/roundtable functions and hosted experts to discuss before our members on community funding for secured firearms storage and alternative psychedelic treatments currently gaining FDA clinical trial approval.

VA Voluntary Services (VAVS)/Center for Development & Civic Engagement (CDCE)

The American Legion's VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) program continues to support VA initiatives that support the care and treatment of veteran patients in VA medical facilities. Every fiscal year, thousands of Legionnaires continue to volunteer at over 200 VA facilities, which included VA medical centers, community clinics, Vet Centers, Fisher Houses, state Veteran's Homes and national cemeteries. Their combined efforts annually total upwards of 700,000 hours volunteered, which saves the VA between \$15 and \$20 million annually.

Military Boards and Memorial Benefits

The Military Boards and Memorial Benefits (MBMB) staff assist veterans, active-duty members and their families, on issues pertaining to the memorial affairs, Department of Defense (DoD) Medical Evaluation Process, Discharge Review and Correction of Military Records; as well as the VA Debt Management Center, VA Pension Management Center, and the VA Life Insurance program.

Memorial Affairs

MBMB staff ensures veterans and their dependents are honored with final resting places in VA national cemeteries, Arlington National Cemetery, state, tribal or private cemeteries. They provide assistance on all National Cemetery Administration (NCA) benefits including headstones, marker, medallions, Presidential Memorial Certificates, military honors, burial flag, burial allowance and survivor benefits.

Discharge Review and Correction of Military Records

Title 10, United States Code, sections 1552 and 1553, provide statutory authority for the existence and operation of the Military Discharge Review Boards and the Boards for Correction of Military Records. The American Legion was instrumental in the creation of these boards shortly after World War II and has represented former servicemembers petitioning them for relief since. Assistance is provided by representing applicants before the board, educating veterans on their due process and how to apply, review and submit applications, and conducting outreach to veterans with "bad paper" discharges. These requests involved a wide variety of issues including character of service upgrades, narrative reason for discharge changes, entitlement or amendment of physical disability severance or retirement, issuance or reissuance of military awards and decorations, requests for military personnel files and service medical records, and administrative corrections to official military records.

Each of the discharge review and correction boards is under a congressional mandate to adjudicate cases within one year from the date of acceptance. We do not have current data on actual processing time for the discharge review and correction boards, but we understand that most, if not all, are not yet in compliance with the one-year mandate, due in part to delays associated with temporary suspension of operations related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Veteran Service Officers at the American Legion National Headquarters units in Washington DC and Indianapolis Indiana provided discharge upgrade or correction of records assistance or information or representation to nearly 100 veterans during the program year. The overwhelming majority of the cases, more than 75, involved veterans who sought information regarding the discharge upgrade and correction of records processes. The relevant information was provided, questions answered, and representation offered in each instance. Some veterans who received information failed to follow through and submit applications, and many chose to complete the relevant forms, assemble evidence and file applications on their own.

The American Legion's Veteran Service Officers submitted nine applications for discharge upgrades or correction of records during the year. They also represented two veterans at in-person hearings held in the Washington metro area. Of the nine upgrade

submissions, three were to the Army Board for Correction of Military Records (BCMR), The remainder were submitted to the Department of the Navy, which uses the same boards for the Navy and the Marine Corps, with three to the Naval Discharge Review Board (DRB) (two Navy and one Marine Corps). The remaining three submissions were to the Board for Correction of Naval Records (BCNR), again with two Navy and one Marine Corps. Of the two hearings, one resulted in a discharge upgrade by the Air Force Discharge Review Board and the other in a denial by the Naval Discharge Review Board.

Pension Management Center (PMC)

The VA PMC processes adjustments of benefits for individuals in receipt of non-service-connected disability pension, death pension and dependency indemnity compensation. Non-service-connected pension is a need-based benefit available for those “most at need” wartime service veterans and their dependents. The American Legion’s Veterans Benefits Specialists are located in St. Paul, MN and Philadelphia, PA. They expedite the delivery of benefits when beneficiaries meet the criteria for receipt in order to reduce a financial hardship. This is accomplished by reviewing all claims for accuracy, ensuring supporting material is included, acting as the counsel and presents verbal arguments on behalf of claimant before VA and preparing claimants for their hearing. This program year, the following activities were reported: 1,915 new pension claims and 287 appeals. There were also 857 Waiver Grants during this period.

Restricted Access Claim Center (RACC)

Sensitive files belonging to current and former senior government officials, VA employees and Veteran Service Organization’s representatives, are handled at the St. Paul Restricted Access Claim Center. This program year, the following was reported: 243 restricted access compensation claims.

VA Life Insurance

VA life insurance, including Service-Disabled Veterans Insurance (S-DVI), Veterans Group Life Insurance and Family SGLI, TSGLI, and Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance, are handled at the VA Insurance Center in Philadelphia, PA. The American Legion’s Veterans Benefits Specialists assist surviving beneficiaries in filing for disbursement of policy at the time of need and ensure veterans are aware of the eligibility window for enrollment. This program year, the following was reported: 2,010 insurance activities.

VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION COMMISSION

John W. Bowen, Colorado, Chairman

Joseph C. Sharpe Jr., District of Columbia, Director

This report covers the programs, activities, and accomplishments of the National Veterans Employment & Education (VE&E) Commission, its two standing committees (Employment and Veterans Preference and Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness), and the division staff from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023. Since the Commission and the committees always meet concurrently, all future references to the Commission in this report will automatically indicate the inclusion of the committees.

The National VE&E Commission is chaired by John W. Bowen (CO). The division comprises Director Joseph C. Sharpe Jr., Senior Policy Associate Kevin P. O’Neil, and Administrative Assistant Ifechukwude M. Abili.

National Veterans Employment & Education Commission

- Employment & Veterans Preference Committee
- Veterans Education, Other Benefits & Homelessness Committee
- Veterans Employment & Education Council

- Awards Subcommittee
- Employment Innovation Task Force Advisory Board
- Credentialing Executive Task Force Advisory Board
- Small Business Task Force Advisory Board
- Homeless Veteran Task Force Advisory Board

2022-2023 Meetings

During the period of July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, the Commission met for the following three regularly scheduled executive sessions:

- (1) The chairman of the Commission addressed the National Executive Committee, held at The American Legion's National Headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana, from October 10-13, 2022. A complete report on that meeting appears in the Digest of Proceedings of the National Executive Committee of The American Legion, October 2022.
- (2) At the 63rd Washington Conference, held in Washington, District of Columbia, from February 26-March 1, 2023, Commission members and guests met to hear the latest on subjects of concern.
- (3) The chairmen of the Commission met May 8-9, 2023, at the headquarters office in Indianapolis, Indiana. A complete report of that meeting appears in the Digest of Proceedings of the National Executive Committee of The American Legion, May 2023.

Legislative Appearances

A vital part of the work of the National VE&E Commission is the preparation and presentation of congressional testimony, preparing letters of support on issues impacting the economic well-being of America's veterans, and meeting with congressional staff to discuss priority issues. During the period covered by this report, the Commission staff testified before Congress and participated in the preparation of testimony presented by other members of the Legion staff on several occasions.

The following is a synopsis of the congressional hearings and correspondence held from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, on matters concerning the National VE&E Commission:

- On July 20, 2022, Joseph C. Sharpe, Director of VE&E, testified before the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity in a hearing titled "Modernizing Veteran Education in the Shadow of Covid-19"
- On August 24, 2022, VE&E staff signed a joint letter of support with several Veteran Service Organizations to applaud the Department of Education's proposed rules for implementing the closure of the 90/10 loophole.
- On October 5, 2022, VE&E staff signed a letter of support for an NDAA Amendment requiring the Voluntary Education Institutional Compliance Program of the U.S. Department of Defense to develop a risk-based survey to oversee covered educational institutions.
- On December 14, 2022, Joseph C. Sharpe, Director of VE&E, testified before the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity regarding "The VA Housing Loan Forever Act of 2022."
- On March 1, 2023, VE&E Chairman Bowen testified alongside National Commander Troiola regarding matters concerning Employment and Education

- On March 30, 2023, Matthew Brennan, Policy Associate, VE&E, testified before the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity regarding "Pending Legislation."
- On June 14, 2023, Ricardo D. Gomez, Policy Associate, VE&E, testified before the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity regarding "Pending Legislation."
- From July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, VE&E staff met with the following congressional offices to discuss issues related to veteran education, employment, housing, and small business: Senator Jon Tester (D-MT); Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD); Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA); Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL); Senator Angus King (I-ME); Senator Rick Scott (R-FL); Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL); Rep. Roger Williams (R-TX); Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA); Rep. Nydia Velazquez (D-NY); Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA); Rep. Nick LaLota (R-NY); Rep. Morgan Luttrell (R-TX); Rep. Morgan McGarvey's (D-KY); Rep. Maria Salazar (R-FL); Rep. Aaron Bean (R-FL); Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN); Rep. Austin Scott (R-GA); Rep. Carlos Gimenez (R-FL); and Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA).

Administrative Activities

The National VE&E Commission is responsible for ensuring that America's veterans can provide with honor and dignity the economic necessities of life for themselves and their families. To achieve this goal, the Commission and its committees work closely with governmental agencies and liaisons to assist the organization's members.

Staff answers a large volume of mail and electronic mail from veterans seeking information or assistance on issues under the Commission's jurisdiction. While the staff can neither place individual veterans in jobs, educational programs, or housing nor represent them in labor disputes, they provide information, guidance, and, when appropriate, referral. In addition to responding to veteran correspondence, the staff also receives and answers frequent requests and inquiries from government agencies, members of Congress, congressional committees, private organizations, and other groups regarding veterans' economic issues.

Employer of the Year Awards

One of the Commission's major programs is its awards program. Through this program, The American Legion pays tribute to employers nationwide who established outstanding records employing and retaining veterans, workers with disabilities, and elderly workers. In addition, The American Legion recognizes exceptional members of the state employment security agencies.

Each year since 1969, the Legion's National VE&E Commission has sponsored the Employer of the Year Awards Program. This program seeks to honor employers nationwide who have established an outstanding record in employing and retaining veterans. Before this year's Washington Conference, the chairman of the National VE&E Commission, John W. Bowen (CO), appointed a five-person subcommittee to review all the Employer of Veterans Award Program nominations received in 2022.

The Commission's Awards Subcommittee met to select the following National winners:

- **Large Employer:** Akima, Fort Cavazos, Texas
- **Medium Size Employer:** Texas Veteran Security, San Antonio, Texas
- **Small Employer:** TangoAlpha3 Austin, Texas

Employment Service Awards

In 1993, three awards were presented to the Local Veterans Employment Representative of the Year, the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist of the Year, and the Employment Service Office of the Year. These awards are given in cooperation with local job service offices nationwide to recognize outstanding veteran-dedicated staff members.

National winners are as follows:

- **LVER of the Year:** Eric Brown, Dallas, Texas
- **DVOP of the Year:** Kelly Norris, Garland, Texas
- **Employment Local Office:** Workforce Solutions Panhandle, Amarillo Texas

Other Awards:

- **Employer of Older Workers:** Harris Health System, Bellaire, Texas
- **Michael Guty's Homeless Veterans Outreach Award:** Department of New Jersey – Housing Our Heroes, Trenton, New Jersey
- **Enhance the Lives of Disabled Person Award:** PRIDE Industries Western Currency Facility, Fort Worth, Texas

EMPLOYMENT & VETERANS PREFERENCE COMMITTEE

James Fratolillo, Massachusetts, Chairman
Joseph C. Sharpe Jr., District of Columbia, Director

The committee's mission is to promote employment and training opportunities for veterans. To accomplish this, the committee works with Congress and various federal agencies. The committee does not place veterans in jobs; it relies on its network of employment chairpersons to assist individual veterans in finding employment. Posts and Departments appoint these employment chairpersons. Occasionally, Departments also appoint them at the county and district levels. Additionally, this committee promotes veterans' preferences throughout the federal government and ensures that agencies continue to observe all veterans' preference laws.

VETERANS EDUCATION, OTHER BENEFITS & HOMELESSNESS COMMITTEE

Eric W. Measles, California, Chairman
Joseph C. Sharpe Jr., District of Columbia, Director

This committee ensures that veterans' educational benefits provided by the federal government are sufficient and that every generation of veterans has the same or better benefits than the previous generation. In addition, this committee ensures that all veterans receive the benefits they are entitled to for their military service on behalf of a grateful nation. Finally, this committee advocates for federal and local governments to allocate adequate resources to combat and eliminate veteran homelessness.

Federal Veterans' Economic Programs

The following is a brief overview of the Commission's interactions with those federal agencies and their veterans' programs, with which the Commission works regularly. The National VE&E Commission addresses employment, education, homelessness and housing, and small business concerns regarding veterans and their families. A synopsis of the meetings and events follows.

Education, Licensing, & Credentialing

The VE&E Commission is devoted to ensuring all veterans can utilize their education benefits to acquire the skills and experience necessary for gainful employment. This requires thoughtful consideration of veterans' needs and careful examination of how to improve the student veterans' experience. To facilitate this, the National VE&E Commission routinely engages with subject-matter experts, policymakers, government agencies, and other stakeholders to comprehensively examine and respond to veterans' needs.

The VE&E Commission can provide insight into the student veteran experience by engaging with myriad stakeholders. Often, the various stakeholders are unaware of veterans' issues when pursuing their academic goals. One issue that has become increasingly common is school closures; school closures and scandals have led to the squandering of taxpayer dollars and the loss of time and benefits for veterans. To remedy this, the VE&E Commission works to advance the Risk-Based Survey (RBS) Model to ensure that only institutions of higher learning with reputable programs receive GI Bill funding. A recent focus that seeks to expand the RBS Model is the Gainful Employment Rule; this proposed rule uses a debt-to-earnings ratio and an earnings premium test to determine whether academic programs will provide students with a return on their investment and prepare them for gainful employment. If the respective program is not designed to do this, the institution will not receive GI Bill funding. It is a commonsense approach that will protect veterans from predatory institutions that aim to exploit them.

In addition to the RBS Model and the Gainful Employment Rule, there are additional proposed solutions to the issues student veterans face—including those that ensure student veterans can obtain their transcript in the case of a school closure. The Transcripts for Heroes Bill is one solution that the VE&E Commission worked with Congress to draft. This bill will allow the student veteran to access their transcript digitally, even following a school closure. This greatly reduces the likelihood that the veteran will have lapses in receiving their education benefits.

In addition to alleviating burdens for student veterans, the VE&E Commission works to expand opportunities for veterans in the licensing and credentialing space. To do this, the VE&E Commission regularly meets with legislators to find innovative ways for veterans to receive an education beyond the traditional four-year college path. Most recently, the VE&E Commission supported a bill designed to promote interest in the aviation field. This bill aims to establish a grant program to assist veterans in obtaining private pilot certificates. Because obtaining a private pilot certificate is requisite to obtaining a commercial pilot's license, it is vital that veterans have greater access to this training. The grant program will pay up to ten thousand dollars to veterans hoping to receive their private pilot certificate—on the condition that the veteran intends to earn their commercial pilots' license. In the next decade, it is expected that 250,000 pilots will be needed to fill demand. With many veterans interested in aviation, having more avenues for them to enter the aviation field could help alleviate the impending shortage. The aviation industry, however, is not the only industry that will incur shortages. The trucking, cyber, and healthcare industries will require an abundance of skilled workers to fill the already exorbitant shortages in these critically manned career fields.

For this reason, the VE&E Commission works closely with Task Force Movement. Task Force Movement is a coalition of military lifecycle experts and industry specialists focusing on improving the lives of transitioning servicemembers, veterans, and their families. The American Legion regularly enlists the help of these industry specialists to find ways to reduce shortages in critically manned career fields and provide transitioning servicemembers and veterans with well-paying, family-sustaining careers. Put simply, the VE&E Commission seeks to advance legislation designed to create opportunities for veterans. This can be done in various capacities, through collaboration with various stakeholders in the education, licensing, and credentialing space. The work that the VE&E

Commission does is critical to seeing that veterans have every available opportunity during and following their military career.

The National VE&E Commission hosted a 'Higher Education and Credentialing' roundtable on February 27, 2023, in conjunction with the Washington Conference. The roundtable featured 34 stakeholder participants and presentations from Task Force Movement, SOLID, LLC., the George W. Bush Presidential Center, and John Patrick University of Applied Health Sciences.

The roundtable primarily focused on the changing landscape of higher education and filling critical skills gaps in the labor market. In addition, roundtable participants identified and examined innovations and new methods that institutions are embracing to educate veterans and explore servicemember barriers to gainful employment in the healthcare, trucking, aviation, and cybersecurity industries. Higher education and training changed dramatically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and some of these changes will likely remain. As technological advancements cause colleges and training establishments to embrace new means of reaching out to and providing quality education to student veterans, those changes must be anchored to the commitment of ensuring veteran success in education and employment.

Finally, during The American Legion's 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the VE&E Commission hosted a multi-day licensing and credentialing event. American Legion members attended this meeting to develop a better understanding of some of the issues impacting servicemembers seeking gainful employment during and following their transition.

EMPLOYMENT & TRANSITION

During The American Legion's 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the VE&E Commission hosted speakers to inform attendees on new developments and current issues on Employment matters.

Mark Toal, Director of the Office of Strategic Outreach for the Department of Labor (DOL) Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS), briefed the Commission on DOL's mission, objectives, and initiatives. This was done to prepare America's veterans, transitioning servicemembers, and their spouses for meaningful careers by providing them with resources, an understanding of protecting their employment rights, and employment opportunities.

The DOL's VETS office is the voice for the veteran employment space. Additional agencies within the DOL that serve veterans and military spouses are the Employment & Training Administration, which works with the National Workforce System and American Job Centers, provides Unemployment Compensation (UCX) benefits, and houses the Office of Apprenticeship and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) Grants. The Solicitor's Office provides employment law expertise and referral assistance regarding Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights (USERRA) cases. The Bureau of Labor Statistics continuously monitors and analyzes U.S. Veteran employment statistics. The Chief Evaluation Officer evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of Veteran employment programs. The Office of Disability Employment Policy focuses on disability-related policies that benefit veterans. The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs ensures affirmative action provisions of the Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA). The Women's Bureau develops policy, advocates for equality and economic security, and promotes quality work environments for working women, including military spouses. The Wages and Hour Division oversees the Military Family Leave Act (FMLA). Finally, the Employee Benefits Security Administration provides financial literacy guidance and a military retirement structure.

Mr. Toal emphasized the soft skills and transferable skills veterans offer the private industry, including leadership, strong work ethic, technical skills, and strong performance

under pressure. Mr. Toal emphasized that studies show that veterans are more productive and have higher retention rates than non-veterans.

Additionally, Mr. Toal covered the Transition Assistance Module that DOL VETS provides, which consists of a one-day Employment Workshop and two one-day career-related tracks in employment or vocational training. He also discussed the supplemental programs to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), including the Employer Navigator Partnership Pilot Program (ENPP), the Transition Employment Assistance for Military Spouses Program, the Wounded Warrior and Caregiver Employment Workshop, and the Off Base Transition Training Pilot.

Kimberly Holden, the Deputy Associate Director for the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), discussed OPM's initiatives and programs, including category ranking, pathway program reform, direct hiring authorities, and veteran and military spouse hiring among the federal executive branch agencies.

Adam Rocke, a retired Army Colonel and Senior Director of External Engagements of Hiring Our Heroes, addressed the VE&E Commission. Mr. Rocke discussed the Veteran landscape, looking at the state of transition from employment and education; he noted that hiring events, bridge programs, and increasing diversity, equality, and inclusion for veterans and military spouses were opportune areas to focus on. Mentorship is essential for veterans and transitioning service members with difficulty communicating their skills and background. Career connectors can provide prospective job seekers with employment preparation, screening, and coaching. Additionally, connecting to fellowship programs and receiving education and training to upskill is essential. The fellowship programs and digital tools referenced were the Corporate Fellowship Program, Military Spouse Fellowship Program, Veteran Employment Transition (VET) Roadmap, and Mil Spouse Roadmap.

The VE&E Commission established the Employment Innovation Taskforce to bring together the public sector, private industry, and non-profit organizations to advance solutions for The American Legion to champion improved and quality employment with its federal agency partners. The task force examines all aspects of TAP and credentialing to optimize TAP to ensure that servicemembers receive a seamless translation from military service to the private sector.

Since the last convening of the Employer Innovation Taskforce Roundtable, private industry stakeholders highlighted a disconnect in base access between employers and transitioning servicemembers. Variability in TAP officer support for employers makes some installations more accessible than others. As a result, many servicemembers are not made aware of the different job opportunities out there for them. The private industry recommended a standard practice from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure employers are equipped with best practices to maintain steady contact with transitioning servicemembers and, in the interim, private sector task force members suggested that The American Legion hold events at posts adjacent to military bases to allow employers to connect with transitioning servicemembers. Following the roundtable, The VE&E Commission has worked to convene a Crisis Action Team with private sector taskforce members and TAP officials to develop a national platform for defining how the TAP program should work for transitioning servicemembers.

The VE&E Commission monitors the development and effectiveness of federal executive branch agency programs that assist servicemembers, including National Guard and Reserve members, veterans, and their families, to ensure a smooth transition from the armed services into gainful employment. Division staff are working with stakeholders and the federal executive branch agencies involved in TAP to contribute innovative solutions to further optimize the program and ensure separating servicemembers face a smooth transition into the civilian sector.

On September 7, and September 8, 2022, VE&E staff attended the Military-Civilian Transition 5.0 Summit held by the TAP Interagency Partnership. The Department of Defense (DoD), DOL, VA, and the United States Small Business Administration (SBA) briefed VE&E staff on the current implementation and intended updates of TAP beginning

in 2023. Staff were also briefed by representatives from the five military service branches on how the program is applied.

During the summit, VE&E staff were briefed by DOL VETS during a breakout session covering the status of the ENPP and Off-Base Transition Training Pilot Programs (OBTT). The ENPP, launched on April 1, 2021, as an extension outside of TAP, offers transitioning servicemembers and their spouses individualized career assistance through Employment Navigators at 13 designated military installations to ensure participants secure meaningful and gainful employment. Since the ENPP's launch, the program has expanded to nine additional facilities: Langley Airforce Base, Fort Drum, Fort Eustis, Fort Shafter, Schofield Barracks, Torii Station, Camp Schwab, Wounded Warrior Battalion East in Camp Lejeune, and Joint Expeditionary Base – Little Creek. To date, ENPP is at 29 locations and has provided services to over 12,400 clients.

Through the ENPP, DOL VETS partnered with public and private sector employment and training entities that provide preparatory services for participants transitioning into the civilian workforce. The DOL VETS has continued onboarding partners, initiating with nine original partners to a projected total of 48. These partners help identify and mitigate possible program gaps in service coverage. In total, 18,082 partner service connections have been made since the pilot's launch.

On January 18, 2022, the DOL launched the OBTT, a five-year pilot program based on the current TAP curriculum with revised changes to apply to the needs of veterans, National Guard, Reserve members, and their spouses. The OBTT consists of 10 two-hour workshops, offered virtually and in-person, that provide an understanding of resume essentials, interview skills, and social media branding. The initial pilot locations were in Los Angeles and San Diego, California; Boston, Massachusetts; Raleigh and Fayetteville, North Carolina; Philadelphia and Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; and Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio, Texas. The OBTT workshops will expand more than 20 states and 50 locations by the end of the pilot.

As the OBTT pilot was previously attempted from 2013 to 2015, DOL is using lessons learned to improve marketing and strategic communication to increase participant attendance. They are doing this by making a more concerted effort at the grassroots and local level through American Job Centers, Veteran Service Organizations, the Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP), and the Veterans Readiness & Employment Program (VR&E). At the end of the third quarter for fiscal year (FY) 2023, OBTT conducted 3,119 workshops for 5,547 participants across the five pilot states.

The VE&E Commission noted from OPM's annual hiring data that there is a consistent decrease in federal government hiring of veterans. Despite the Obama Administration's Veterans' Employment Initiative, issued under Executive Order 13518, federal hiring of veterans decreased from 33% in FY 2015 to 25% in FY 2020. Moreover, according to The Government Accountability Office (GAO) in its July 2020 report, veteran federal employees had lower retention rates and higher attrition rates within their first five years than their non-veteran counterparts. The GAO recommended that OPM and federal executive branch agencies address this disparity through a veteran retention strategy. Furthermore, the VE&E Commission learned that the OPM's Office of Veterans Affairs was dismantled. The Office of Veterans Affairs had four full-time employees who assisted veterans with their federal resumes and informed them of veteran preference benefits. Moreover, OPM's standard practice of quarterly meetings with Veteran Service Organizations on veteran hiring and benefit updates has not been observed in over five years. The VE&E Commission met with OPM to discuss ways The American Legion can assist the agency in meeting the shared goal of having more veterans employed and retained throughout the federal executive branch agencies.

The VE&E Commission is working with two organizations to develop memorandums of understanding (MOUs). The first MOU is with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which seeks to bolster gainful employment opportunities for transitioning servicemembers and veterans within the department and produce actionable

steps leading to increased veteran-owned business participation in USDA contracts. The second MOU proposal is with Military Hire, a veteran job and career services organization with over 650,000 members and over 35,000 collective companies and recruiters, whose primary purpose is to facilitate the transition process for veterans from military to civilian life by providing resources and job placement opportunities. The MOU will foster a working relationship to benefit transitioning servicemembers and recently separated veterans.

CAREER FAIRS

The American Legion has been hosting and participating in Job Fairs since 2005, with the primary purpose of educating veterans about their benefits, providing veterans avenues for employment, promoting The American Legion's mission "to enhance the well-being of America's veterans, their families, our military, and our communities by our devotion to mutual helpfulness."

The VE&E Commission collaborated with the Texas Veterans and Workforce Commissions to host a virtual hiring event through Premier Virtual on July 13, 2022. National Commander Dillard provided welcoming remarks to employers and job seekers as they entered the event. The event drew employers and job seekers from across the nation. 184 employers from various industries and 230 registered job seekers participated in the Career Fair. Jobseekers consisted of active duty servicemembers, veterans, spouses, and family members nationwide. Over 800 unique conversations between organizations and candidates were exchanged, with more than 5000 messages sent. There were eight on-the-spot interviews, and seven potential job offers at the event. Employers scheduled interviews with eight job seekers after the event. The employers and participants at this event were pleased with the outcome. The employers stated that the participants were professional and qualified. The participants liked that the employers were from different industries and were willing to hire veterans. Surveys to industry and attendees were sent to assess ways to improve future events.

On June 16, 2023, a career workshop provided jobseekers with skills and resources to conduct employer research and locate career opportunities across multiple employer websites. On June 22, and 29, 2023, workshops were held to aid jobseekers in tailoring their resume to best serve the applicant tracking system. On June 21 and June 28, 2023, workshops to provide LinkedIn Basics were offered to ensure job seekers can leverage the social media site to search for careers.

On August 25, 2022, VE&E staff collaborated with the Department of Wisconsin and Hiring Our Heroes to conduct a career event during The American Legion's 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In conjunction with the career fair, The VE&E Commission supplemented the event by hosting resume, financial literacy, social media branding, and VA medical claim filing workshops in the morning. Following the workshop panels, attendees heard about a few selected employers' hiring programs and initiatives during the Networking Luncheon. The panel comprised representatives from Fiserv, Comcast, Amazon, Oshkosh, Skill Mil, and the VA. During the job fair, VE&E Commission Chairman James A. LaCoursiere provided opening remarks, followed by Adam Roche, Senior Director of External Engagements for Hiring Our Heroes, and Mark Toal, Director for the Office of Strategic Outreach DOL VETS. 44 employers from various market sectors were present, and more than 100 jobseekers.

While conducting outreach for the event, VE&E staff visited the Great Lakes Naval Base. Staff met with Gerald Metoyer, Tap Program Manager, and Krista Shalott, Work, and Family Life Consultant for the Family Readiness Program of the Fleet and Family Support Center, to learn about the programs and initiatives that are offered to servicemembers transitioning from the Great Lakes installation. The VE&E staff also visited the Army and Marine Corps Reserve components at Fort Sheridan to disseminate information regarding the career fair.

On June 12, 2023, VE&E staff and The Department of Texas held employment and transition workshops at Fort Cavazos' Army Community Service Soldier and Family Assistance Center in Killeen, Texas. The workshops provided transitioning servicemembers, members of the Soldier Recovery Unit, and military spouses with information on how to tailor their civilian and federal resumes, gain comprehensive financial planning knowledge, and achieve greater visibility to hiring managers through a well-formulated social media presence on LinkedIn. An American Legion Department Service Officer also assisted transitioning servicemembers seeking more information about VA benefits and how to file VA claims. 33 of the 52 registrants that signed up for the event attended. There were over 661 page views on the registration site. The participants found the workshops helpful and were engaged with the workshop providers, who represented various organizations, including the Texas Veterans Commission and Northwestern Mutual.

Finally, VE&E staff and Department of Texas Legionnaires attended Fort Cavazos' TAP Mega Job Fair on June 13, 2023, to educate servicemembers about their benefits. These Legionnaires discussed how The American Legion assists veterans in reintegrating into their local communities. They answered servicemembers' questions about benefits, described the Legion's programs, and explained how to become a member. Approximately 2,000 servicemembers attended the event. Forty-nine transitioning servicemembers, active-duty personnel, veterans, and military spouses signed into the American Legion booth.

VETERAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Veteran-owned small businesses (VOSBs) and entrepreneurial veterans seeking to start small businesses face challenges unique to the veteran community. According to the SBA, small businesses make up 99.9% of American businesses, of which approximately 6% are veteran-owned. However, recent data suggests that the number of VOSBs has steadily declined over the past few years. To combat this trend, the VE&E Commission counts on The American Legion's Small Business Task Force (SBTF) and its veteran small business subject matter experts. The VE&E Commission facilitates the task force, composed of expert Legionnaires that help define and execute best practices in developing small businesses and government procurement policies. The task force fosters an entrepreneurial ecosystem that allows VOSBs to thrive.

On February 23, 2023, the task force met virtually to discuss policy recommendations and priorities from its five subcommittees (Cybersecurity, Access to Capital, Veterans' Preference, Verification and Certification, and Taxes). Based on recommendations, VE&E staff and task force members worked on finalizing three tax-oriented resolutions. The first proposed resolution aims to grant The American Legion the ability to support measures that reduce tax liabilities for veterans, military members, and their families and oppose measures that would increase tax liabilities for veterans, military members, and their families.

The second proposed resolution aims to support the reauthorization of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and efforts to enhance the WOTC for the benefit of veterans, military members, and their families. The WOTC program incentivizes private-sector employers to hire and retain qualified veterans. Under this program, employers receive tax breaks in exchange for hiring qualified veterans.

The third proposed resolution seeks to support reauthorization, enhancement, and permanent changes to 199A Qualified Business Income (QBI). The QBI deduction allows "pass-through" small businesses – such as sole proprietors, partnerships, and LLCs, to deduct up to 20% of their QBI each year before normal taxation. This 20% deduction is essential in giving veteran-owned businesses the financial flexibility to succeed in the market.

The VE&E Commission continues to diligently advocate for veteran business owners to lawmakers and government agencies. Throughout July 2022 – June 2023, VE&E staff and SBTF members met with various congressional offices to discuss The American Legion's small business legislative priorities for the 118th Congress.

Commission staff discussed enhancing protection from increased cyber threats to VOSBs, providing access to capital for veterans seeking to start small businesses, codifying the proven Boots to Business program for servicemembers completing the Transition Assistance (TAP) program, and increasing contracting opportunities for service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSBs) by increasing federal agency-wide procurement goals from 3% to 5%. In addition, staff and the SBTF Chairman discussed the inclusion of statutory language in the forthcoming 2024 National Defense Authorization Act that would expand the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA's) "Vets-First" contracting program to the Department of Defense (DoD). If implemented, "Vets-First" would provide significant opportunities for veteran-owned small businesses to work with the DoD. This has been an American Legion priority for a few years because VOSBs and SDVOSBs continue losing government contracts to larger contractors. If not reversed, this trend will drive countless VOSBs and SDVOSBs out of business.

Strategic partnerships with public and private entities, including the SBA, are instrumental for the SBTF's success. To further strengthen this relationship, the VE&E Commission met with the SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development's Director to discuss drafting a Strategic Alliance Memorandum (SAM) between The American Legion and the SBA. This memorandum allows for the SBA to provide The American Legion with up-to-date information about SBA's programs and services and information regarding SBA's resource partners, including Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), SCORE, Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs), and the Women's Business Centers (WBCs). In addition, the memorandum supplements the SBA's ability to provide speakers to discuss SBA financing, government contracting, and other business topics at American Legion workshops, conferences, seminars, and other activities. Commission staff's efforts enabled The American Legion and SBA to complete and authorize this memorandum. This directly led to the confirmation of SBA's participation in The American Legion's Tango Alpha Lima podcast, which would aim for SBA to discuss all the small business programs available to veterans and their families.

During The American Legion's 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Veterans Employment & Education Commission hosted speakers to inform attendees on new developments and current issues on veteran small business matters. Members from the American Legion's Small Business Taskforce attended this meeting.

Larry Stubblefield, Associate Administrator in the Office of Veterans Business Development at the SBA, opened the discussion. Mr. Stubblefield discussed the importance small businesses play to the U.S. economy. He focused on the stability and impact small businesses created during the pandemic.

The Chairman of The American Legion's Small Business Task Force, Mr. Charles Fowler, also briefed the attendees on issues related to the Vets First program. The Veterans Benefits, Health Care and Information Technology Act of 2006 gave the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) authority to allow verified veteran-owned businesses to compete for VA set-asides. However, according to the 2020 DoD's Inspector General's Report, \$800 million was awarded incorrectly to non-eligible companies. Mr. Fowler is pushing to pass legislation strengthening the ability for veterans to receive priority to seek and win these set-asides. The idea is to extend the certification from the VA to the DoD to ensure reliable veteran-owned companies get the procurement contracts.

VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

Preventing and ending veteran homelessness continues to be a priority for The American Legion and VE&E staff. The Commission acknowledges that veteran

homelessness is a national issue; however, it is equally important to acknowledge that each state faces unique issues. That is why the Commission counts on support from each American Legion department through the Homeless Veteran Task Force (HVTF).

The task force is composed of chairpersons from each American Legion department. Commission staff is meticulously working towards ensuring each department has at least one chairperson. Commission staff periodically reaches out to departments to update the HVTF spreadsheet with up-to-date names and phone numbers for those Legionnaires eager to be part of the task force.

The goal is to maintain a task force with the resources necessary to prevent and end veteran homelessness nationwide. In addition, a comprehensive task force enhances The American Legion's ability to provide resources and services to homeless and at-risk veterans.

The VE&E Commission works closely with the VA to meet the mutual goal of ending veteran homelessness. From July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, Commission staff met with key VA personnel within the veteran homelessness sector to discuss mutual priorities and future collaboration. Commission staff met with the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA's) Homeless Program's Executive Director and the Principal Advisor to discuss how the VA housed 40,000 veterans for 2022, exceeding its goal of 38,000. Moreover, the Commission learned of the VA's calendar year 2023 goal of housing more than 38,000 veterans and ensuring that 95% of those housed do not return to homelessness.

Congress authorized the creation of the Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (ACHV) in response to the complex nature surrounding veteran homelessness. The committee advises the Secretary of VA on providing benefits and services to veterans experiencing homelessness. In April 2023, Commission staff attended the committee's quarterly meeting in Baltimore, Maryland. The meeting began with a message from the Secretary of VA, emphasizing the critical work that must be done to end veteran homelessness. Following the Secretary's message, various federal employees spoke about their roles. The federal participants included personnel from the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and DoD. The meeting concluded with an announcement by the National Director for the Veterans Justice Program, who informed participants that the VA Legal Services for Veterans Grant Program's first grant was recently approved. This is significant because unmet legal needs are one of the leading causes of veteran homelessness.

In addition to these activities, from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, Commission staff personally assisted over forty veterans experiencing homelessness. Staff connected these veterans with resources and personnel that could meet their needs. The HVTF greatly contributed by regularly collaborating with Commission staff to help veterans in their respective states.

During The American Legion's 103rd National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Veterans Employment & Education Commission toured the Vets Place Central, a homeless veteran's facility in Milwaukee. The 80-resident homeless veterans' residence is managed by the Center for Veterans Issues (CVI), which provides housing and supportive services to help improve the quality of life for all veterans, their families, and the communities they live and serve. CVI works with government entities and corporate donors, including the Green Bay Packers, Harley-Davidson, and Milwaukee Tool, while also fundraising independently.

At Vets Place Central, veterans can either use the facility as a short-term housing option for up to two years or choose to make it their permanent residence. For short-term stays, the facility also provides access to resources to help the veteran wanting to get out on their own by providing the first month's rent, security deposit, moving expenses, and whatever it takes to get them on their feet. Veterans Employment & Education Commission visits these sites to develop a better understanding of the programs and approaches that successfully combat veteran homelessness.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
2022-2023 Report to Congress

A Community of Volunteers Serving Veterans, Military, and their Families

NATIONAL PRESIDENT
Vickie Koutz, Indiana

It's hard to believe this administrative year has come to a close. It seems I just set off on my first department visit and yet here we are, down to the end. It was humbling to meet so many grassroots Auxiliary members. You worked tirelessly to move this organization forward and put our veterans, military, and their families first. It was inspiring to see you work the mission in various ways throughout the country. I saw some ideas to borrow!

I appreciate the love and support you gave to our National Veterans Creative Arts Festival companions. It was wonderful to see so many of them able to attend the 2023 Festival to support their veteran in person! Seeing companions at registration before the event began, it was clear that choosing companions for the 2022-2023 ALA administrative year focus was the right choice.

An interest in bringing awareness to our Prisoners of War/Missing in Action has been part of me since my husband, Jim, first traveled back overseas to help dig for remains. It continued to impact me and is a solemn reminder that not all who served are home. It meant a lot to see more units and posts this year participating in ceremonies and focusing on this very important issue.

Thank you for a wonderful year focused on our NVCAF companions, POW/MIA awareness, and honoring our veterans, military, and their families every day. I'm looking forward to being back home again in Indiana! Thank you to all American Legion Auxiliary members for a wonderful term as national president.

NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT
Lisa Williamson, Alaska

After serving as a national chairman of several committees over the years, I thought the 2022-2023 term as national vice president would be quiet. Boy, was I wrong! It was a year of planning. I attended many meetings, made decisions, and was able to do some traveling.

Thanks to all of you, as you had our National President Vickie Koutz traveling across our country with very little down time. And huge thanks to her for allowing me to represent the ALA when a last-minute invitation was extended by Wreaths Across America (WAA) for their annual caravan bringing wreaths from Maine to Arlington National Cemetery.

What is now touted as "the world's largest veterans parade," flags were waving with chants of "USA, USA, USA!" It epitomizes how important it is to remember our fallen veterans, honor our military, and teach our children, paralleling the ALA's mission of supporting our veterans, military, and their families. Many American Legion Family members participated and shared how our mutual commitment mobilized membership year-round.

Truckers across the country vie to be a part of the WAA convoy. Of the 12 tractor-trailers that carried the very special loads, one promoted The American Legion's centennial, and two displayed the POW/MIA banner, falling in line with National President Vickie's focus.

I was amazed at the way Gold Star Families were remembered at all ceremonies along the way. Traveling with American Gold Star Mothers National President Sarah Taylor afforded me a lifelong friend.

The culmination of the event was the wreath-laying at Arlington National Cemetery. Nearly 40,000 volunteers signed up to help place wreaths in Arlington, though estimates say there were 70,000! As well, our fallen were honored at more than 3,700 additional

locations across all 50 U.S. states, at sea, and abroad.

NATIONAL SECRETARY
Dr. Coral May Grout, Massachusetts

It has been my extreme pleasure to serve as your national secretary. The process which began last year resulted in a completed job description for the national secretary. Everything is now written down for future national secretaries to use. Special thanks to Marybeth Revoir, Tamara Shumate, and Sara Riegel who worked with me to build the description.

Our National Headquarters staff members are an amazing group of people! I had firsthand experience seeing the evidence of them working on their own time for evening Zoom meetings, researching and developing reports, and checking emails on weekends, evenings, and holidays. They truly deserve our appreciation.

In early April, the national American Legion staff provided training for those of us working with the ALA emblem. They provided samples of emblem requests that were not approved and to use the emblem once again. The emblem is our banner, and its protection against inappropriate use is imperative.

I enjoyed participating as a designated director on the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation through my role as national secretary. The work of this committee has supported so many projects to benefit veterans. The quality of projects has continued to surpass the wonderful expectations that came with the original development of the Foundation.

In addition, I served as a non-voting member of the national Finance Committee and Risk & Compliance Committee, both valuable teams that ensure our organization continues to work legally and safely on behalf of the ALA.

These two groups of dedicated members always put the ALA first. They are committed to preserving our organization and what it stands for, with the fiscal and risk-related oversight that all nonprofits need.

NATIONAL TREASURER
Marybeth Revoir, Illinois

In January 1927, the American Legion Auxiliary published the first *American Legion Auxiliary Bulletin*. On the cover page, National President Mrs. Adalin W. McCauley's message stated, "We at National Headquarters can only guide, and we realize full well that the departments can be no greater than the achievements of the units — that the national organization can be no greater than the achievements of the departments." Who knew that her analysis of this core principle that guides our organization would last forever?

Yes, the national organization gives us guidance, but there is so much more! All divisions within National Headquarters are fundamental to our overall success. As national treasurer, I am privileged to collaborate with them.

The Finance Division has the main fiscal responsibility by processing of contribution, payment of expenditures, and scrutinizing our investment portfolio. Development is a close working partner that reaches out to find resources to help solidify our bottom line and further our purpose. Programs and meetings are tasked with directing our mission through events and educational activities. They plan, staff, and coordinate ALA Mission Trainings, national meetings, and the annual National Convention, among a myriad of additional daily tasks. Communications keeps members informed and the world acquainted with who we are and what we do. Last but not least, our Executive Offices/Administration Division keeps the train on track and moving forward in the most proficient and resourceful manner. This is just a brief overview of what the national organization accomplishes.

The American Legion Auxiliary has multiple strengths. Our members are the most important strength we have. The belief in our core principles of service will always set us

apart from others. The people who staff our National Headquarters are the cog in the center of the wheel that is the American Legion Auxiliary!

It is truly an unbelievable honor for me to serve as your national treasurer. I am blessed to have been given this opportunity.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

Karen Peel, Ohio

This national chaplain was honored to serve with the most resolute department chaplains this year. The honor and respect for which they performed their duties was an inspiration.

Thousands of cards were sent to our members, veterans, military, and families for holidays, thinking of you, sympathy, birthdays, and get well. Departments included Juniors in the creating of cards for all occasions. Visits were made to shut-ins, nursing homes, and VAMC facilities.

The Department of Colorado held a chaplains retreat, "Blessed Are the Peacemakers." The retreat included inspirational speakers and chaplains. A table of goodies to assist chaplains with their duties was available for all the attendees to choose from. Each participant received a "Pray for Our Heroes" to put their goodies in. I hope other departments will think about holding a retreat. The Department of Wyoming held a chaplains workshop at their school of instruction.

Department of Arizona Chaplain Marge Christianson stated that the impact for God and country was overwhelming in Arizona. To serve as department chaplain was a humbling experience. I am sure all department chaplains feel the same way.

Prayer is so powerful. Some departments have chaplain Facebook pages or prayer chains. What a wonderful way to tend to the needs of our members and their families, our veterans, and our military. I have encouraged our members to pray for someone every day. It does not matter if you personally know them — just pray.

Thank you for all that you did for our members, veterans, military, and their families. You blessed so many this year. Being the spiritual leader of your unit or department is a humbling and rewarding experience.

"We are here to be witnesses of love to celebrate life, because life has been created in the image of God. Life is to love and be loved." — Mother Teresa

NATIONAL HISTORIAN

Laura "Susie" Clyde, South Dakota

I have to say that being the national historian is truly an experience and memory that will never be forgotten.

When I decided to run for national historian, I knew everything I wanted to include in the history of this wonderful organization, and how I wanted to do it. It never dawned on me that so many of the department historians — as special as every one of them are — would be at a complete loss as to what they needed to do to write the history of their department. So, for future department historians, I would like to enlighten you.

Communication with everyone is the key to getting information to put in your history book. This means you need to contact your officers, district presidents, chairmen, and all units. Let them know that anything they do that they think is worthy of being recorded needs to be sent to you. This can be done through newsletters, department mailings, Facebook pages, or any other means of getting the word out. If you don't let the members know what you want, they won't send you anything.

The national website has all the information for what you need to put your history book together and how it will be scored on the national level. Go to www.ALAforVeterans.org/Member/Resources/History, and start searching through what is there.

History is a wonderful thing, and if it doesn't get documented, no one will know all of the wonderful things our members, units, and leaders have done to make this organization what it is, or what we do for veterans, military, their families, our communities, state, and nation.

We do great things, and generations to come need to know and remember it.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Sara T. Riegel, Indiana

Behind every success is a great team. This saying needs to be displayed on a banner at National Headquarters.

And it's not all attributed to staff. We work alongside volunteers of all levels to build up collaborative relationships and eliminate silos. With the surge in ways people communicate — email, phone, virtual meetings, Microsoft Teams, texts, and more — it's safe to say we've got information coming at us from all angles. So, when we're all on the same page, we all know what's going on. This helps support not only our mission of serving veterans, military, and their families, but customer service too.

Here are a few successes from the 2022-2023 administrative year:

You've likely seen the new logo on our National Headquarters corporate identity pieces, and lots of you have already purchased clothing items with the new branding we received from The American Legion for our next era of service. The Legion — which owns our trademark name and emblem — obtained the final trademark last fall on a new set of Legion Family logos that included the Auxiliary.

In May 2023, with National President Vickie, we signed a memorandum of understanding with Bergmann & Moore, the same law firm The American Legion has partnered with, to engage and inform ALA members on predatory law firms attached to the Camp Lejeune water contamination situation. We stand ready to serve our veterans in any way we can. Stay tuned to ALA media to learn more about this partnership.

And last but not least, we recently completed a tech upgrade to the Hobart Room at National Headquarters. The enhancement is not limited to our building in Indianapolis — it means we now have a strengthened capability in hosting more nationwide virtual and hybrid meetings like the National Executive Committee meetings, becoming friendlier to everyone's schedules and reaching more people.

FINANCE COMMITTEE
Sharon Conatser, Illinois, Chair

The national Finance Committee continued to be strong advocates for good fiscal planning. With our ever-changing needs, it is important to meet the needs of today, as well as future fiduciary requirements.

The Finance Committee is represented on the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation Board of Directors and the Risk & Compliance Committee.

We need to remember the why of our mission and purpose with strong support for the ALA programs we love. Remember that no donation given is too small. What is your why for joining our ALA?

The Finance Committee reviewed the draft budget, made any adjustments that may have been necessary to reflect new or changing goals, and recommended a budget for the National Executive Committee consideration and adoption. Also, in carrying out the role of fiduciary stewards, the ALA national Finance Committee was responsible for investment planning, reviewing financial statements, monitoring member benefits and fundraising campaigns, and for NEC action to ensure the ALA national organization met nonprofit benchmarks and governmental requirements.

We feel ALA Mission Trainings and the ALA national Junior meetings are very important to the education and support of our unit members. We are excited to continue

these into the new administrative year and encourage everyone to spread the word and increase our attendance.

Members need to step up their responsibility and help retain and recruit members. Another way to help is by supporting the fundraisers sent to your mailbox.

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY FOUNDATION

Cathe MacInnes, New York, ALA Foundation Board of Directors President

The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation benefited ALA programs during the 2022-2023 year. The ALA Foundation supported the American Legion Auxiliary's sponsorship of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, provided funds for ALA Girls Nation, and awarded 30 grants with a total of \$108,012 to support unit and department initiatives.

Veteran Projects Fund grants enabled units and districts to provide blanket warming cabinets for the Indiana Veterans Home, tablets and accessories for the Maine Veterans Home, a courtyard canopy at the Chippewa Veterans Home in Wisconsin, additions to the North Strand Housing Shelter Veterans and Families Unit in South Carolina, beds at Haven for Heroes in Minnesota, a reflection area for the Golden Isles Veterans Village in Georgia, handmade quilts for veterans hospitals and a Fisher House in North Carolina, a wheelchair bicycle for the New York State Veterans Home at Oxford, and kayaks, canoes, paddles, and life vests for the Magnus Veterans Foundation water therapy program.

Three Veterans Creative Arts Festival grants were awarded to support local Veterans Creative Arts Festivals at the Indiana U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, the Syracuse VA Medical Center, and the Stratton VA Medical Center in Albany, N.Y. Mission in Action grants helped 18 ALA units and departments become recognized for their good works as they used branded pop-up tents, banners, table runners, and more throughout their communities.

Since July 2022, subgrants provided over \$61,000 to support ALA Girls State programs and other unit and department initiatives.

None of this would have been possible without our more than 6,000 donations totaling \$278,338. The ALA Foundation is proud to serve the ALA.

AMERICANISM COMMITTEE

Michele DeGennaro, Florida, Chair

The American Legion Auxiliary Americanism program promotes patriotism and responsible citizenship — and that is just what our members did — when several units in Minnesota reported starting a program with local kindergarten classes. When a kindergartener successfully learned the Pledge of Allegiance, they received their own small flag. All of the kindergarteners who learned the pledge got to lead the Pledge of Allegiance at the school Veterans Day program.

The Department of Maryland was happy to report that Americanism was alive and well in their state. Sixty units contacted 229 schools, sharing information about the Americanism Essay Contest, with 1,531 essays submitted for judging. Department Chair Marilyn said, "It was heartwarming to be able to give them all an avenue to express their patriotism."

The Department of Pennsylvania had one unit report they held a contest for a flag display. Unit members nominated homes in the community that proudly and correctly displayed the flag. They awarded a winner every quarter. In the fall, they held a small social after a meeting and presented all winners with a framed picture of their flag display and \$25 cash award.

Unit 69 in New Mexico promoted Americanism every month in their Auxiliary monthly newsletter, promoted flag etiquette, proper flag folding, announcements of national holidays, and notification of half-staff flag days.

District 5 in the Department of Kansas held a trivia contest at a local middle school. It was students against veterans using *Indivisible: The Story of Our Flag* as their guide. They may have declared a winner for this contest, but everyone came away with more knowledge of our flag and a deeper feeling of patriotism.

It was clear in all reports submitted that American Legion Auxiliary members love and respect our country!

AUXILIARY EMERGENCY FUND COMMITTEE

Kelly Elliott, Iowa, Chair

This year, we introduced the new "Members Helping Members" pins. ALA members stepped up and did some amazing fundraising this year. Many held events, passed around baskets/jars at meetings, and held various raffles and auctions.

The Department of Ohio had a unit that passed Emery (short for emergency) around at each meeting by a Junior member to collect donations. Emery is a small plastic pig.

The Department of Iowa even had an online Pampered Chef party on Facebook to reach more people.

Our members faced a lot of adversity this year and have seen how our American Legion Family is here when they need them most. Many members had financial setbacks, as well as the fact that this was an unusually active year for weather disasters. Southern states were most affected by hurricanes, tornadoes, and flooding that occurred.

The stories from our departments about members who lost everything but were more worried about their other members were inspiring. We are a family, and that shined through this year — from helping members find items lost in storms, to helping rebuild their Legion buildings, to raising funds to helping others in need.

I think Kate Webber, Department of Illinois, said it best: "Each donation, no matter the amount, adds to the financial hug in a time of need. No one knows when they might be the one who needs that financial hug."

We continue to keep those who suffered loss or a setback this year in our thoughts and prayers.

CHILDREN & YOUTH COMMITTEE

Pam Ray, Illinois, Chair

Units and departments around the country continued to support our children — everything from Halloween parties, to trunk or treats, to breakfast with Santa. Unit 13 in Tallahassee, Fla., adopted a veteran's family with three kids, providing gift cards so their Christmas could feel special.

Let's also give a shout out to Florida Homosassa Unit 166 for "adopting" a 3-year-old boy with cancer for a year. They provided gifts, cards, and gas cards to assist with travel expenses to the hospital and doctor visits.

Unit 60 of Cushing, Okla., supported their community in a big way. Requests came from their schools for a clothing closet to provide emergency clothing due to severe weather or accidents. They also provided hygiene items for the children.

Unit 3 in Sault St. Marie, Mich., along with VFW Auxiliary 3676, held their first America and Me Boot Camp for youth ages 5-12. The camp taught flag etiquette, marching skills, writing thank-you notes to veterans, and other activities.

Members of Unit 355 in Wisconsin served as counselors at Camp Hometown Heroes, a free weeklong camp for children and siblings of fallen U.S. servicemembers. That is Kids of Deployed are Heroes 2 in action. The Department of Texas distributed over 400 KDH2 buttons as well.

Winchendon, Mass., Unit 193 supported traveling basketball teams for elementary students. Through donations, they assisted with providing a safe place for students to practice and provided buses to their events.

Fairmont Unit 85 in Rhode Island worked for our kids every month. They supported their National Guard unit by donating both funds and time for their events. Synepuxent Unit 166 in Maryland supported many children's organizations such as Casey Cares, Tomorrow Children's House by the Sea, and many others.

COMMUNITY SERVICE COMMITTEE

Melanie Taylor, California, Chair

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service to others." — Mahatma Gandhi

The Department of Iowa reported that Oskaloosa Unit 34 served their community by participating in the Suds of Love project. They donated laundry supplies purchased by their members with the assistance of their Junior Auxiliary members.

Lauren Lloyd with the Department of the District of Columbia reported Unit 1 participated in food drives and distribution for Thanksgiving, which fed over 100 families.

The 9/11 National Day of Service found Minnesota units helped women's homeless shelters, served meals to homebound veterans, held blood drives, and participated in Adopt a Highway, cleaning ditches along roadways and picking up trash thrown to the side.

GI Joe Unit 244, Department of Kentucky, provided a birthday celebration for a World War II veteran's 98th birthday.

The Department of Arizona did not forget our fur babies. They contacted their community-minded members and assisted at and made donations to local animal shelters and sanctuaries.

Units reported assisting family members with funeral arrangements and celebrations of life.

Meals were made and delivered to first responders in the field.

Members reported hosting ceremonies for Memorial Day and Veterans Day, partnering with the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, donated food, worked at their local food pantries, and volunteered at hospitals and nursing homes.

Units didn't forget those veterans who struggled with thoughts of suicide by supporting The American Legion's Be The One veteran suicide awareness campaign.

Our members continued to wear red on Fridays — Remember Everyone Deployed — and let our communities know who we are and what we do.

CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS COMMITTEE

Diana Sirovina, Wisconsin, Chair

The Constitution & Bylaws Committee informs and educates members of the American Legion Auxiliary on the importance and power of having properly written and regularly reviewed and updated governing documents at all levels of the organization.

Our Constitution & Bylaws provide the governance structure for our organization and how it will function. These documents furnish answers to the important questions that arise, such as eligibility, purpose, officers and how we elect them, executive committee, meetings, and how we can amend the documents. Standing Rules provide greater detail about administrative policies and address specific things that may be unique to a particular unit or department.

The key to keeping our organization healthy and productive is to make sure our governing documents are reviewed and updated regularly. Units, counties, districts, and departments all over the country were very busy this year doing just that! The Department of Kansas successfully secured the expertise of Professional Registered Parliamentarian Chris Dickey in the silent auction at last year's convention to assist them in revising their governing documents.

Many departments — including Virginia, Indiana, and Michigan — held Constitution & Bylaws and document workshops at their Fall Conferences and leadership workshops to

help their members become more familiar with the important elements of well-written, properly organized documents.

Department chairmen wrote articles and sent newsletters to help their units with the vital process of reviewing and updating their governing documents. Several chairmen created templates for bylaws and standing rules so units would have a good basis for drafting their documents. Other chairmen created fill-in-the-blank games and quizzes to help members understand the importance of well written documents.

Make an annual review of your documents part of your regular activities.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE **Sallie Rossman, Virginia, Chair**

The snow slowed down but did not stop one unit from delivering school supplies to a two-room school. For students sitting at tables to learn, one member made chair packs for the students to use to keep supplies organized for better learning.

A kindergarten class received new sneakers thanks to a Skechers store that worked with a unit.

Supply purchases were often made through AmazonSmile, giving back to the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation.

To show appreciation to school staff during National Education Week and Teachers Appreciation Week, members provided supplies, meals, snacks, and gifts with special notes.

Schools supported over 100 Veterans in Community Schools programs as living history lessons. One school created a veterans wall with a donation from the Auxiliary.

Members actively promoted and judged national, department, and unit scholarships, allowing for \$510,870 in unit and department scholarships and \$130,000 in national scholarships.

The American Legion Auxiliary understands the importance of education to the future of our country, as do our communities, with in-kind donations totaled \$91,324 for scholarships, school supplies, and necessities for students in need.

Our Education Program enriched and supported school life, especially for our veterans and military families in their communities, through Auxiliary donations of \$329,748 for school and student supplies, including student necessities, and \$43,791 to celebrate National Education Week and Teachers Appreciation Week.

ALA GIRLS NATION COMMITTEE **Donna Dillard, Texas, Chair**

It takes many hands and countless hours to prepare for ALA Girls State sessions, and through hard work and perseverance, many programs reported an increase in participants this year. Some even reached pre-pandemic participation numbers again. All ALA Girls State programs reporting in the Eastern Division noted their numbers were up from the prior year.

Today's teenagers' lives are saturated by mobile technology and social media. Program information and social sharing is now done on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Maryland even put a QR code on their Facebook page that led candidates to the application to attend their program.

Several ALA Girls State programs partnered with The American Legion Boys State program in their state. While the actual programs are still separate, they are conducted during the same timeframe and combine presenters and even key staff members to reduce the cost for both programs. Through this collaboration, they initiated some key efforts and enhanced their program. Missouri created a best practices tool, which they are happy to share with other states considering this option.

Delivering our mission and preserving our legacy, the ALA Girls State staff of

Vermont conducted a panel during their session where members sat and talked to delegates about the American Legion Auxiliary and what our organization can do for them and their communities. ALA Kansas Girls State implemented "Auxiliary Moments" where they explain the history of the ALA and services and programs it supports.

Every generation of teens has been shaped by the social, political, and economic events of the day. The American Legion Auxiliary Girls State program successfully adapted to the shape of our society and evolved with new ideas and new procedures to accommodate today's teens, all while keeping the focus on our mission.

JUNIOR ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

Starr Purnell, Maryland, Chair

Martin Luther King Jr. often said, "Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve." The ALA Junior members of this nation truly showed that *Service Not Self* was the driving force behind their programs and activities.

Five national Junior meetings were held this year where our Juniors were educated on our programs. Juniors had a blast making crafts and decorating bags for companions of veterans attending the National Veterans Creative Art Festival in support of National President Vickie Koutz's 2022-2023 administrative year focus. Indiana Juniors raised close to \$2,000 for the project.

Ohio Juniors collected over \$1,000 in school supplies for schools in undervalued communities. Texas Juniors joined forces with their Sons of The American Legion youth and stuffed over 500 backpacks for students at Uvalde schools after they suffered a tragedy.

Juniors in Alaska cleaned the headstones of veterans and placed flags in their cemeteries. Minnesota Juniors raised over \$13,000 for a veterans home adaptive sports program. Michigan Juniors hosted a dinner for first responders. West Virginia Juniors collected over \$15,000 of personal and comfort items for VA nursing, hospitals, and veterans homes. Maryland Juniors raised over \$5,700 for their special project: Luke's Wings.

From coast to coast, Juniors held POW/MIA ceremonies, Military Child's Table Setting ceremonies, and they participated in Purple Up! for Military Kids in April for Month of the Military Child. ALA Juniors rock!

LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

Nancy Magginnis, Indiana, Chair

ALA leadership comes in many forms and may be modeled for others in a variety of ways. Units, districts, and departments are encouraged to look outside the box for ways to share leadership skills with members.

Wisconsin Department President Linda Coppock emphasized leadership with her personal style. At many events, she encouraged members by saying, "Members, remember to believe YOU make a difference, because YOU have a value, believe in YOU because I DO!" What a great message. By these words, Coppock instilled confidence and encouraged ALA members.

The Department of Florida used a leadership Facebook page as a great teaching tool. The page passed on information and answered questions about the ALA. Mary Kelly-Perkins, the department Leadership chair, featured Mentoring Monday where she shared a different topic to teach members about officer duties, how to write narratives, and much more. If you want to join their group to continue learning, simply ask the Department of Florida to join.

The Department of Ohio developed a *Leadership Guide to Success* reference book. This is an accumulation of national, department, and Leadership Chair Pam Bates prepared materials since 1976.

The American Legion College is another way to learn more about our organization as

a Family. Many ALA departments are part of their state's training program. To learn more, contact your department American Legion.

Some ALA members prefer hands-on training which allows an opportunity to network and gain friendships. Several departments and the national organization have online training or use Zoom meetings to share information. Whatever your style, please make the commitment to learn more about the American Legion Auxiliary and our many programs serving veterans and their families.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE **Pamela Bates, Ohio, Chair**

Our Legislative program provides information and assistance to American Legion Auxiliary members to advocate for the legislative agenda of The American Legion. To use the theme from the Department of Pennsylvania Legislative chairman — Educate, Advocate, and Communicate. That's what units from all states accomplished.

Here are some ways ALA members educated, advocated, and communicated the legislative agenda.

They informed and shared the legislative agenda with their Legion Family members at meetings, communities, veterans groups, city, county, state, and federal representatives, civic organizations, and schools. Members spoke to these groups about the Legion's legislative agenda for our veterans by inviting them to the post home for special recognition and occasions.

One unit's scholarship winners were asked to write a letter to their member of Congress about veterans issues, and another unit used a QR code to assist members with information and set up information boards at meetings.

In smaller towns, many went door to door with handouts of the legislative agenda. Many handed out pamphlets and other material that can be found on the Legion and Auxiliary websites. Many signed up and used the VoterVoice Action Alerts as well as phoned, emailed, and wrote letters to their members of Congress.

Members in this program witnessed the impact of their volunteerism with two events — the passage of the PACT Act and being able to "Storm the Hill" and talk directly to their member of Congress.

The South Dakota department Legislative chair told our story in one sentence: "The American Legion Family continues to serve as a powerful voice for veterans in our nation, but the power of our voice is amplified by the voices of our membership."

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE **Linda Tome, New York, Chair**

Thank you, everyone, for your hard work in recruiting, renewing, and rejoining members this year! As you know, each of us is part of this membership team, and I can't thank you more for hitting some pretty high percentages again this year.

Southern Division started the year out in first place between the five divisions! What a race it was as Western Division jockeyed back and forth with Southern Division for first place when this was written. Although Eastern, Central, and Northwestern Division all had a taste of first place this year, Southern Division was determined to stay out in front, as of press time. Great job to everyone for working the challenge of reaching 100% for your division.

The Department of Arizona reached 100% in April and attributed that in part to a unit that holds monthly events, ranging from dinners with a comedian, to a magic show to bingo, and encouraged members to bring a different guest every time. The unit president introduced herself and asked about possible eligibility. Other units held Independence Day, Labor Day, and Veterans Day membership drives. And of course, they attributed ALAMIS to helping them keep their membership accurate and up to date.

Department of Indiana members held a March Madness race where units scored different points for every renewal, a new member, rejoins, and if they created a mascot and did a short video promoting ALA membership that was posted to social media and/or reaching 100% of goal. Mooresville Unit 103 was the only unit that made a three-pointer with a new member and posted the video to TikTok. How creative!

These were just a couple of ways our members re-energized their units and brought in new members to help move our mission forward in support of veterans, military, and their families.

NATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE **Barb Washburn, Nebraska, Chair**

It was "mission in action" all year long, starting with supporting National President Vickie's focus on POW/MIA awareness.

Every department's year-end report included great information about what members were doing: displaying POW/MIA white tables, holding POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremonies, and sharing information about the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), which provides a wealth of information about our POW/MIAs.

In support of our active-duty military, care packages were sent to over 1,000 servicemembers at an estimated value of \$33,000. Over 95,000 coupons were clipped and shipped, valued at \$5.7 million. A special shout-out to the Department of Florida which reported clipping coupons at a value of \$5.5 million. Coupon clipping was on the upswing compared to previous years.

Twenty-seven departments reported units distributed hundreds of Blue Star Banners to families of military families and displayed them in communities across the country.

The service of first responders was honored by the delivery of snacks, food, and special events highlighting the good works of these groups. Certificates of appreciation were presented to first responders by units in 10 departments.

Emergency preparedness was an important part of the program as 31 departments reported participating in emergency preparedness events, preparing disaster kits, and gathering items for areas hard hit by natural disasters.

Baby showers for expectant military moms and spouses were held by several units, many in conjunction with VA medical centers, Operation Homefront, or the USO. What a fun way to show our military families they are important to us.

Our members supported the ALA National Security program in so many ways, and I thank everyone for their dedication to the National Security program.

POPPY COMMITTEE **Jeanne Haas, Kansas, Chair**

American Legion Auxiliary departments reported members served 46,745 hours on the Poppy Program.

Junior members serving as Miss Poppy handed out poppies. Pennsylvania Unit 791 partnered with Texas Roadhouse and Quaker Steak to hold "Dine to Donate" nights where 10% of the sales went to the poppy fund. Poppies were distributed at the front door.

Members read *The Poppy Lady* to school children and at different community events, with some readers dressing in time period costumes.

With fewer veterans making poppies, units held Poppy Days where members were taught to make a poppy and then made poppies to distribute.

The Department of Michigan challenged units to think outside the box, so a unit teamed up with a movie theater for Poppies and Popcorn, and another unit introduced the \$5 challenge where a bag containing poppies, a Flanders Field bookmark, and poppy seeds were given for the donation.

Units mailed letters to all members with poppy information and several poppies to

wear. Some took poppies to assisted living and nursing home facilities.

Units and departments had poppy contests besides the Poppy Poster Contest — centerpieces and wreaths.

More social media was used to increase the visibility of unit activities for the Poppy Program.

Units reported using poppy funds to provide bus passes to veterans traveling to the doctor, needed items for homeless veterans, food and cleaning supplies, and the needs of those in a VA hospital.

PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Norma Tramm, Minnesota, Chair

New American Legion Auxiliary branding was introduced in 2022-2023. Created as a new marketing tool, the refreshed branding gives a clear statement of who we are — the American Legion Auxiliary — because the new logo is easy to read. Our traditional emblem is not going away. It will continue to be used for official documents and communication. The new branding will be used for all marketing communication applications.

All departments used technology to share information about ALA programs and our mission. Wisconsin's Unit 494 President Crystal Shaw made business cards that had contact information and a QR code to their Facebook page. North Carolina's Department PR Chair Dolly Fisher reported that many units found it a huge advantage to join local community apps like Nextdoor and Facebook Marketplace. It made a difference in bringing attention to many events such as blood drives and stand downs.

Branding ourselves makes a difference every day. South Dakota's department PR Chair Jill Larmer challenged units to participate in a "Spread the Word" contest. All units were encouraged to participate in submitting a narrative describing "the who, the what, and the why" we matter. Reports included newspaper articles and photos of members wearing or displaying the ALA emblem or new logo while volunteering at an event.

Through public relations, we share the mission of the ALA. Many units spend time in booths at their county fairs and various community events. In Idaho, 32 out of 55 units brought in new members because of their public relations work. The Poppy chair for Massachusetts Unit 121 was interviewed by a local television station. By using public relations, we generate greater participation and donations for our programs. If we do public relations correctly, we will enhance all of our other programs.

RISK & COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE

Carol Westergren, Arkansas, Chair

Risk & Compliance is a committee that serves in an oversight capacity to anticipate, identify, and remediate threats that can affect the operation and security of both the American Legion Auxiliary and the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation. We ensure compliance with the necessary legal and regulatory requirements while monitoring the validity of financial statements and related disclosures. We serve to advise the NEC on the processes, procedures, and regulations that maintain the integrity of our operation. Finally, our five-member committee provides the financial credibility and long-term viability expected by our members, donors, and the public.

The committee met throughout the year with our external auditors, ALA National Headquarters staff, and management both by Zoom and in person to approve the audit, income statement, and the 990s. I am happy to report the audit was clean and the tax returns and 990s were filed in a timely manner.

This year, we contracted with Crowe LLP to conduct the first external audit of the information technology systems maintained and utilized by National Headquarters. I am excited to announce that no high-risk issues were identified. The 14 moderate risk items

identified were addressed and resolved by our staff at Headquarters.

I want to take this opportunity to thank National Headquarters staff for all of their hard work during the audits and to help us stay in compliance, and as always, just being there to answer our questions.

In December 2022, we lost Jeri Greenwell, our committee chair of several years. Jeri loved the American Legion Auxiliary and served with an unmatched intensity on the Risk & Compliance Committee. The committee appreciated all of your cards, texts, and prayers.

VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION COMMITTEE
Trish Ward, Kansas, Chair

Every day is Veterans Day for ALA members. The opportunity for veterans to express themselves through the arts served to heal and inspire both those who participated and our members who supported and volunteered. After receiving an American Legion Auxiliary Foundation grant, Fort Dodge Soldiers Home in Fort Dodge, Kan., collaborated with local businesses to showcase veterans' art creations for the community to embrace and enjoy. Across the country, American Legion Auxiliary members offered their services in support of local events by donating supplies, hospitality, and staffing assistance.

Collaboration was key to members' involvement in activities that directly impacted our veteran community. Leveraging local resources and businesses that support our mission, units across the country rallied the teams to assure able veterans had the opportunity to participate in the Honor Flight experience. Making sure our veterans experienced their memorials was an integral mission-focused activity embraced by members across the ALA landscape.

Although regulations have eased, COVID-19 restrictions at the VA still impacted members' ability to serve in traditional ways. Ever vigilant and creative, our members found ways to positively impact in support of our mission. Units in southern Arizona packed duffle bags with clothing, socks, toiletries, and gift cards for distribution at the Tucson VA Medical Center. Christmas baskets in Missouri were assembled and delivered, and members found ways to serve those in need both in person and from afar.



Crowe LLP
Independent Member Crowe Global

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

Members of the National Finance Commission
The American Legion National Headquarters
Indianapolis, Indiana

Report on the Audit of the Financial Statements

Opinion

We have audited the consolidated financial statements of The American Legion National Headquarters ("Legion"), which comprise the consolidated statements of financial position as of December 31, 2022 and 2021, and the related consolidated statements of activities, functional expenses, and cash flows for the years then ended, and the related notes to the financial statements.

In our opinion, the accompanying consolidated financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the consolidated financial position of the Legion as of December 31, 2022 and 2021, and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audits in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America (GAAS). Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements section of our report. We are required to be independent of the Legion and to meet our other ethical responsibilities, in accordance with the relevant ethical requirements relating to our audits. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Responsibilities of Management for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the consolidated financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America, and for the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of consolidated financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the consolidated financial statements, management is required to evaluate whether there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Legion's ability to continue as a going concern for one year from the date the consolidated financial statements are available to be issued.

(Continued)

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the consolidated financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not absolute assurance and therefore is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with GAAS will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control. Misstatements are considered material if there is a substantial likelihood that, individually or in the aggregate, they would influence the judgment made by a reasonable user based on the consolidated financial statements.

In performing an audit in accordance with GAAS, we:

- Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the consolidated financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, and design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks. Such procedures include examining, on a test basis, evidence regarding the amounts and disclosures in the consolidated financial statements.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Legion's internal control. Accordingly, no such opinion is expressed.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluate the overall presentation of the consolidated financial statements.
- Conclude whether, in our judgment, there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Legion's ability to continue as a going concern for a reasonable period of time.

We are required to communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit, significant audit findings, and certain internal control-related matters that we identified during the audit.

Supplementary Information

Our audits were conducted for the purpose of forming an opinion on the consolidated financial statements as a whole. The consolidating statements of financial position and activities are presented for purposes of additional analysis of the consolidated financial statements rather than to present the financial position and results of operations of the individual companies and are not a required part of the consolidated financial statements. Such information is the responsibility of management and was derived from and relates directly to the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the consolidated financial statements. The information has been subjected to the auditing procedures applied in the audits of the consolidated financial statements and certain other procedures, including comparing and reconciling such information directly to the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the consolidated financial statements or to the consolidated financial statements themselves, and other additional procedures in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. In our opinion, the information is fairly stated in all material respects in relation to the consolidated financial statements as a whole.


Crowe LLP

Indianapolis, Indiana
August 1, 2023

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION
December 31, 2022 and 2021

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 5,029,246	\$ 3,222,988
Accounts receivable	4,425,683	5,427,680
Interest receivable	953,594	912,364
Prepaid expenses and deposits	3,078,456	3,329,898
Deferred membership expense	2,343,550	3,944,234
Inventory	3,878,992	3,186,910
Investment in affiliate (CFA)	<u>42,794</u>	<u>42,794</u>
	19,752,315	20,066,868
Investments		
General	13,669,872	27,956,201
Segregated for Restricted and Reserved Funds	35,667,180	40,226,047
Paid-Up-For-Life Membership fund	25,491,174	28,880,686
Samsung scholarship fund	6,581,052	7,557,844
Building funds	7,424,289	8,276,568
Sept. 11 Memorial scholarship fund	15,507,219	17,608,335
Special account – Endowment Fund	1,831,894	2,086,596
General account – Endowment Fund	11,978,788	12,839,954
National Emergency Fund	5,975,391	6,829,609
American Legion Charities	5,096,134	5,666,741
Other	<u>4,046,389</u>	<u>4,548,286</u>
	133,269,382	162,476,867
Property, plant and equipment, net	<u>6,333,367</u>	<u>5,545,580</u>
	<u>\$ 159,355,064</u>	<u>\$ 188,089,315</u>
LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable	\$ 2,259,766	\$ 4,627,024
Scholarships payable	1,264,580	1,971,760
Deposits on emblem merchandise sales	81,648	617,497
Deferred income	1,213,847	1,289,797
Deferred dues income	21,828,750	22,512,681
Deferred income – direct membership solicitation	2,483,250	2,803,706
Accrued vacation benefits	837,176	842,333
Accrued pension expense	12,001,590	18,999,412
Other liabilities	831,134	212,159
Notes payable	8,500,000	-
Deferred dues income – Paid-Up-For-Life membership	22,561,910	23,294,215
Life memberships due to state and local posts	<u>25,740,188</u>	<u>26,575,652</u>
	99,603,839	103,746,236
NET ASSETS		
Without donor restriction	10,873,782	31,119,272
With donor restriction	<u>48,877,443</u>	<u>53,223,807</u>
Total net assets	<u>59,751,225</u>	<u>84,343,079</u>
	<u>\$ 159,355,064</u>	<u>\$ 188,089,315</u>

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
Year ended December 31, 2022

	Without Donor Restriction	With Donor Restriction	Total
Revenue, gains and other support			
National member dues	\$ 26,437,301	\$ -	\$ 26,437,301
Direct membership solicitations	5,266,226	-	5,266,226
Member service fees income	466,668	-	466,668
Affinity income	4,037,500	-	4,037,500
Sales of emblem items	14,461,908	-	14,461,908
Advertising	6,643,423	-	6,643,423
Contributions	21,046,745	4,666,930	25,713,675
Label and printing fees	219,709	-	219,709
Interest and dividends, net of fees	1,665,817	1,117,629	2,783,446
Net realized loss – investments	(467,304)	(411,637)	(878,941)
Other	<u>3,918,466</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3,918,466</u>
	83,696,459	5,372,922	89,069,381
Net assets released from restriction	<u>3,277,150</u>	<u>(3,277,150)</u>	<u>-</u>
Total revenues, gains, and other support	86,973,609	2,095,772	89,069,381
Expenses			
Salaries	15,620,445	-	15,620,445
Employee benefits	6,463,239	-	6,463,239
Cost of sales – Legion	8,045,706	-	8,045,706
Department and magazine costs	1,241,913	-	1,241,913
Direct publications	9,932,751	-	9,932,751
Executive, staff and program travel	3,368,884	-	3,368,884
Commission and committee	1,387,648	-	1,387,648
Printing and postage	33,031,856	-	33,031,856
Scholarships, grants and awards	2,184,530	-	2,184,530
Office and other operating	18,619,748	-	18,619,748
Occupancy and usage	1,823,029	-	1,823,029
Special projects and programs	<u>3,956,942</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3,956,942</u>
	<u>105,676,691</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>105,676,691</u>
Change in net assets from operations	(18,703,082)	2,095,772	(16,607,310)
Net unrealized loss – investments	(8,237,621)	(6,442,136)	(14,679,757)
Net change in PUFL	(319,986)	-	(319,986)
Amortization of pension loss	(1,844,266)	-	(1,844,266)
Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost	<u>8,859,465</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>8,859,465</u>
Change in net assets	(20,245,490)	(4,346,364)	(24,591,854)
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>31,119,272</u>	<u>53,223,807</u>	<u>84,343,079</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ 10,873,782</u>	<u>\$ 48,877,443</u>	<u>\$ 59,751,225</u>

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
Year ended December 31, 2021

	Without Donor Restriction	With Donor Restriction	Total
Revenue, gains and other support			
National member dues	\$ 27,407,718	\$ -	\$ 27,407,718
Direct membership solicitations	5,596,968	-	5,596,968
Member service fees income	496,828	-	496,828
Affinity income	4,000,000	-	4,000,000
Sales of emblem items	12,247,254	-	12,247,254
Advertising	7,024,231	-	7,024,231
Contributions	19,914,839	5,936,506	25,851,345
Label and printing fees	213,045	-	213,045
Interest and dividends, net of fees	1,471,532	1,109,657	2,581,189
Net realized gains - investments	168,749	125,780	294,529
Other	<u>5,272,025</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>5,272,025</u>
	83,813,189	7,171,943	90,985,132
Net assets released from restriction	<u>2,334,665</u>	<u>(2,334,665)</u>	<u>-</u>
Total revenues, gains, and other support	86,147,854	4,837,278	90,985,132
Expenses			
Salaries	15,313,002	-	15,313,002
Employee benefits	5,482,466	-	5,482,466
Cost of sales – Legion	6,556,637	-	6,556,637
Department and magazine costs	1,221,645	-	1,221,645
Direct publications	9,299,355	-	9,299,355
Executive, staff and program travel	2,443,211	-	2,443,211
Commission and committee	954,309	-	954,309
Printing and postage	16,591,875	-	16,591,875
Scholarships, grants and awards	3,108,864	-	3,108,864
Office and other operating	18,115,264	-	18,115,264
Occupancy and usage	1,801,006	-	1,801,006
Special projects and programs	<u>4,130,849</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>4,130,849</u>
	85,018,483	-	85,018,483
Change in net assets from operations	1,129,371	4,837,278	5,966,649
Net unrealized loss – investments	(301,977)	(1,073,615)	(1,375,592)
Net change in PUFL	1,704,384	-	1,704,384
Amortization of pension loss	(2,698,665)	-	(2,698,665)
Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost	8,073,976	-	8,073,976
Gain on forgiveness of PPP loan payable	<u>3,824,000</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3,824,000</u>
Change in net assets	11,731,089	3,763,663	15,494,752
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>19,388,183</u>	<u>49,460,144</u>	<u>68,848,327</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ 31,119,272</u>	<u>\$ 53,223,807</u>	<u>\$ 84,343,079</u>

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

	Program Services		Supporting Services			2022 Total
	Veterans Programs Services	Americanism and Children and Youth Activities	Management and General	Member Development	Fundraising	
2022						
Salaries	\$ 6,176,259	\$ 601,838	\$ 7,961,093	\$ 768,022	\$ 113,233	\$ 15,620,445
Employee benefits	655,533	59,457	5,659,600	77,710	10,939	6,463,239
Cost of sales - Legion	8,045,706	-	-	-	-	8,045,706
Department and magazine costs	1,186,907	-	(3,001)	-	58,007	1,241,913
Direct publications	9,932,751	-	-	-	-	9,932,751
Executive, staff and program travel	1,006,756	1,525,506	797,930	33,203	5,489	3,368,884
Commission and committee	615,596	292,859	398,910	80,283	-	1,387,648
Printing and postage	2,236,954	2,399	66,233	2,766,543	27,959,727	33,031,856
Scholarships, grants, and awards	1,541,313	597,956	-	45,261	-	2,184,530
Office and other operating	1,835,839	252,947	9,515,096	6,294,771	721,095	18,619,748
Occupancy and usage	19,056	1,410	1,385,612	416,951	-	1,823,029
Special project programs	<u>2,207,557</u>	<u>479,041</u>	<u>1,270,647</u>	<u>(303)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3,956,942</u>
Total	<u>\$ 35,460,227</u>	<u>\$ 3,813,413</u>	<u>\$ 27,052,120</u>	<u>\$ 10,482,441</u>	<u>\$ 28,868,490</u>	<u>\$105,676,691</u>
	Program Services		Supporting Services			2021 Total
	Veterans Programs Services	Americanism and Children and Youth Activities	Management and General	Member Development	Fundraising	
2021						
Salaries	\$ 6,185,628	\$ 552,537	\$ 7,727,984	\$ 806,515	\$ 40,338	\$ 15,313,002
Employee benefits	652,109	56,464	4,688,710	82,223	2,960	5,482,466
Cost of sales - Legion	6,556,637	-	-	-	-	6,556,637
Department and magazine costs	1,175,561	-	2,214	-	43,870	1,221,645
Direct publications	9,299,355	-	-	-	-	9,299,355
Executive, staff and program travel	603,415	1,217,975	601,450	19,907	464	2,443,211
Commission and committee	651,671	56,704	231,192	14,742	-	954,309
Printing and postage	2,029,405	1,792	110,563	2,635,324	11,814,791	16,591,875
Scholarships, grants, and awards	2,025,277	912,009	-	171,578	-	3,108,864
Office and other operating	2,521,391	227,813	8,290,827	6,445,642	629,591	18,115,264
Occupancy and usage	22,205	1,418	1,232,809	544,574	-	1,801,006
Special project programs	<u>2,112,042</u>	<u>556,279</u>	<u>1,462,225</u>	<u>303</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>4,130,849</u>
Total	<u>\$ 33,834,696</u>	<u>\$ 3,582,991</u>	<u>\$ 24,347,974</u>	<u>\$ 10,720,808</u>	<u>\$ 12,532,014</u>	<u>\$ 85,018,483</u>

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF CASH FLOWS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Cash flows from operating activities		
Change in net assets	\$ (24,591,854)	\$ 15,494,752
Adjustments to reconcile change in net assets to net cash from operating activities		
Depreciation expense	720,065	496,914
Realized (gain) loss on sale of investments	878,941	(294,529)
Unrealized (gain) loss on investments	14,679,757	1,375,592
Net change in Paid-Up-For-Life annuity	(319,986)	1,704,384
Amortization of pension loss	1,844,266	2,698,665
Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost	(8,859,465)	(8,073,976)
Paycheck Protection Program loan forgiveness	-	(3,824,000)
Contributions restricted for long-term purposes	(1,239,118)	(4,144,096)
Bad debt expense	-	(31,506)
Changes in assets and liabilities:		
Accounts receivable	1,001,997	(937,915)
Interest receivable	(41,230)	117,476
Prepaid expenses and deposits	251,442	237,011
Deferred membership expense	1,600,684	(269,087)
Inventories	(692,082)	660,101
Accounts and scholarships payable	5,425,562	4,557,202
Deferred income	(2,863,969)	(6,403,790)
Accrued pension expense	17,377	(164,383)
Other accrued liabilities	613,818	(1,765,625)
Net cash from operating activities	<u>(11,573,795)</u>	<u>1,433,190</u>
Cash flows from investing activities		
Purchase of property and equipment	(1,507,852)	(1,436,912)
Purchase of investments	(108,496,061)	(114,231,869)
Sales and maturities of investments	122,144,848	110,957,891
Investments in affiliate (CFA)	-	(697)
Net cash from investing activities	<u>12,140,935</u>	<u>(4,711,587)</u>
Cash flows from financing activities		
Contributions restricted for long-term purposes	<u>1,239,118</u>	<u>4,144,096</u>
Net cash from financing activities	<u>1,239,118</u>	<u>4,144,096</u>
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents	1,806,258	865,699
Cash and cash equivalents, beginning of year	<u>3,222,988</u>	<u>2,357,289</u>
Cash and cash equivalents, end of year	<u>\$ 5,029,246</u>	<u>\$ 3,222,988</u>
Supplemental cash flows information:		
Investment maturities	\$ 20,954,367	\$ 1,775,000
Forgiveness of PPP loan	-	3,824,000
Non-cash transactions:		
Notes payable as a result of vendor payment reductions	\$ 8,500,000	\$ -

See accompanying notes to consolidated financial statements.

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 1 - NATURE OF OPERATIONS AND SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Nature of Organization: The American Legion National Headquarters ("Legion") is a national veterans organization, which was declared to be a corporate body by an Act of the United States Congress on September 16, 1919.

According to the Original Act and Subsequent Amendments, the purpose of the Legion is "To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to promote peace and goodwill among the peoples of the United States and all the nations of the earth; to preserve the memories and incidents of the two World Wars and the other great hostilities fought to uphold democracy; to cement the ties and comradeship born of service; and to consecrate the efforts of its members to mutual helpfulness and service to their country."

Approximately 36% of the Legion's income is derived from membership dues (including amounts allocated for magazine subscriptions). Contributions generate an additional 29% of revenue. Advertising for the American Legion Magazine derives approximately 7% of income. Another significant source of income is Emblem sales, which includes the sale of apparel, jewelry, and other items bearing the American Legion Emblem. Income is expended by the Legion on several different programs including The American Legion Magazine, Emblem sales, veterans' assistance and rehabilitation, youth programs and others. The Legion's youth programs include American Legion baseball, oratorical contests and Boys Nation.

Principles of Consolidation: The consolidated financial statements include the accounts of The American Legion National Headquarters, The American Legion Charities ("ALC"), The American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation ("ALEF"); and the National Emergency Fund ("NEF") (collectively, "the Legion"). All material inter-organizational accounts and transactions have been eliminated in consolidation.

The American Legion Charities includes the consolidated balances and activities of the American Legion Charities Trust and the American Legion Charities, Inc. The ALC was established to solicit funds from the individuals, organizations and corporations and to disburse said funds as may be directed to various Legion programs and charities. The ALC also promotes the common good and general welfare of the people of the United States of America by raising money for the programs of the Legion and its departments and posts.

The American Legion Endowment Fund Corporation, a tax-exempt Indiana corporation, was created to provide permanent funding for the rehabilitation of American veterans and assistance to orphans of veterans.

The National Emergency Fund is a tax-exempt trust established to provide gifts and grants to relieve suffering and ameliorate financial hardship incurred by American Legion members, families and Posts.

Basis of Accounting: The financial statements have been prepared on the accrual basis of accounting in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America ("GAAP").

Use of Estimates in Preparation of Financial Statements: The preparation of financial statements in conformity with GAAP requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets and liabilities and disclosure of contingent assets and liabilities at the date of the financial statements and the reported amounts of revenues, expenses, gains, losses and other changes in net assets during the reported period. Actual results could differ from those estimates.

Financial Statement Presentation: The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with GAAP, which requires, among other things, that the financial statements report the changes in and total of each of the net asset classes, based upon donor restrictions, as applicable. Net assets are to be classified as without donor restriction and with donor restriction.

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 1 - NATURE OF OPERATIONS AND SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES
(Continued)

The following classes of net assets are maintained:

Net Assets Without Donor Restriction - The net asset without donor restriction class includes general assets and liabilities of the Legion, as well as assets and liabilities designated by the National Executive Committee, the governing body of the Legion. The net asset without donor restriction of the Legion may be used at the discretion of management to support the Legion's purposes and operations. There are \$1,370,457 and \$1,597,351 of board designated net assets included in the net assets without donor restrictions as of December 31, 2022 and 2021, respectively. These funds have been designated by the American Legion Charities Board for quasi endowment.

Net Assets with Donor Restrictions - The net asset with donor restriction class includes assets of the Legion related to gifts with explicit donor-imposed restrictions that have not been met as to specified purpose, or to later periods of time or after specified dates. Unconditional promises to give that are due in future periods are classified as net asset with donor restriction. As the restrictions are met, the net assets are released from restrictions and included in net assets without donor restriction. Contributions for which the restrictions are met in the same period in which the contribution is received are also recorded as net assets with donor restrictions and released from restrictions. The net asset with donor restriction class also includes assets of the Legion for which the donor has stipulated that the contribution be maintained in perpetuity. Donor-imposed restrictions limiting the use of the assets or its economic benefit neither expire with the passage of time nor can be removed by satisfying a specific purpose.

Cash and Cash Equivalents: Cash and cash equivalents include cash on hand and less than 90-day deposit balances with banks. The Legion maintains all of its cash deposits in banks and brokerage firms. This may result in a concentration of credit risk in the case of a severe regional financial failure. The maximum amount at risk is the excess of the deposit liabilities reported by the banks over the amounts that would have been covered by federal insurance. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation ("FDIC") insures deposits up to \$250,000 per financial institution.

Accounts Receivable and Allowance for Uncollectible Accounts: The Legion bills members, posts, and departments for dues and bills agencies for advertising in the Legion magazine. Interest is not normally charged on receivables. Management establishes a reserve for losses on its accounts based on historic loss experience and current economic conditions. Losses are charged off to the reserve when management deems further collection efforts will not produce additional recoveries. Management estimated that no allowance was necessary for the years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021.

The Charities collects donations from members, posts, and departments. Losses are charged off to the reserve when management deems further collection efforts will not produce additional recoveries. Management estimated that no allowance was necessary for the years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021.

Inventory: Inventory consists of Emblem items held for sale, magazine paper and publication rights and is stated at the lower of cost or market using the first-in, first-out ("FIFO") method. Supplies which are not intended for sale are expensed when purchased.

Investments: Investments are carried at fair value. The fair values of investments are based on quoted market prices, where available. If quoted market prices are not available, fair values are based on quoted market prices of comparable instruments. Realized and unrealized gains and losses are reflected in the consolidated statements of activities. Premiums or discounts on investments are generally recognized at the time of disposal or maturity. Interest and dividends are shown net of fees on the statements of activities.

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 1 - NATURE OF OPERATIONS AND SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES
(Continued)

Property, Plant, and Equipment: Expenditures for property, plant, and equipment and items, which substantially increase the useful lives of existing assets and are greater than \$1,500 are capitalized at cost. The Legion records depreciation on the straight-line method at rates designated to depreciate the costs of assets over their estimated useful lives. Buildings are depreciated on the straight-line method using a 30-year life. All other capital assets are depreciated over lives ranging from three to seven years.

Impairment of Long-Lived Assets: In accordance with GAAP, the Legion reviews its property and equipment for impairment whenever events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying value of an asset may not be recoverable. If the fair value is less than the carrying amount of the asset, an impairment loss is recognized for the difference. No impairment loss has been recognized during the years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021.

Collections: The Legion owns many collectible military related items and historical documents, which were not recorded as they were acquired. It is often impracticable to determine a value for collections and accordingly, the Legion has concluded that they need not be capitalized. Some of these items have been appraised for insurance purposes.

Support and Revenue: The Legion reports gifts of cash and other assets as restricted support if they are received with donor stipulations that limit the use of the donated assets. When a donor restriction expires, that is, when a stipulated time restriction ends or purpose restriction is accomplished, temporarily restricted net assets are reclassified to unrestricted net assets and reported in the statement of activities as net assets released from restrictions.

In 2022, the majority of the fundraising for the Legion shifted from the American Legion National Headquarters to the American Legion Charities. As a result most of the contribution revenue and related fundraising expenses are reported on the American Legion Charities for the year ended December 31, 2022 and moving forward.

Revenue Recognition: The Legion recognizes revenue either as performance obligations are materially satisfied, contracts expire or are invalidated, and/or as applicable terms warrant. This includes affinity income, sales of emblems, advertising and other revenue streams not specifically outlined in note 1.

Member Dues Income and Expense: Member Dues are recognized as income over the applicable membership period, which is on a calendar-year basis. In addition to other methods of obtaining new members, the Legion uses direct mail and other direct marketing approaches. The income generated from direct membership solicitation is recognized over the applicable membership period (calendar year). The direct-response expenses incurred in obtaining new members are deferred and recognized in the subsequent membership year.

Income Taxes: The Legion is exempt from federal income taxes under section 501(c)(19) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. ALC, ALEF and NEF are exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. None of the entities are considered to be a private foundation. The Legion is subject to income tax on unrelated business income. In 2022 and 2021, the Legion incurred no tax expense.

Current accounting standards require the Legion to disclose the amount of potential benefit or obligation to be realized as a result of an examination performed by a taxing authority. For the years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021, management has determined that the Legion does not have any tax positions that result in any uncertainties regarding the possible impact on the Legion's financial statements.

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 1 - NATURE OF OPERATIONS AND SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES
(Continued)

The Legion does not expect the total amount of unrecognized tax benefits to significantly change in the next 12 months. The Legion recognizes interest and/or penalties related to income tax matters in income tax expense. The Legion did not have any amounts accrued for interest and penalties at December 31, 2022 and 2021.

Fair Value of Financial Instruments: The carrying amount of all financial instruments of the Legion, which include cash and cash equivalents, accounts receivable, beneficial interest in trust, investments, accounts payable, and notes payable, approximate fair value.

Expense Allocation: Expenses have been classified as program services, management and general, member development and fund raising based on actual direct expenditures. Additionally, salary and employee benefits expenses are allocated among departments based upon estimates of the amount of time spent by Legion employees performing services for these departments.

Subsequent Events: Management has performed an analysis of the activities and transactions subsequent to December 31, 2022, to determine the need for any adjustments or disclosures to the financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2022. Management has performed their analysis through August 1, 2023, the date the financial statements were available to be issued.

NOTE 2 – PAYCHECK PROTECTION PROGRAM (PPP) LOAN

In December 2019, a novel strain of coronavirus surfaced and has spread around the world, with resulting business and social disruption. The coronavirus was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization on January 30, 2020. As a result of the economic uncertainty stemming from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in May 2020, the Legion received a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan for \$3,824,000 from the United States Small Business Administration (SBA). The Legion accounted for the PPP Loan as debt under ASC 470 and therefore, recognized the \$3,824,000 of revenue when the loan was forgiven in June 2021. Further disclosure of the loan is included within notes payable in note 7 of the financial statements.

NOTE 3 - COLLECTIONS

The Legion owns many collectible military related items and historical documents, which were not recorded as they were acquired. It is often impracticable to determine a value for collections and accordingly, the Legion has concluded that they need not be capitalized. These items have been appraised, or are in the process of being appraised for insurance purposes and are as follows:

	Appraisal Date	(unaudited) Replacement Value
World War I Posters	12/10/2015	\$ 492,204
World War II Posters	12/10/2015	469,039
Military Unit Histories	12/10/2015	112,410
Fine Art Collection	12/10/2015	980,000
Museum Collection	12/10/2015	120,475

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
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Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 4 - INVESTMENT IN AFFILIATE

The Legion, in conjunction with approximately 120 other organizations, has created a nonprofit corporation known as The Citizens Flag Alliance, Inc. ("CFA") for the purpose of aiding in the campaign to secure a constitutional amendment empowering the Congress and the States to enact legislation to protect the Flag of the United States of America from physical desecration.

CFA recognized a change in net assets of \$0 and \$697 in 2022 and 2021, respectively. Accordingly, the Legion's investment in CFA has been changed by these amounts and corresponding adjustments have been reflected in unrestricted net assets for 2022 and 2021.

NOTE 5 - FAIR VALUE OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

Fair value is defined as the price that would be received for an asset or paid to transfer a liability (an exit price) in the Legion's principal or most advantageous market for the asset or liability in an orderly transaction between market participants on the measurement date.

GAAP establishes a fair value hierarchy, which requires an entity to maximize the use of observable inputs and minimize the use of unobservable inputs when measuring fair value. GAAP describes three levels of inputs that may be used to measure fair value:

Level 1: Quoted prices for identical assets or liabilities in active markets that the entity has the ability to access as of the measurement date.

Level 2: Significant other observable inputs other than Level 1 prices such as quoted prices for similar assets or liabilities; quoted prices in markets that are not active; or other inputs that are observable or can be corroborated by observable market data.

Level 3: Significant unobservable inputs that reflect a reporting entity's own assumptions about the assumptions that market participants would use in pricing an asset or liability.

In many cases, a valuation technique used to measure fair value includes inputs from multiple levels of the fair value hierarchy. The lowest level of significant input determines the placement of the entire fair value measurement in the hierarchy.

The fair value of money markets and common stock are based on quoted prices in active markets (Level 1 inputs). The fair value of U.S. Government obligations, corporate bonds, and state and municipal bonds are based on quoted market prices of similar securities with similar due dates using the market approach (Level 2 inputs).

The fair value of beneficial interest in trust assets is determined using the income approach and is based on a valuation model that calculates the present value of estimated distributed income. The valuation model incorporates assumptions that market participants would use in estimating future distributed income. The Legion is able to compare the valuation model inputs and results to widely available published industry data for reasonableness; however, the Legion is unable to redeem the assets of the trust and only receives distributions (Level 3 inputs).

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 5 - FAIR VALUE OF FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS (Continued)

Assets and Liabilities Measured on a Recurring Basis: Assets and liabilities measured at fair value on a recurring basis are summarized below:

	Fair Value Measurements at December 31, 2022 Using		
	Quoted Prices in Active markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)	Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)	Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)
Assets:			
Money market accounts	\$ 15,190,835	\$ -	\$ -
U.S. Government obligations	-	19,093,084	-
State and municipal bonds	-	37,315,046	-
Corporate bonds	-	36,174,765	-
Common stock	<u>25,495,652</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
	<u>\$ 40,686,487</u>	<u>\$ 92,582,895</u>	<u>\$ -</u>

The tables below present a reconciliation and statement of activities classification of gains and losses for all assets measured at fair value on a recurring basis using significant unobservable inputs (Level 3) for the years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021:

	Fair Value Measurements at December 31, 2021 Using		
	Quoted Prices in Active markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)	Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)	Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)
Assets:			
Money market accounts	\$ 33,851,525	\$ -	\$ -
U.S. Government obligations	-	15,022,272	-
State and municipal bonds	-	46,768,542	-
Corporate bonds	-	38,922,956	-
Common stock	<u>27,911,572</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
	<u>\$ 61,763,097</u>	<u>\$ 100,713,770</u>	<u>\$ -</u>

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 6 – PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT

The Legion's property and equipment, and the related accumulated depreciation at December 31, 2022 and 2021 are as follows:

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Washington, D.C. real estate		
Land	\$ 80,000	\$ 80,000
Building	5,863,932	5,765,411
Indianapolis real estate		
Land	389,264	389,264
Building	4,621,860	4,230,713
Furniture, fixtures and equipment		
National Headquarters, Indianapolis	7,456,647	7,823,580
Washington, D.C.	455,195	707,829
Construction in progress	<u>1,716,444</u>	<u>769,563</u>
	20,583,342	19,766,360
Less: accumulated depreciation	<u>(14,249,975)</u>	<u>(14,220,780)</u>
	<u>\$ 6,333,367</u>	<u>\$ 5,545,580</u>

Depreciation expense for the years ended, December 31, 2022, and 2021 was \$720,065 and \$496,914, respectively.

NOTE 7 – NOTES PAYABLE

In May 2020, The Legion obtained a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan under a program offered by the United States Small Business Administration (SBA) in the amount of \$3,824,000. The Legion accounted for the PPP loan as debt under ASC 470. The Legion received notice of formal forgiveness of the loan in June 2021 and recorded a gain on forgiveness of debt for the year ended December 31, 2021.

On January 1, 2022, the Legion entered into a structured payables arrangement with a supplier that extended the due date for each invoice for a period of up to 2 years without any interest accruing. At December 31, 2022, the outstanding balance was \$8,500,000. Terms of the arrangement require no payments in 2023 and the full balance being paid monthly throughout 2024.

NOTE 8 - LEASES

The Legion has several non-cancelable operating leases, primarily for facilities, computer equipment, and copiers that expire at various dates through 2026. The Legion implemented ASC 842 during 2022 and evaluated the leases under the standard. The Legion determined that there was no significant impact and has not reported a right to use lease assets or lease liability related to any of the leases. Rent expense under these leases for the years ended December 31, 2022, and 2021 was \$174,237 and \$335,731, respectively. The minimum lease commitments under these leases are as follows:

2023		\$ 43,628
2024		34,789
2025		12,929
2026		<u>3,619</u>
		<u>\$ 94,965</u>

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 8 – LEASES (Continued)

In addition, the Legion has a lease with the State of Indiana for rental of the National Headquarters building in Indianapolis, which expired on June 30, 2013. The Legion is operating on a month-to-month basis under the same terms as the original lease agreement. According to the terms of the lease, the Legion is required to maintain the interior of the building and provide adequate insurance on the building in lieu of lease payments. The cost of maintenance for 2022 and 2021 was \$913,617 and \$756,400, respectively. Insurance coverage is included in the Legion's general insurance policy.

NOTE 9 - PAID-UP-FOR-LIFE MEMBERSHIP FUND

The National Executive Committee approved the establishment of a life membership plan available to any member of a participating department. In accordance with the plan, the assets of the Paid-Up-For-Life ("PUFL") Membership Fund are included in without donor restriction, board designated net assets and segregated in a trust account from which funds equal to the annual dues of life members are withdrawn for current operations each year. The trust agreement provides that the Legion has the right to withdraw part or all of the assets of the trust account and to modify or terminate the trust agreement at its discretion.

Under the terms of the PUFL program, participating member's national, state and local dues are paid by the Legion for the remainder of the individual's life. Management has estimated and recognized a liability for the future payments to state and local Legion organizations. Likewise, management has deferred recognition of the national dues portion of the members' payment. Deferred PUFL dues are recognized in annual amounts equal to the national dues in effect each year. The liability and deferred revenue amounts are estimated by the Legion's actuaries using PUFL membership summaries and discount rates comparable to the Legion's recent investment performance.

NOTE 10 - RESTRICTED AND RESERVE DESIGNATED FUNDS

The restricted fund is designated for use by the National Finance Commission and National Executive Committee and reported as without donor restriction, board designated net assets. Earnings of the restricted fund, along with the principal, can be expended only upon recommendation of the National Finance Commission and a two-thirds affirmative vote of the National Executive Committee at two successive meetings. It is the policy of the Legion to transfer 10% of the prior year's defined net income from operations to the restricted fund. The Legion made no transfers to the restricted fund in 2022 and 2021. As of December 31, 2022 and 2021, the restricted fund had an investment balance of \$33,788,623 and \$38,037,073, respectively.

The reserve fund is also designated for use by the National Finance Commission and National Executive Committee and reported as without donor restriction, board designated net assets. However, earnings of the reserve fund may be used for the general operations of the Legion. The principal can be expended only by action of the Legion at its national convention, or by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the National Executive Committee in two successive meetings not less than 60 days apart. As of December 31, 2022 and 2021, the reserve fund had an investment balance of \$1,878,557 and \$2,188,974, respectively.

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THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 11 - NET ASSETS WITH DONOR RESTRICTION

Net assets with donor restrictions have assets that are donor-restricted for specific purposes or have assets that represent donor-restricted gifts that have been invested and are to be maintained in perpetuity.

Income from the Samsung scholarship fund is to be used to fund undergraduate scholarships for descendants of Korean War veterans and other wars in which U.S. service men and service women participated. Income from the American Legion Endowment Fund is to be used to support the veteran affairs and rehabilitation and children and youth activities of the Legion.

At December 31, 2022 and 2021, net assets with donor restriction by specific purpose and in perpetuity are as follows:

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
<u>With Specific Purpose</u>		
Overseas graves decoration fund	\$ 844,635	\$ 974,799
Samsung scholarship	1,181,816	2,099,786
American Legacy fund	15,783,005	16,968,558
National Emergency Fund	6,282,108	7,209,654
Operation Comfort Warrior	3,624,769	3,821,756
John DeVore	343,059	362,390
Edwin J. Dentz VA Boy's State	600,050	697,103
Samsung American Legion Alumni Association	255,940	281,703
Others	<u>486,101</u>	<u>678,200</u>
Total with specific purpose	29,401,483	33,093,949
<u>In Perpetuity</u>		
Samsung scholarship	5,000,000	5,000,000
American Legion Endowment Fund	<u>14,475,960</u>	<u>15,129,858</u>
Total in perpetuity	<u>19,475,960</u>	<u>20,129,858</u>
Total net assets with donor restriction	<u>\$ 48,877,443</u>	<u>\$ 53,223,807</u>

NOTE 12 - NET ASSETS RELEASED FROM RESTRICTION

Net assets were released from donor restrictions by incurring expenses satisfying the restricted purposes or by occurrence of other events specified by donors.

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
<u>Purpose restrictions accomplished</u>		
Overseas graves decoration	\$ 10,948	\$ 20,976
Scholarships and grants (including relief aid)	1,361,041	895,854
Veterans' affairs and rehabilitation and children and youth programs	<u>1,905,161</u>	<u>1,417,835</u>
	<u>\$ 3,277,150</u>	<u>\$ 2,334,665</u>

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 13 - ENDOWMENT COMPOSITION

The Legion's endowments include donor restricted endowment funds that are comprised of two separate funds, the American Legion Endowment Fund and the Samsung scholarship fund. In accordance with GAAP, net assets associated with endowment funds, including funds designated by the National Executive Committee to function as endowments, are classified and reported based on the existence or absence of donor-imposed restrictions.

Interpretation of Relevant Law: The National Executive Committee has interpreted the State of Indiana's Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act ("SPMIFA") as requiring the preservation of the fair value of the original gift as of the gift date of the donor restricted endowment funds absent explicit donor stipulations to the contrary. As a result of this interpretation, the Legion classifies as permanently restricted net assets (a) the original value of gifts donated to the permanent endowment, (b) the original value of subsequent gifts to the permanent endowment, and (c) net accumulations to the permanent endowment made in accordance with the governing documents of the Legion. The remaining portion of the donor restricted endowment fund that is not classified in permanently restricted net assets is classified as temporarily restricted net assets until those amounts are appropriated for expenditure by the Legion in a manner consistent with the standard of prudence prescribed by SPMIFA. In accordance with SPMIFA, the Legion considers the following factors in making a determination to appropriate or accumulate donor restricted endowment funds:

- (1) The duration and preservation of the fund
- (2) The purposes of the Legion and the donor restricted endowment fund
- (3) General economic conditions
- (4) The possible effect of inflation and deflation
- (5) The expected total return from income and the appreciation of investments
- (6) Other resources of the Legion
- (7) The investment policies of the Legion

Endowment net asset composition by type of fund as of December 31, 2022:

	Without Donor Restriction	With Donor Restriction	Total
Donor restricted endowment funds	\$ (168,478)	\$ 20,862,994	\$ 20,694,516
Total funds	<u>\$ (168,478)</u>	<u>\$ 20,862,994</u>	<u>\$ 20,694,516</u>

Endowment net asset composition by type of fund as of December 31, 2021:

	Without Donor Restriction	With Donor Restriction	Total
Donor restricted endowment funds	\$ 87,526	\$ 22,434,861	\$ 22,522,387
Total funds	<u>\$ 87,526</u>	<u>\$ 22,434,861</u>	<u>\$ 22,522,387</u>

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 13 - ENDOWMENT COMPOSITION (Continued)

Changes in endowment net assets for the year ended December 31, 2022:

	Without Donor <u>Restriction</u>	With Donor <u>Restriction</u>	<u>Total</u>
Net assets, beginning of year	\$ 87,526	\$ 22,434,861	\$ 22,522,387
Investment gain:			
Investment income, net of fees	47,327	432,099	479,426
Net depreciation (realized and unrealized)	<u>(268,500)</u>	<u>(2,850,334)</u>	<u>(3,118,834)</u>
Total investment gain	(221,173)	(2,418,235)	(2,369,408)
New gifts	-	1,239,118	1,239,118
Appropriation of endowment assets for expenditure	<u>(34,831)</u>	<u>(392,750)</u>	<u>(427,581)</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ (168,478)</u>	<u>\$ 20,862,994</u>	<u>\$ 20,694,516</u>

Changes in endowment net assets for the year ended December 31, 2021:

	Without Donor <u>Restriction</u>	With Donor <u>Restriction</u>	<u>Total</u>
Net assets, beginning of year	\$ 122,078	\$ 18,387,512	\$ 18,509,590
Investment gain:			
Investment income, net of fees	46,897	449,648	496,545
Net depreciation (realized and unrealized)	<u>(30,788)</u>	<u>(299,219)</u>	<u>(330,007)</u>
Total investment gain	16,109	150,429	166,538
New gifts	-	4,144,096	4,144,096
Appropriation of endowment assets for expenditure	<u>(50,661)</u>	<u>(247,176)</u>	<u>(297,837)</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ 87,526</u>	<u>\$ 22,434,861</u>	<u>\$ 22,522,387</u>

Return Objectives and Risk Parameters: The Legion has adopted investment and spending policies for endowment assets that attempt to provide a predictable stream of funding to programs supported by its endowment while seeking to maintain the purchasing power of the endowment assets. Endowment assets include those assets of donor-restricted funds that the Legion must hold in perpetuity or for a donor-specified period(s). Under this policy, as approved by the National Executive Committee, the endowment assets are invested in a manner that is intended to produce income while assuming a low level of investment risk.

Strategies Employed for Achieving Objectives: To satisfy its long-term rate-of-return objectives, the Legion relies on a total return strategy in which investment returns are achieved through both capital appreciation (realized and unrealized) and current yield (interest and dividends). The Legion targets fixed income securities to achieve its long-term return objectives within prudent risk constraints.

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
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Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 13 - ENDOWMENT COMPOSITION (Continued)

Spending Policy and How the Investment Objectives Relate to Spending Policy: Realized and unrealized gains/losses are added to the principal of the American Legion Endowment Fund and distributions are limited to cumulative interest, net of fees. On the Samsung scholarship fund, the capital appreciation can be spent, along with the interest, net of fees, according to the spending policy. Endowment fund principal, unless otherwise directed by the donor, shall not be disbursed except for emergency situations. In order to make a principal disbursement, a majority vote by the Legion National Executive Committee will be required.

Funds with Deficiencies: From time to time, the fair value of assets associated with individual donor restricted endowment funds may fall below the level that the donor of SPMIFA requires the Legion to retain as a fund of perpetual duration. As of December 31, 2022 and 2021, the Legion did not have any funds with deficiencies.

NOTE 14 - EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The Legion has a 401(k) savings plan with a qualified automatic contribution arrangement that was effective July 1, 2008. The plan calls for a 100% match of the first 1% contributed by the employee and a 50% match of the next 5% contributed by the employee. Thus, the maximum matching percentage an employee will receive is 3.5%. The Legion made contributions of \$401,883 and \$387,388 in 2022 and 2021, respectively.

The Legion has two defined-benefit pension plans. The first plan (Plan A) covers substantially all of its employees as well as those of certain affiliated and subordinated groups. The plan was established in 1944 by vote of the Legion's National Convention. Contributions to Plan A are made by the Legion, and other participating groups, on the basis of annual actuarial valuations. The second plan (Plan B) covers substantially all of its employees. The plan was established in October of 2016 and was effective January 1, 2017. Contributions to Plan B are made by the Legion on the basis of annual actuarial valuations.

In May 2008, the Legion voted to freeze the Plan A effective June 30, 2008. The result of the freeze is that current employees still received the benefits they had earned as of June 30, 2008, but no future benefits were earned and no new employees were added.

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THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
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NOTE 14 - EMPLOYEE BENEFITS (Continued)

The following table sets forth the Legion's portion of Plan A's funded status and amounts recognized in the Legion's consolidated statement of financial position at December 31, 2022 and 2021:

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Benefit obligation	\$ (46,294,420)	\$ (59,742,581)
Fair value of plan assets	<u>38,328,056</u>	<u>47,761,757</u>
Funded status	<u>\$ (7,966,364)</u>	<u>\$ (11,980,824)</u>
Interest cost	\$ 1,453,476	\$ 1,298,207
Actual return on assets	6,347,768	(4,790,075)
Amortization of prior service costs	388,266	442,267
Amortization of loss	1,497,505	2,382,858
Difference between expected and actual return on assets	<u>(9,548,878)</u>	<u>1,699,643</u>
Net periodic pension cost	<u>\$ 138,137</u>	<u>\$ 1,032,900</u>
Net gain/(loss)	\$ (3,764,331)	\$ (6,575,974)
Prior service cost	<u>(388,266)</u>	<u>(442,267)</u>
Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost	<u>\$ (4,152,597)</u>	<u>\$ (7,018,241)</u>
Prepaid benefit cost	\$ 3,621,188	\$ 3,279,325
Accumulated benefit obligation	46,294,420	59,742,581
Vested benefit obligation	45,871,715	59,156,360
Net periodic pension cost	138,137	1,032,900
Benefits paid	3,565,933	3,610,716
Measurement date	12/31/2022	12/31/2021

Estimated future benefit payments:

2023	\$ 3,885,416
2024	3,825,910
2025	3,782,363
2026	3,742,233
2027	3,693,603
Years 2028-2032	17,132,884

The asset investment policy is a lower risk strategy with the primary objective of preservation of capital with an emphasis on long-term growth and generation of current income to provide adequate cash flow needed for benefit payments. The target asset allocation is 0-20% in cash or cash equivalents, 40-70% in fixed income and 30-60% in equities. Prohibited investments include real estate investment trusts, real estate partnerships, mutual funds, private equity, hedge funds and guaranteed investment certificates.

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THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
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Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 14 - EMPLOYEE BENEFITS (Continued)

The fair value of Plan A assets at December 31, 2022 and 2021 are as follows. See Note 5 for descriptions of inputs for each type of asset.

	<u>Fair Value Measurements at December 31, 2022 Using</u>		
	Quoted Prices In Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)	Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)	Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)
Accrued interest	\$ 177,032	\$ -	\$ -
Money market accounts	1,144,215	-	-
U.S. Government and agency obligations	7,940,920	1,020,180	-
Municipal bonds	-	2,819,432	-
Corporate bonds	-	11,792,068	-
Common stock:			
Materials	739,057	-	-
Industrials	1,071,149	-	-
Consumer discretionary	1,626,977	-	-
Consumer staples	1,091,912	-	-
Health care	2,108,164	-	-
Financials	2,820,790	-	-
Telecommunication	468,597	-	-
Technology	2,746,004	-	-
Utilities	<u>761,559</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
	<u>\$ 22,696,376</u>	<u>\$ 15,631,680</u>	<u>\$ -</u>

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
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NOTE 14 - EMPLOYEE BENEFITS (Continued)

	<u>Fair Value Measurements at December 31, 2021 Using</u>		
	Quoted Prices In Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)	Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)	Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)
Accrued interest	\$ 172,591	\$ -	\$ -
Money market accounts	2,048,265	-	-
U.S. Government and agency obligations	-	4,403,059	-
Municipal bonds	-	3,708,931	-
Corporate bonds	-	13,236,949	-
Common stock:			
Materials	1,611,126	-	-
Industrials	1,359,790	-	-
Consumer discretionary	2,155,802	-	-
Consumer staples	1,992,629	-	-
Health care	3,679,700	-	-
Financials	4,967,177	-	-
Telecommunication	1,612,359	-	-
Technology	5,773,231	-	-
Utilities	1,040,148	-	-
	<u>\$ 26,412,818</u>	<u>\$ 21,348,939</u>	<u>\$ -</u>

Historical returns of multiple asset classes were analyzed to develop a risk free real rate of return and risk premium for each asset class. The overall rate for each asset class was developed by combining a long-term inflation component, the risk free real rate of return, and the associated risk premium. A weighted average rate was developed based on those overall rates and the target asset allocation of the plan.

<u>Weighted-average assumptions</u>	<u>2022</u>	2021
Discount rate	4.90%	2.52%
Expected return on plan assets	7.00	7.00
Rate of compensation increase	0.00	0.00

The amounts of net loss and net prior service cost expected to be recognized as components of net periodic benefit cost for the year ending December 31, 2022 are \$1,497,505 and \$388,266, respectively.

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 14 - EMPLOYEE BENEFITS (Continued)

The following table sets forth Plan B's funded status and amounts recognized in the Legion's consolidated statement of financial position at December 31, 2022 and 2021:

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Benefit obligation	\$ (9,083,905)	\$ (12,067,267)
Fair value of plan assets	<u>5,135,850</u>	<u>5,048,679</u>
Funded status	<u>\$ (3,948,055)</u>	<u>\$ (7,018,588)</u>
Service cost	\$ 1,025,723	\$ 864,650
Interest cost	334,319	252,924
Actual return on assets	816,235	(417,696)
Amortization of prior service costs	370,027	370,027
Amortization of loss	346,761	315,807
Difference between expected and actual return on assets	<u>(1,169,559)</u>	<u>115,770</u>
Net periodic pension cost	<u>\$ 1,723,506</u>	<u>\$ 1,501,482</u>
Net gain/(loss)	\$ (4,336,841)	\$ (685,708)
Prior service cost	<u>(370,027)</u>	<u>(370,027)</u>
Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost	<u>\$ (4,706,868)</u>	<u>\$ (1,055,735)</u>
Prepaid benefit cost	\$ (2,347,219)	\$ (1,623,713)
Accumulated benefit obligation	7,214,161	8,608,011
Vested benefit obligation	6,339,666	7,533,403
Net periodic pension cost	1,723,506	1,501,482
Benefits paid	96,594	85,218
Measurement date	12/31/2022	12/31/2021

Estimated future benefit payments:

2023	\$ 207,757
2024	239,132
2025	279,740
2026	343,035
2027	403,463
Years 2028-2032	3,050,504

The asset investment policy is a lower risk strategy with the primary objective of preservation of capital with an emphasis on long-term growth and generation of current income to provide adequate cash flow needed for benefit payments. The target asset allocation is 0-20% in cash or cash equivalents, 40-70% in fixed income and 30-60% in equities. Prohibited investments include real estate investment trusts, real estate partnerships, mutual funds, private equity, hedge funds and guaranteed investment certificates.

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 14 - EMPLOYEE BENEFITS (Continued)

The fair value of Plan B assets at December 31, 2022 and 2021 are as follows. See Note 5 for descriptions of inputs for each type of asset.

	<u>Fair Value Measurements at December 31, 2022 Using</u>		
	Quoted Prices In Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)	Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)	Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)
Accrued interest	\$ 20,209	\$ -	\$ -
Money market accounts	1,084,219	-	-
U.S. Government and agency obligations	488,975	-	-
Municipal bonds	-	527,338	-
Corporate bonds	-	1,616,319	-
Common stock:			
Materials	77,687	-	-
Industrials	114,392	-	-
Consumer discretionary	172,324	-	-
Consumer staples	115,705	-	-
Health care	224,190	-	-
Financials	203,368	-	-
Telecommunication	24,864	-	-
Technology	405,540	-	-
Utilities	80,929	-	-
	<u>\$ 3,012,402</u>	<u>\$ 2,143,657</u>	<u>\$ -</u>

	<u>Fair Value Measurements at December 31, 2021 Using</u>		
	Quoted Prices In Active Markets for Identical Assets (Level 1)	Significant Other Observable Inputs (Level 2)	Significant Unobservable Inputs (Level 3)
Accrued interest	\$ 16,158	\$ -	\$ -
Money market accounts	1,309,928	-	-
U.S. Government and agency obligations	-	-	-
Municipal bonds	-	636,749	-
Corporate bonds	-	1,046,763	-
Common stock:			
Materials	153,965	-	-
Industrials	123,704	-	-
Consumer discretionary	173,575	-	-
Consumer staples	170,411	-	-
Health care	288,755	-	-
Financials	274,404	-	-
Telecommunication	47,901	-	-
Technology	719,432	-	-
Utilities	86,934	-	-
	<u>\$ 3,365,167</u>	<u>\$ 1,683,512</u>	<u>\$ -</u>

(Continued)

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
NOTES TO CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
Years ended December 31, 2022 and 2021

NOTE 14 - EMPLOYEE BENEFITS (Continued)

Historical returns of multiple asset classes were analyzed to develop a risk-free real rate of return and risk premium for each asset class. The overall rate for each asset class was developed by combining a long-term inflation component, the risk-free real rate of return, and the associated risk premium. A weighted average rate was developed based on those overall rates and the target asset allocation of the plan.

<u>Weighted-average assumptions</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Discount rate	5.01%	2.79%
Expected return on plan assets	7.00	7.00
Rate of compensation increase	3.00	3.00

The amounts of net loss and net prior service cost expected to be recognized as components of net periodic benefit cost for the year ending December 31, 2022 are \$346,761 and \$370,027, respectively.

NOTE 15 - LIQUIDITY AND AVAILABILITY

The Legion's financial assets available within one year of the statement of financial position date for general expenditure are as follows:

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Financial assets at year-end:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 5,029,246	\$ 3,222,988
Accounts receivable, net	4,425,683	5,427,680
Interest receivable	953,594	912,364
Investments	<u>133,269,382</u>	<u>162,476,867</u>
Total financial assets	<u>\$ 143,677,905</u>	<u>\$ 172,039,899</u>
Less amounts not available for general expenditure within one year		
Donor-restricted endowment funds	<u>\$ (19,475,960)</u>	<u>\$ (20,129,858)</u>
Financial assets not available to be used within one year	<u>\$ (19,475,960)</u>	<u>\$ (20,129,858)</u>
Financial assets available to meet general expenditures within one year	<u>\$ 124,201,945</u>	<u>\$ 151,910,041</u>

As part of the Legion's liquidity management, the Legion invests its financial assets to be available as its general expenditures, liabilities, and other obligations come due.

NOTE 16 - LITIGATION

The Legion is currently involved in and/or has been mentioned as a defendant or co-defendant in several legal actions. It is the opinion of the National Judge Advocate that these claims are without merit and any ultimate liability of the Legion with respect to these actions will not materially affect the financial statements of the Legion.

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
CONSOLIDATING STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
December 31, 2022

	American Legion National Headquarters	American Legion Charities	American Legion Endowment Fund	National Emergency Fund	Eliminations	Total
ASSETS						
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 2,157,186	\$ 1,892,801	\$ 910,512	\$ 68,747	-	\$ 5,029,246
Accounts receivable	3,296,360	9,941	1,501,730	179,939	(562,287)	4,425,683
Interest receivable	771,640	38,475	85,448	58,031	-	953,594
Prepaid expenses and deposit	3,078,456	-	-	-	-	3,078,456
Deferred membership expense	2,343,550	-	-	-	-	2,343,550
Due from American Legion Endowment Fund	2,000,000	-	-	-	(2,000,000)	-
Inventory	3,878,992	-	-	-	-	3,878,992
Investment in affiliate (CFA)	42,794	-	-	-	-	42,794
	<u>17,568,978</u>	<u>1,941,217</u>	<u>2,497,690</u>	<u>306,717</u>	<u>(2,562,287)</u>	<u>19,752,315</u>
Investments						
General	13,669,872	-	-	-	-	13,669,872
Segregated for Restricted and Reserved funds	35,667,180	-	-	-	-	35,667,180
Paid-Up-For-Life Membership fund	25,491,174	-	-	-	-	25,491,174
Samsung scholarship fund	6,581,052	-	-	-	-	6,581,052
Building funds	7,424,289	-	-	-	-	7,424,289
Sept. 11 Memorial scholarship fund	15,507,219	-	-	-	-	15,507,219
Special account – Endowment Fund	-	-	1,831,894	-	-	1,831,894
General account – Endowment Fund	-	-	11,978,788	-	-	11,978,788
National Emergency Fund	-	-	-	5,975,391	-	5,975,391
American Legion Charities	-	5,096,134	-	-	-	5,096,134
Other	4,046,389	-	-	-	-	4,046,389
	<u>108,387,175</u>	<u>5,096,134</u>	<u>13,810,682</u>	<u>5,975,391</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>133,269,382</u>
Property, plant and equipment, net	6,333,367	-	-	-	-	6,333,367
	<u>\$ 132,289,520</u>	<u>\$ 7,037,351</u>	<u>\$ 16,308,372</u>	<u>\$ 6,282,108</u>	<u>\$ (2,562,287)</u>	<u>\$ 159,355,064</u>
LIABILITIES						
Accounts payable	\$ 1,918,672	\$ 902,491	\$ 890	\$ -	\$ (562,287)	\$ 2,259,766
Scholarships payable	1,264,580	-	-	-	-	1,264,580
Due to American Legion National Headquarters	-	-	2,000,000	-	(2,000,000)	-
Deposits on emblem merchandise sales	81,648	-	-	-	-	81,648
Deferred income	1,213,847	-	-	-	-	1,213,847
Deferred dues income	21,828,750	-	-	-	-	21,828,750
Deferred income – direct membership solicitation	2,483,250	-	-	-	-	2,483,250
Accrued vacation benefits	837,176	-	-	-	-	837,176
Accrued pension expense	12,001,590	-	-	-	-	12,001,590
Other liabilities	763,634	67,500	-	-	-	831,134
Notes payable	-	8,500,000	-	-	-	8,500,000
Deferred dues income – Paid-Up-For-Life Membership	22,561,910	-	-	-	-	22,561,910
Life memberships due to state and local posts	25,740,188	-	-	-	-	25,740,188
	<u>90,695,245</u>	<u>9,469,991</u>	<u>2,000,890</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>(2,562,287)</u>	<u>99,603,839</u>
NET ASSETS						
Without donor restriction	17,152,414	(6,110,155)	(168,477)	-	-	10,873,782
With donor restriction	24,441,861	3,677,515	14,475,959	6,282,108	-	48,877,443
Total net assets	<u>41,594,275</u>	<u>(2,432,640)</u>	<u>14,307,482</u>	<u>6,282,108</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>59,751,225</u>
	<u>\$ 132,289,520</u>	<u>\$ 7,037,351</u>	<u>\$ 16,308,372</u>	<u>\$ 6,282,108</u>	<u>\$ (2,562,287)</u>	<u>\$ 159,355,064</u>

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
CONSOLIDATING STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
December 31, 2021

	American Legion National Headquarters	American Legion Charities	American Legion Endowment Fund	National Emergency Fund	Eliminations	Total
ASSETS						
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 1,503,739	\$ 991,878	\$ 540,607	\$ 186,764	\$ -	\$ 3,222,988
Accounts receivable	3,857,112	-	1,668,912	133,659	(232,003)	5,427,680
Interest receivable	734,249	37,178	81,315	59,622	-	912,364
Prepaid expenses and deposits	3,146,780	183,118	-	-	-	3,329,898
Deferred membership expense	3,944,234	-	-	-	-	3,944,234
Due from American Legion Endowment Fund	2,000,000	-	-	-	(2,000,000)	-
Inventory	3,186,910	-	-	-	-	3,186,910
Investment in affiliate (CFA)	42,794	-	-	-	-	42,794
	<u>18,415,818</u>	<u>1,212,174</u>	<u>2,290,834</u>	<u>380,045</u>	<u>(2,232,003)</u>	<u>20,066,868</u>
Investments						
General	27,956,201	-	-	-	-	27,956,201
Segregated for Restricted and Reserved funds	40,226,047	-	-	-	-	40,226,047
Paid-Up-For-Life Membership fund	28,880,686	-	-	-	-	28,880,686
Samsung scholarship fund	7,557,844	-	-	-	-	7,557,844
Building funds	8,276,568	-	-	-	-	8,276,568
Sept. 11 Memorial scholarship fund	17,608,335	-	-	-	-	17,608,335
Special account – Endowment Fund	-	-	2,086,596	-	-	2,086,596
General account – Endowment Fund	-	-	12,839,954	-	-	12,839,954
National Emergency Fund	-	-	-	6,829,609	-	6,829,609
American Legion Charities	-	5,666,741	-	-	-	5,666,741
Other	4,548,286	-	-	-	-	4,548,286
	<u>135,053,967</u>	<u>5,666,741</u>	<u>14,926,550</u>	<u>6,829,609</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>162,476,867</u>
Property, plant and equipment, net	5,545,580	-	-	-	-	5,545,580
	<u>\$ 159,015,365</u>	<u>\$ 6,878,915</u>	<u>\$ 17,217,384</u>	<u>\$ 7,209,654</u>	<u>\$ (2,232,003)</u>	<u>\$ 188,089,315</u>
LIABILITIES						
Accounts payable	\$ 4,498,583	\$ 360,444	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (232,003)	\$ 4,627,024
Scholarships payable	1,971,760	-	-	-	-	1,971,760
Due to American Legion National Headquarters	-	-	2,000,000	-	(2,000,000)	-
Deposits on emblem merchandise sales	617,497	-	-	-	-	617,497
Deferred income	1,289,797	-	-	-	-	1,289,797
Deferred dues income	22,512,681	-	-	-	-	22,512,681
Deferred income – direct membership solicitation	2,803,706	-	-	-	-	2,803,706
Accrued vacation benefits	842,333	-	-	-	-	842,333
Accrued pension expense	18,999,412	-	-	-	-	18,999,412
Other liabilities	212,159	-	-	-	-	212,159
Deferred dues income – Paid-Up-For-Life Membership	23,294,215	-	-	-	-	23,294,215
Life memberships due to state and local posts	26,575,652	-	-	-	-	26,575,652
	<u>103,617,795</u>	<u>360,444</u>	<u>2,000,000</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>(2,232,003)</u>	<u>103,746,236</u>
NET ASSETS						
Without donor restriction	28,365,259	2,666,487	87,526	-	-	31,119,272
With donor restriction	27,032,311	3,851,984	15,129,858	7,209,654	-	53,223,807
Total net assets	<u>55,397,570</u>	<u>6,518,471</u>	<u>15,217,384</u>	<u>7,209,654</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>84,343,079</u>
	<u>\$ 159,015,365</u>	<u>\$ 6,878,915</u>	<u>\$ 17,217,384</u>	<u>\$ 7,209,654</u>	<u>\$ (2,232,003)</u>	<u>\$ 188,089,315</u>

THE AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
CONSOLIDATING STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
Year ended December 31, 2022

	American Legion National Headquarters	American Legion Charities	American Legion Endowment Fund	National Emergency Fund	Eliminations	Total
Revenue, gains and other support						
National member dues	\$ 26,437,301	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 26,437,301
Direct membership solicitation	5,266,226	-	-	-	-	5,266,226
Member service fees income	466,668	-	-	-	-	466,668
Affinity income	4,037,500	-	-	-	-	4,037,500
Sales of emblem items	14,461,908	-	-	-	-	14,461,908
Advertising	6,643,423	-	-	-	-	6,643,423
Contributions	3,493,995	21,613,019	1,239,118	544,018	(1,176,475)	25,703,675
Label and printing fees	219,709	-	-	-	-	219,709
Interest and dividends, net of fees	2,207,279	103,896	288,962	175,683	7,626	2,753,446
Net realized gain (loss) - investments	(654,373)	(7,798)	(217,378)	608	-	(878,941)
American Legion Endowment Fund income	235,807	-	-	-	(235,807)	-
Other	3,625,968	300,124	-	-	(7,626)	3,918,466
	<u>66,441,411</u>	<u>22,009,241</u>	<u>1,310,702</u>	<u>720,309</u>	<u>(1,412,282)</u>	<u>89,069,381</u>
Expenses						
Salaries	15,620,445	-	-	-	-	15,620,445
Employee benefits	6,463,239	-	-	-	-	6,463,239
Cost of sales – Legion	8,045,706	-	-	-	-	8,045,706
Department and - magazine costs	1,241,913	-	-	-	-	1,241,913
Direct publications	9,932,751	-	-	-	-	9,932,751
Executive, staff and program travel	3,366,228	-	2,656	-	-	3,368,884
Commission and committee	1,387,648	-	-	-	-	1,387,648
Printing and postage	5,397,541	27,634,315	-	-	-	33,031,856
Scholarships, grants and awards	711,149	1,889,661	235,807	760,195	(1,412,282)	2,184,530
Office and other operating	18,074,794	501,526	38,004	5,424	-	18,619,748
Occupancy and usage	1,823,029	-	-	-	-	1,823,029
Special projects and programs	3,687,500	269,442	-	-	-	3,956,942
	<u>75,751,943</u>	<u>30,294,944</u>	<u>276,467</u>	<u>765,619</u>	<u>(1,412,282)</u>	<u>105,676,691</u>
Change in net assets from operations	(9,310,532)	(8,285,703)	1,034,235	(45,310)	-	(16,607,310)
Net unrealized loss – investments	(11,187,976)	(665,408)	(1,944,137)	(882,236)	-	(14,679,757)
Net change in PUFLL	(319,986)	-	-	-	-	(319,986)
Amortization of pension loss	(1,844,266)	-	-	-	-	(1,844,266)
Pension-related changes other than net periodic pension cost	8,859,465	-	-	-	-	8,859,465
Change in net assets	(13,803,295)	(8,951,111)	(909,902)	(927,546)	-	(24,591,814)
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>55,397,570</u>	<u>6,518,471</u>	<u>15,217,384</u>	<u>7,209,654</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>84,343,079</u>
Net assets, end of year	\$ 41,594,275	\$ (2,432,640)	\$ 14,307,482	\$ 6,282,108	\$ -	\$ 59,751,225