

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 124TH NATIONAL CON-
VENTION OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS
OF THE UNITED STATES

COMMUNICATION

FROM

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

TRANSMITTING

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 124TH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF
THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HELD IN PHOENIX, ARIZONA: JULY 22-27, 2023, PURSUANT TO
44 U.S.C. 1332; (PUBLIC LAW 90-620 (AS AMENDED BY PUBLIC
LAW 105-225, SEC. 3); (112 STAT. 1498)



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

[Approved October 2, 1968.]

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
OCTOBER 2024

Honorable Mike Johnson
The Speaker U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In conformance with the provisions of Public Law No. 620, 90th Congress, approved October 22, 1968, I am transmitting to you herewith the proceedings of the 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Phoenix, Arizona July 22-27, 2023, which is submitted for printing as a House document.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan West". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dan West
Adjutant General

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

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

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

* indicates deceased

American Veterans of Foreign Service

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

American Veterans of Foreign Service
(Eastern Branch)

1903-1904	Capt. Robert S. Hansburg *	Elected at Altoona, Pennsylvania.
1904-1905	H.O. Kelly *	Elected at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

(The above two organizations amalgamated September 1905, at Altoona,
Pennsylvania.)

Army of the Philippines

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

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

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

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

1937-1938	Scott P. Squyres* .....Elected at Buffalo, New York.
1938-1939	Eugene I. Van Antwerp* .....Elected at Columbus, Ohio.
1939-1940	Otis N. Brown* Elected at Boston, Massachusetts.
1940-1941	Joseph C. Menendez* Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1941-1942	Max Singer* .....Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1942-1943	Robert T. Merrill* .....Elected at Cincinnati, Ohio.
1943-1944	Carl S. Schoeninger* .....Elected at New York, New York.
1944-1945	Jean A. Brunner* .....Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1945-1946	Joseph M. Stack* .....Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1946-1947	Louis E. Starr* Elected at Boston, Massachusetts.
1947-1948	Ray H. Brannaman* Elected at Cleveland, Ohio.
1948-1949	Lyll T. Beggs * Elected at St. Louis, Missouri.
1949-1950	Clyde A. Lewis* Elected at Miami, Florida.
1950-1951	Charles C. Ralls* .....Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1951-1952	Frank C. Hilton*.....Elected at New York, New York.
1952-1953	James W. Cothran* Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1953-1954	Wayne E. Richards* Elected at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
1954-1955	Merton B. Tice* .....Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1955-1956	Timothy J. Murphy* Elected at Boston, Massachusetts.
1956-1957	Cooper T. Holt* .....Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1957-1958	Richard L. Roudebush* Elected at Miami Beach, Florida.
1958-1959	John W. Mahan* .....Elected at New York, New York.
1959-1960	Louis G. Feldmann* Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1960-1961	T.C. Connell* Elected at Detroit, Michigan.
1961-1962	Robert E. Hansen* Elected at Miami Beach, Florida.
1962-1963	Byron B. Gentry* Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1963-1964	Joseph J. Lombardo* .....Elected at Seattle, Washington.
1964-1965	John A. Jenkins* Elected at Cleveland, Ohio.
1965-1966	Andy Borg* .....Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1966-1967	Leslie M. Fry* .....Elected at New York, New York.
1967-1968	Joseph A. Scerra* .....Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1968-1969	Richard W. Homan* Elected at Detroit, Michigan.
1969-1970	Raymond A. Gallagher* ....Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1970-1971	Herbert R. Rainwater* Elected at Miami Beach, Florida.
1971-1972	Joseph L. Vicites* .....Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1972-1973	Patrick E. Carr* Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1973-1974	Ray R. Soden* .....Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.

1974-1975	John J. Stang*	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1975-1976	Thomas C. Walker*	Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1976-1977	R. D. Smith Jr.	Elected at New York, New York.
1977-1978	Dr. John Wasylik*	Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1978-1979	Eric Sandstrom*	Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1979-1980	Howard E. Vander Clute Jr.* ..	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1980-1981	T. C. Selman*	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1980-1981	Arthur Fellwock*	Succeeded T.C. Selman, Oct. 21, 1980.
1980-1981	Arthur Fellwock*	Elected at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
1982-1983	James R. Currieo*	Elected at Los Angeles, California.
1983-1984	Clifford G. Olson Jr*	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1984-1985	Billy Ray Cameron*	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1985-1986	John S. Staum*	Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1986-1987	Norman G. Staab*	Elected at Minneapolis, Minnesota.
1987-1988	Earl L. Stock*	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1988-1989	Larry W. Rivers	Elected at Chicago, Illinois.
1989-1990	Walter G. Hogan	Elected at Las Vegas, Nevada.
1990-1991	James L. Kimery*	Elected at Baltimore, Maryland.
1991-1992	Robert E. Wallace.....	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
1992-1993	John M. Carney*	Elected at Indianapolis, Indiana.
1993-1994	George R. Cramer.....	Elected at Dallas, Texas.
1994-1995	Allen F. "Gunner" Kent*	Elected at Las Vegas, Nevada.
1995-1996	Paul A. Spera	Elected at Phoenix, Arizona.
1996-1997	James E. Nier.....	Elected at Louisville, Kentucky.
1997-1998	John E. Moon	Elected at Salt Lake City, Utah.
1998-1999	Thomas A. Pouliot.....	Elected at San Antonio, Texas.
1999-2000	John W. Smart.....	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri.
2000-2001	John F. Gwizdak*	Elected at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
2001-2002	James N. Goldsmith*	Elected at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
2002-2003	Raymond C. Sisk*	Elected at Nashville, Tennessee.
2003-2004	Edward S. Banas, Sr.	Elected at San Antonio, Texas.
2004-2005	John Furgess.....	Elected at Cincinnati, Ohio.
2005-2006	James R. Mueller.....	Elected at Salt Lake City, Utah.
2006-2007	Gary L. Kurpius	Elected at Reno, Nevada.
2007-2008	George J. Lisicki	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri.
2008-2009	Glen M. Gardner, Jr.	Elected at Orlando, Florida.
2009-2010	Thomas J. Tradewell, Sr.*	Elected at Phoenix, Arizona.

2010-2011	Richard L. Eubank.....	Elected at Indianapolis, Indiana.
2011-2012	Richard L. DeNoyer	Elected at San Antonio, Texas.
2012-2013	John E. Hamilton	Elected at Reno, Nevada.
2013-2014	William A. Thien	Elected at Louisville, Kentucky.
2014-2015	John W. Stroud.....	Elected at St. Louis, Missouri.
2015-2016	John A. Biedrzycki, Jr.*	Elected at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
2016-2017	Bernard J. Duffy	Elected at Charlotte, North Carolina.
2017-2018	Keith E. Harman	Elected at New Orleans, Louisiana.
2018-2019	Vincent “BJ” Lawrence	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri.
2019-2020	William “Doc” Schmitz	Elected at Orlando, Florida.
2020-2021	Harold “Hal” Roesch, II.....	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri.
2021-2022	Matthew “Fritz” Mihelcic.....	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri
2022-2023	Timothy M. Borland	Elected at Kansas City, Missouri
2023-2024	Duane Sarmiento	Elected at Phoenix, Arizona

VFW NATIONAL OFFICERS 2022-2023

Commander-in-Chief.....	Timothy M. Borland
Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.....	Duane Sarmiento
Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief.....	Alfred “Al” Lipphardt
Judge Advocate General	Thomas “TC” Rollins, Jr.
Surgeon General	Daniel L. Kell
National Chaplain.....	Deborah Halter
National Chief of Staff.....	Cynthia Archuleta
Inspector General	Shawn C. Watson

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Associate Director, Administrative Operations	Zach Schwenk
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Department of Arizona	Lewis Wood
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Department of Delaware	John Mitchell
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Department of Idaho	Rockey Davis
Department of Illinois	Philip Maughan
Department of Indiana	Johnny Capps
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Department of Kansas	Patrick Briggs
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Department of Louisiana	Robert Lovergne
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Department of New Hampshire	Leon Rideout
Department of New Jersey	William Thomson
Department of New Mexico	Lenwood Hampton
Department of New York	Eugene Ratigliano
Department of North Carolina	Gregory Stafford
Department of North Dakota	William Tuff
Department of Ohio	Christopher Haynes
Department of Oklahoma	Curtis Watts
Department of Oregon	George Carroll
Department of Pacific Areas	Kenneth Stein
Department of Pennsylvania	Glenn Umberger
Department of Rhode Island	Eric Dukat
Department of South Carolina	Edwin Tufts

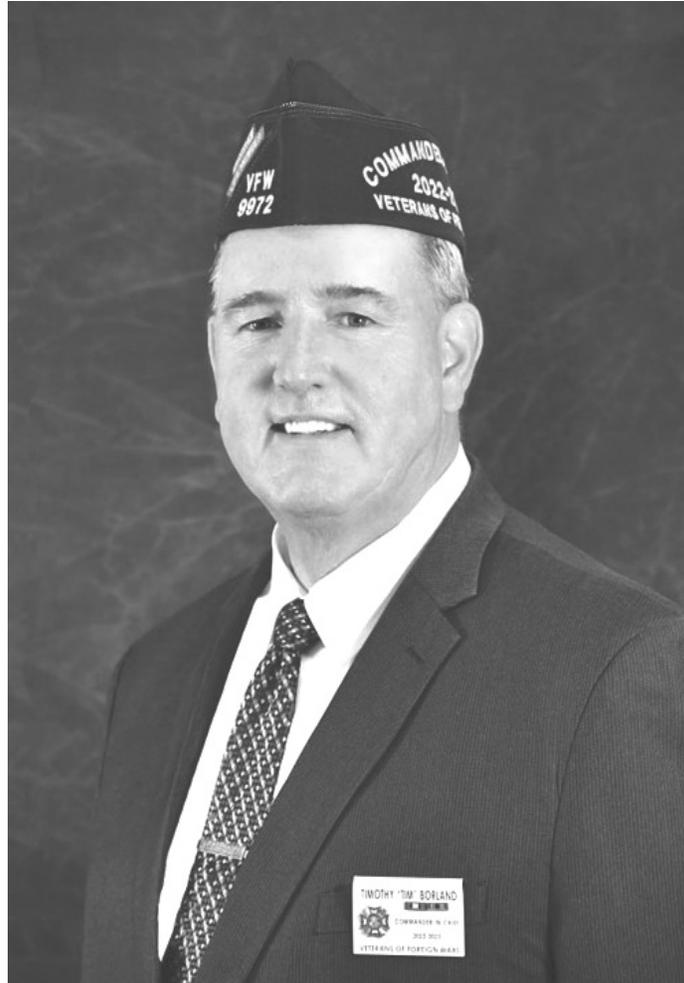
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Department of Tennessee	Brian Walker
Department of Texas	Ingeborg Conley
Department of Utah	Dennis Parizek
Department of Vermont	Charles Magnant
Department of Virginia	Kenneth Wiseman
Department of Washington	Frederick Green
Department of West Virginia	Thomas Anderson
Department of Wisconsin	Gundel Metz
Department of Wyoming	Rodney Birkle
Immediate Past Commander-in-Chief	Matthew Mihelcic

NATIONAL HONOR GUARD

Ronald Servary, Captain	521 MD
Jay Cabacar	5471 DC
Kathleen Carlson	160 MD
Marco De La Rosa	660 GA
Mark Herron	5789 MO
Alfred Simmons	8509 MD
Clinton Slack	475 DE
Edward Smith	2863 DE
Mary Spencer	56 KS
Brian Willette	3104 MA

NATIONAL ASSISTANT SERGEANTS-AT-ARMS

Joy Ausman	4456 MN
Sherrod N Conyers	2681 GA
Rene Fuertes	3104 MA
Todd Hokanson	3279 KS
Lora Land	9191 TX
George Lott	10152 NJ
Keith MacDonald	5867 CA
Brian Willette	3104 MA



Timothy M. Borland
Commander-in-Chief
2022-2023



Duane Sarmiento
Commander-in-Chief
2023-2024

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Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore
Judge Advocate General J. Douglas Whitaker
Surgeon General Curtis “Doc” Bohlman, M.D.
National Chaplain..... David Frei
National Chief of Staff..... Carey Pritchett
Inspector General Peter Mascetti

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Deputy Director, Administrative Operations Vacant
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Associate Director, Membership Matthew Nute
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Assistant Director, Veterans & Military Support, Programs Mark Herron
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Assistant Director, IT..... Geremie Berkley
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Director, Development Kelly Jones
Director, General Services Alisa Neilon
Director, Human Resources Sari Maple
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Director, Properties-KC D’Marillio Holland
Director, VFW Store Hank Ellis

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 Associate Director, Grassroots Advocacy NLSJoseph Grassi
 Associate Director, DAMA NLS..... Vacant
 Associate Director, National Legislative ServiceMeggan Thomas
 Director, National Security & Foreign Affairs..... Vacant
 Associate Director, Communications & Public Affairs Brittany Dymond
 Director, National Veterans Service..... Michael Figlioli
 Deputy Director, National Veterans Service Gregg Orto
 Deputy Director, National Veterans ServiceChristopher Macinkowicz
 Associate Director, Service Office- KC..... Ron Cherry
 Associate Director, Service Officer DC Stephen (Daniel) Lenhert
 Assistant Director, Field OperationsCindy Noel
 Associate Director, Field OperationsMark Barrett
 Assistant Director, Veterans Health Policy Katherine Cassell
 Assistant Director, Operations & AdministrationBradley Hazell
 Assistant Director, Compensation & Pension Policy..... Daniel Fletcher
 Assistant Director, Training & Quality Assurance Keith Garrison
 Associate Director, Board of Veterans Appeals Jeffrey Wishneski
 Assistant Director, Properties-DC Kenneth Eads
 Manager, Administration & Support Operations..... Theresa Aldana

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Department of Alaska	Johnathon Hackett
Department of Arizona	Lewis Wood
Department of Arkansas	Donald Barnes
Department of California	Dale Smith
Department of Colorado	David Stone
Department of Connecticut	David Greene
Department of Delaware	John Mitchell
Department of Europe	Peter Mascetti
Department of Florida	Kenneth Corr
Department of Georgia	Jeff Carroll
Department of Hawaii	Norbert Enos
Department of Idaho	Rockey Davis
Department of Illinois	Matthew Claussen

Department of Indiana	Johnny Capps
Department of Iowa	Michael Braman
Department of Kansas	Patrick Briggs
Department of Kentucky	Robert Daugherty
Department of Louisiana	Robert Lovergne
Department of Maine	Steven SanPedro
Department of Maryland	Denise Perry
Department of Massachusetts	Eric Segundo
Department of Michigan	Kevin Conklin
Department of Minnesota	Dale Hoogeveen
Department of Mississippi	Steven Organ
Department of Missouri	Eric Sullivan
Department of Montana	Jack Hawley
Department of Nebraska	Joseph Smith
Department of Nevada	Gerald Peterson
Department of New Hampshire	Leon Rideout
Department of New Jersey	William Thomson
Department of New Mexico	Lenwood Hampton
Department of New York	Eugene Ratigliano
Department of North Carolina	Gregory Stafford
Department of North Dakota	William Tuff
Department of Ohio	Christopher Haynes
Department of Oklahoma	Curtis Watts
Department of Oregon	George Carroll
Department of Pacific Areas	Kenneth Stein
Department of Pennsylvania	Glenn Umberger
Department of Rhode Island	Eric Dukat
Department of South Carolina	Edwin Tufts
Department of South Dakota	Barbara McKean
Department of Tennessee	Brian Walker
Department of Texas	Ingeborg Conley
Department of Utah	Dennis Parizek
Department of Vermont	Charles Magnant
Department of Virginia	Kenneth Wiseman
Department of Washington	Frederick Green
Department of West Virginia	Thomas Anderson
Department of Wisconsin	Cory Geisler
Department of Wyoming	Rodney Birkle
Immediate Past Commander-in-Chief	Timothy Borland

NATIONAL HONOR GUARD

	POST
Ronald Servary, Captain	521 MD
Jay Cabacar	5471 MD
Kathleen Carlson	160 MD
Marco De La Rosa	660 GA
Mark Herron	5789 MO
Alfred Simmons	8509 MD
Clinton Slack	475 DE
Edward Smith	2863 DE
Mary Spencer	56 KS
Brian Willette	3104 MA

NATIONAL ASSISTANT SERGEANTS-AT-ARMS

Joy Ausman	3979 MN
Sherrod N Conyers	2681 GA
Rene Fuertes	3104 MA
James Galen	6802-MI
Todd Hokanson	430 TX
Lora Land	9191 TX
George Lott	10152 NJ
Keith MacDonald	5867 CA

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

Brian Willette	3104 MA
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SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE
124TH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE
UNITED STATES
PHOENIX, ARIZONA JULY 22-27, 2023

ANNUAL MEMORIAL SERVICE
SUNDAY, JULY 23, 2023

(The Memorial service of the 124th Annual convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the Phoenix Convention Center, Phoenix, Arizona, was called to order at 8:30 a.m., with Commander-in-Chief Timothy Borland presiding.)

CALL TO ORDER

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

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Sir. National Sergeants, please escort the Gold Star families and the Past National Chaplains to their places of honor in the hall.
(Ceremonial processional.)

COMMANDER IN CHIEF BORLAND: Please be seated. There are times when mere words seem far from being adequate. This is such an occasion because we are gathered that we call those who have made the supreme sacrifice, and to honor their families, thus our deeds speak better than words. The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is founded upon true comradeship of people bound by experiences, interests, and everlasting patriotism. It is the sort of comradeship that lives through succeeding generations and far back into memory because we know that neither time nor events can separate those who have joined in common defense of our flag and country.

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

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

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

VFW AUXILIARY DRAPING OF THE ALTAR
INVOCATION: VFW AUXILIARY NATIONAL CHAPLAIN LOIS CALLAHAN
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I now call on VFW Auxiliary National President, Jane Reape, to prepare the Auxiliary altar.

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

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

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you, sir. Captain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Honor Guard, advance and post the colors on your orders. All rise. (Posting of Colors.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Present Arms. Order Arms.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We will now have the invocation by VFW Auxiliary National President Chaplain, the National Chaplain Lois Callahan. Parade rest.

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

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

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

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary. Ladies and gentlemen, comrades, brothers and sisters, facing the flag of our nation please join me in our Pledge of Allegiance followed by the singing of our National Anthem by VFW Auxiliary Soloist, followed by the posting of colors.

Present.

(The pledge of allegiance was recited.)

(The National Anthem was performed.)

(Post colors.)

POW/MIA TRIBUTE
MEMORIAL ROLL CALL AND TRIBUTE
SYMBOLIC TRIBUTE

COMMANDER IN CHIEF: Please be seated. Comrades, members of the VFW Auxiliary, and friends, we meet at this time to commemorate the comrades of the United States Armed Forces who have answered the last call and their families whose service and sacrifices too often goes without recognition it deserves.

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

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, your order shall be obeyed.

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

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

God Almighty, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, some of our comrades and companions are prisoners of war and missing in action. Comfort them, we pray, in their isolations from homes and loved ones. Supply their needs and protect them from want and deprivation.

Strengthen and sustain them that they may face discouragement with courage and hardship with resolution. Grant that they may find patience to endure and peace in the knowledge of Your continuing presence.

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

May their devotion and loyalty to You and their homeland inspire them in moments of challenge, and comfort them in tribulation and long separations from their loved ones.

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

This year, our Memorial Roll Call recognizes Departed Past Commander-in-Chief Clifford G. -- known

as Cliff -- Olson, Jr., who passed away July 13, 2022.

Past Commander-in-Chief Thomas J. "Tommy" Tradewell who passed away August 2nd, 2022.

The Past National President, Sandy Germany, who passed away November 15th, 2022.

And Past National President, Helen Harsh, who passed away May 25th, 2023.

Clifford Olson, Jr., was National Commander-in-Chief from 1983 to 1984. The family of Clifford Olson, Jr., is

being represented by Michael Raymond, Past Department Commander. The family could not attend, but his wife wanted to offer a written message.

"Thanks, you to, all the delegates in attendance, who will be remembering my husband and Past Chief Clifford Olson, Jr.

The VFW was a part of his life and our lives for as long as I can remember. We have met so many good people along the way, and he achieved so many wonderful things. We are honored that you will be remembering him at the 124th National Convention. I wish we could be there again but thank you for remembering him."

Thomas J. "Tommy" Tradewell was National Commander-in-Chief from 2009 to 2010. The family of Thomas Tradewell is being represented by Michelle Rathke, the Past Department Commander. The family could not attend but wanted to offer this written message.

"While Tom was serving in Vietnam, he became close friends with three friends, fellow young soldiers. On March 23rd, 1968, these three young soldiers were killed in action close to where Tom was.

"He received a Purple Heart ribbon for his injuries, but in his mind and heart, these young soldiers will never be forgotten. Tom dedicated a portion of his life to making sure that the memory of our fallen soldiers and their families will never be forgotten. God bless our Veterans and our families."

Sandy Germany was National President from 2005 and 2006. Sandy Germany was being represented by Past National President Sissy Borel.

Helen Harsh was National President from 1994 to 1995. Helen Harsh is being represented by Past National President Dixie Hild.

We will now prepare for our Memorial Roll Call Tribute.

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

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

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: VFW Auxiliary National President, how can we maintain hope in the midst of our sadness and our loss?

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

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

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

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

NATIONAL SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT MARTINEZ: We can continue to meet together as we are now and to speak of them with fondness and love. We must

remember and honor the memory of those we lost.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let us pray.

God, grant to the living grace; to the departed rest; to the nation peace and unity; to us all, your servants, the promise of everlasting life. A light to guide us on our way. Courage to support us, and Your blessing to unite us in service to You, our God, and this country. Amen.

The Phoenix Boys Choir will now perform My Country, 'Tis of Thee.
(My Country, 'Tis of Thee was performed.)

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Comrades, in commemorating the virtues of our departed heroes who served our country in time of need, we now offer symbolic tributes. I will place on our sacred shrine these red flowers which symbolize the zeal of our departed comrades in upholding brotherhood, truth, and justice.

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

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

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, what tribute did you have to offer upon this sacred shrine?

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

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

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

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: While America's military service personnel are overseas defending liberty around the world, they leave behind those who love them the most.

Family members of the military keep the home fires burning. Their prayers, their care packages, their phone calls, and their e-mails give support and encouragement for those at war. They stand by their side in a show of love and commitment. We honor their sacrifices today.

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

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT REAPE: These white flowers we bring as a token of the love that we have for our departed brothers and sisters, and these white orchids we bring as a token of remembrance for our departed Past National Presidents.

(America the Beautiful was performed.)

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

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

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce our speaker. Former Commissioned Armor Officer from West Point and Desert Shield/Desert Storm veteran, the Honorable William G. Montgomery, Justice Arizona Supreme Court.

JUSTICE WILLIAM MONTGOMERY: Thank you, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, for the introduction.

It was the weekend of Memorial Day when I first sat down to compose these remarks

to share with you this morning. So I had the benefit of reflections from fellow Americans across the country on the sacrifices of so many who have served under our flag, as well as my own remembrances of fallen friends.

I saw numerous photos and video of cemeteries at home and in foreign lands with white crosses, Stars of David, and simple headstones in rows upon rows upon rows. Standing at attention is silent reminders of the true price of freedom. A

thought I've shared with others came to mind. No country in the history of the world has spilled more blood, spent more treasure, or toiled harder for the cause of freedom for ourselves and for others than the United States of America. And how has America been able to do this? By what means?

It is a simple truth. Because of the bravery and the sacrifice of the men and women who have worn our nation's uniform. It is an enduring truth. Americans from every walk of life, race, creed, color, have mixed their blood, sweat, and determination to defend our way of life as reflected in our founding documents: The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. It is therefore fitting that we gather here in this place on this morning to pay tribute to those who have made the ultimate sacrifice and to those who remain prisoners of war or missing in action.

It is essential that we keep in our present collective consciousness the recognition that freedom is not free and that we cannot remain free without such selfless service.

I am deeply grateful for the invitation to be with you all this morning. The chance to join with fellow veterans and comrades in the VFW and to share this space with Gold Star families to honor our fallen is one to be cherished. And the importance of paying tribute cannot be overstated.

In a quote often attributed to General and later our first President George Washington, we have the acknowledgment that the willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.

Given that service in our country's military carries with it the reality that each sailor, soldier, airman, and marine may have to lay down their life in service to the cause of freedom, I submit that it is critical that we honor the fallen, the POW, and the MIA in order to demonstrate our appreciation, our love, our debt to those who have given their lives that our nation may endure, and to treat their memories with reverence. I use the term "our debt" because we do carry a charge to ensure that the sacrifice of our brothers and sisters is never in vain. In that regard, let us recall the words of President Abraham Lincoln in his address at the dedication of the cemetery honoring fallen Union soldiers at the battlefield in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

"It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead, we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion.

"That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

While President Lincoln was speaking specifically about the soldiers laid to

rest in Gettysburg, his words are just applicable to all who have fallen. From Lexington and Concord to Antietam to battlefields in Europe, Southwest and Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. His words are just as applicable to all of us alive today in this place.

We must remain resolved to protect and hand on the freedom purchased at such great price, which is the task of every present and succeeding generation of Americans. And what of the Americans, our brothers and sisters in arms to whom we owe this debt. This duty of the living.

As General Douglas MacArthur once shared, "His name and fame are the birthright of every American citizen, and his youth and strength, his love and loyalty, he gave all that mortality can give. He belongs to posterity as the instructor of future generations and the principles of liberty and freedom."

The service of Americans in uniform has spanned from across our own land to skies, oceans, beachheads, hedgerows, rivers, ravines, hills, plains, and mountains on nearly every continent on the globe.

They have imposed their will on enemies of freedom over the centuries from our fight for independence to our fight against the purveyors of terror. And no matter the where or the when, the lives lost are precious.

And what of the debt we owe? Let me start by underscoring the fact that Americans are not warmongers. As the writer G.K. Chesterton aptly noted, "The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him."

So we owe a debt to preserve what all who have served love about this great country. What is there to love about America? Let me start with our Declaration of Independence and the claim that all men are created equal.

Because of our willingness to make such a bold statement, seemingly a matter of fact one today, but a radical departure from how societies viewed people when it was made in 1776. We would not have an objective standard to measure our progress as a society in making that claim a reality and how we treat one another as individuals. And in how our systems of justice operate for all.

Because of our willingness to work hard to make that statement a reality, we have a country in which the dreams of small children are only limited by their ingenuity and effort to make them come true. Opportunity for all is part of America's DNA and is worth loving and preserving.

We have a duty then to share what is good and true about our country. Even as we acknowledge that we are still on the road to be all that we claimed to be that July 4th of 1776. Too many have died to ignore the progress made as a result of their sacrifice.

Then, we have the Preamble to our Constitution. "We the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America."

Everyone who has fallen in battle took an oath to defend the Constitution,

that document ordained and established for the United States of America. That oath states, in part, "I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same."

We therefore have a duty to preserve and protect the Constitution in their name. In their honor. And we have a duty to fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship in a constitutional republic. To ensure that this experiment in self-government does not fail because of indifference or lack of effort on our part. No one who has fought under our flag to defend our way of life could be accused of indifference or inaction.

Finally, we have a duty to keep alive the memories of loved ones who have given so much so that present and future generations will be reminded and inspired that they too are capable of being great patriots. And that they possess in their own DNA, as Americans, the capacity to face evil on foreign shores and, if it be God's will, give all that they have for all that is good and noble about this land of ours in which He stands for. If we keep to our duty and keep faith with the husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters who gave so much for us, we will be worthy of their sacrifice.

May God continue to bless America and raise up heroes like those we honor and remember here to ensure that this government of the people, by the people, and for the people does not perish from the face of the earth.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF: Thank you, Justice Montgomery.

VFW National Soloist, Mary Touve Kackman, will now perform Hallelujah, Veterans Version.
(Hallelujah, Veterans Version, was performed.)

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Please stand for the benediction by past VFW National Chaplain Peter R. Hook, followed by the playing of Taps by Mark Scott.

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

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

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

And now, Lord, be gracious and merciful to us. Let Your light shine upon us for You are our God, Savior, King of Kings and Lord of Lords and unto You, we ascribe glory, now and forever more. Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Present arms.

(Taps was played.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order arms.

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

(The service concluded.)

BUSINESS SESSION
MONDAY, JULY 24, 2023

(The Business Session of the 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the 110th National Convention of the VFW Auxiliary, held in the Phoenix Convention Center, Phoenix, Arizona, was called to order on Monday, July 24, 2023, at 8:30 a.m., by Adjutant General Dan West.)

INTRODUCTORY CALL TO ORDER: ADJUTANT GENERAL DAN WEST

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Good morning, my fellow comrades of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, patriots of the Auxiliary, citizens of our great nation, distinguished guests and visitors. My name is Dan West, and I serve as the Adjutant General for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Welcome to Phoenix, Arizona, and our 124th celebration of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: As we get started here this morning, please direct your attention to the large screens as this year's convention sponsors are displayed. A sincere thank you goes out to all of them for their support. Special appreciation goes to Burger King, Humana, SportsClips, Twisted X, USAA, and the Wounded Warrior Project.

And I'd like to add a special thanks to CaptionCall via Sorenson Interpreting Services as this year's provider of this year's closed captioning. Please give our sponsors a big round of applause for making our convention possible this year.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Before we move on, I do have a few brief announcements. If you've not done yet already, please download the VFW Events app for quick and easy access to the convention schedule and other important convention information. It's available in the App Store and Google Play, so please download it now.

I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the speakers that you'll hear from today and in the days that follow are our invited guests. They care about our great organization as well as our nation's veterans, so please show them the respect and appreciation they deserve.

You should also know, my first time as Adjutant General up here, so there may be a few brief pauses as we try to get on track. Please have some patience. Do not throw rotten tomatoes or hard fruit.
(Laughter.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: And, finally, as we conduct our convention

this week here in his home state, I would be remiss not to address the staggering loss of one of our own just last month. Comrade Mark Short, Senior Vice Department Commander of Arizona, was lost too soon. He was a mentor to many, a friend to all, and he will be deeply missed.

Please continue to keep his family in your thoughts and, comrades, please continue to conduct buddy checks at every opportunity. And I can assure you, suicide prevention will remain a top VFW priority for as long as I'm your Adjutant General.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Now, let's get our convention underway. Please welcome to the stage the 124th National Convention Chairman, Jim McCormick.
(Applause.)

REMARKS: JIM MCCORMICK CONVENTION CHAIRMAN

NATIONAL CONVENTION CHAIRMAN MCCORMICK: Good morning, VFW and VFW Auxiliary members, and special guests. And welcome to the 124th VFW National Convention. Our conventions serve to reinforce our commitment to America's veterans and military families and bring new excitement to our work as members of the VFW and its Auxiliary.

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

Now, please rise as we officially open the convention with the advancing of the colors.

ADVANCEMENT OF COLORS: VFW NATIONAL HONOR GUARD
INVOCATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DEBORAH HALTER
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sir, Comrade Chairman, Sir.
(Advancing of Colors.)

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars National Honor Guard, advance and post the colors on your orders.
(Sergeant-at-Arms gives proper commands to advance the colors.)

NATIONAL CONVENTION CHAIRMAN MCCORMICK: National Sergeant-at-Arms, will you prepare the room to advance the colors.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade National Chaplain, Deborah

Halter, will you lead us in our opening prayer. Parade rest. Uncover.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Good morning to the fellow comrades, and good morning to our ever steadfast Auxiliary.

Please join me in prayers for as your traditions and faith allow.

Almighty God, we gather here today to celebrate the opening of our National Convention. We are grateful to be back together with our fellow comrades and Auxiliary who have served this great nation on foreign soil and understand our challenges. We are honored, Lord, to be able to visit and work with each other in this grand setting.

We pray for guidance and patience in all we do while together in this convention. May we gain wisdom and understanding of the mission we must accomplish and have the strength to undertake it for the greater good of all.

We ask that as we are presented with many opportunities, that we share our learning experiences with each other and that we may learn what works best in order to streamline our organization to greater success.

We ask for special blessings on our leadership as we work through the many matters we need to accomplish this week. We ask for blessings on those who are currently serving our country throughout the world. May they be effective, yet safe. May their families be blessed with joy upon their return.

We look forward to having an opportunity to do the things we love most about convention, such as the great social interaction. May we make more friends among all attendees and enjoy our time together. Amen.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Veterans of Foreign Wars and Auxiliary, cover.

Comrades, brothers and sisters honoring the flag of our nation, please join me in the pledge of allegiance, followed by the national anthem, sung by VFW Auxiliary Willa Watts, and the posting of colors by the VFW National Honor Guard. Present.

(The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.)

(The National Anthem was performed by Willa Watts.)

(Posting of colors.)

(Applause.)

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade Chairman, that completes opening ceremonies of the 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

National sergeants, right face. Forward.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Now, please dim the lights for a special presentation.

(Video presentation, Year in Review.)

(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TIMOTHY BORLAND
PRESENTATION OF OFFICIAL BADGE, BELL, AND GAVEL

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: I'm pleased to introduce to you this morning a man who has served our great country for more than four decades. He's an Army veteran.
(Shouting.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: You can do better, Army. He's an Army veteran --
(Shouting.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: -- who has filled elected and appointed positions at every echelon of our great organization. He has earned the distinction of All-American and Triple Crown, and he has received an impressive 19 consecutive Century Awards prior to today for his recruiting efforts.

Timothy M. Borland was elected as the Veterans of Foreign Wars first ever Iraq War veteran on July 21st, 2022, at the organization's 123rd National Convention in Kansas City, Missouri.

A member of the U.S. Army from 1979 to 2007, he last served with the 101st Airborne Division and earned his VFW eligibility through service in Korea in addition to Iraq. He has been a Gold Legacy Life member for more than 23 years.

Tim truly believes that every veteran counts because every veteran does count, and that has been his mantra for the last year. I believe it's one he's led our organization in embracing wholeheartedly as evidenced by our many successes for veterans over the past year.

Please welcome our Commander-in-Chief, Tim Borland.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Well, that was a fast year, 2022/2023, for sure. I just remember being at the National Convention last year, accepting this honor of becoming Commander-in-Chief, and then all of a sudden, we're here. This is amazing. One year just flew by. So much we've done.

I've got to thank two individuals that encouraged me 23 years ago to reach this goal. It wasn't just yesterday and it wasn't just tomorrow, it was 23 years to get here.

James R. "Bob" Curreio, Past National Commander from 9972, 82/83, and Allen "Gunner" Kent, Past National Commander, '94/'95, from 9972. Those two individuals alone, when I was a bartender at 9972 in Sierra Vista, inspired me to reach this goal.

Any one of you in this audience can reach this goal. But you gotta take it step by step and do your job well when you're there. The most important thing about reaching for the future is taking care of veterans then and now and into the

future.

I want to thank posts, VFW post and its Auxiliary 9972 from Sierra Vista, you here?
(Shouting.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All right. We got a few.
I want to thank District 7. I definitely want to thank the Department of Arizona.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And I definitely want to thank the Department of Arizona for hosting the 124th National Convention. What a great turnout. Duane Sarmiento and I were just looking out here in the audience, and we are very impressed with all of you who showed up for this.

We got a lot of awards to give out this week, especially the All-American program. As you all know, my number one priority was membership. And some of you got tired of hearing about membership. But I am here to tell you, we did it. 48 departments made All-American. 23
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Through the 12 countries that Ryan Gallucci, myself, and sometimes Duane Sarmiento went on these trips because we had to catch up to the last three years of COVID.

I don't know if you all realize this, but the Junior Vice National Commander-in-Chief, who will be Carol Whitmore in a few days --
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: -- they're the ones that normally go to Vietnam to witness these recovery sites that the defense POW Account Agency, DPAA, do. These are volunteer soldiers that go TDY for 45 days in the horrifying heat and humidity at those dig sites to bring home Vietnam Veterans. And Duane Sarmiento and I witnessed this in Laos and Vietnam, and it was the most honorable thing I can ever say we have done.

We will bring everyone home until everyone is home. We were just told --
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you.

We were told by DPAA while we were there, that there's approximately 1,200 more to bring home. We were also told by DPAA that we only got about five years to bring them home. For those of you who don't know, the soil in Vietnam and Laos deteriorates the bone.

So we don't have much more time to get these heroes home. Before we left Vietnam, we were told that another identified aircraft off the coast of Vietnam was -- you know, was identified. And there's four more that we're going to bring

home, and I think they've already went into the sea to bring these four heroes back.

So if everything worked out, we were looking for two in Laos, and we were looking for one in Vietnam, and then those four right off the coast of Vietnam. That's seven more Vietnam Veterans we're going to bring home to our communities.

But the most important thing -- you've got to all know this. The most important thing is that if you're asked to give a DNA sample, please do. We could go back four generations to recover these heroes that have been lost. And without that DNA, they can't 100 percent identify them.

So with that 100 percent identification, we will bring them home. Real quick. And then I'm going to get back into this program because you can see, this is just from the hip. It's from my heart.

Some of the most outstanding things we did this year that I will never forget, my God, comrades, brothers and sisters, just a few weeks in as Commander-in-Chief, I got the honor and privilege to stand on the stage with President Joe Biden to sign in the most comprehensive veterans' bill ever in three decades, the PACT Act.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I was one of three VSOs on stage. We had 10 guests up there. Some of them were family members of Heath Robinson, Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, who started this Act. That is a \$270 billion bill.

They have already helped and gave claims to hundreds of thousands of veterans already. And we will not stop. The V.A. is working tremendously on the PACT Act and encouraging and making sure that these veterans get taken care of. Just a real quick story. Just a real quick one.

When President Biden was giving all 10 of us his presidential coin after he signed this bill into law, the American Legion National Commander was sitting -- standing next to me. He gets a real quick handshake. I figured I would get a real quick handshake.

But when the President Biden saw my hat, Veterans of Foreign Wars, he pulled my hand in as he gave me that coin and for a good 20 to 30 seconds, which seemed like eternity because I'm up on stage with flash cubes going off, and I'm representing the Veterans of Foreign Wars, he told me and thanked me for the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the three years that they have been banging down the doors of Congress and Senate to get that Bill passed.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: The Veterans of Foreign Wars was the No. 1 organization that got this Bill passed. He told me that his son died of toxic exposure in 2018, and as he's holding my hand and telling me all this and thanking me because I am the Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, which made me very proud to be up there, he pointed to his grandson, who is the son of his son, who was only about nine years old.

And can you believe President Biden actually had a tear in his eye as he's shaking my hand as he's pointing at his grandson.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: That was overwhelming. That was overwhelming. And I was very proud, very proud to be there.

And then two other things. I have buried two Medal of Honor recipients this year. West Virginia, where you at?
(Shouting.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Now, I know all of you know this. "Woody" Hershel Williams.
(Shouting.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Responsible for all the Gold Star family memorials nationwide. Yes, unfortunately, we lost him at the ripe age of 96 years old. And I was there to honor him. And the most overwhelming thing about honoring him was a grave site that was out there, and it was his wife of 20 years ago, still waiting for him to come home.

He never remarried. He never dated. He loved his wife, and he -- now they're buried together in West Virginia. So West Virginia, that was a very big honor to recognize Woody Williams. He's done a lot.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And one more. Lieutenant Colonel Addison Baker. 79 years ago his plane went down. They bombed oil fields in France. He completed his mission. Got the rest of them to safety. But he was shot down and lost 79 years ago, and DPAA recovered his remains. Identified him through DNA.

And believe it or not, great, great -- two great nephews and a great niece was the DNA that they got. David, John, and Susan. The reason why I know those names, my brothers and my mom. I gave them a coin and thanked them for his service. But those are honorable.

And then when Duane and I went to Vietnam, that was overwhelming.

So, in closing, I am absolutely proud to have represented the Veterans of Foreign Wars this year as your Commander-in-Chief. And if you haven't noticed, I never stopped. I was on the road as much as possible promoting the VFW, and I was very proud to do it. And I'm going to miss this. I'm going to miss this.

But I am absolutely confident that Duane Sarmiento, our next Commander-in-Chief, is going to do a phenomenal job. And I'm going to be there to support him.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: VFW GOLD MEDAL OF MERIT AND CITATION TO
JANE REAPE, PRESIDENT OF THE VFW AUXILIARY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I've talked enough. Let's get on with the 124th National Convention.

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

Jane Reape is a life member of Dionne-Rumble Auxiliary 7227 located in her hometown of Carthage, New York.

She joined the Auxiliary on the eligibility of her late husband, James, who honorably served in the U.S. Air Force for 22 years. Prior to her marriage, Jane had no family members who had served and no knowledge of the VFW Auxiliary.

She joined the Auxiliary when her husband became a VFW Post Commander, and her best friend urged her to join. The rest, as they say, is history. Jane's family includes three children and three grandchildren, each growing up with military service instilled in them at a very young age.

Today, Jane's oldest son, Raymond, is a Navy veteran of the Iraq War and a proud VFW life member. Her youngest son, Robert, is an Air Force veteran. Her granddaughter marks the third generation of Air Force service. And her grandson currently serves in the Army.

(Shouting.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: That was weak. In the Army.
(Shouting)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: That was better Jane has served the Auxiliary in a couple capacities at the Post, District, Department, and National levels. She is equally active in her community as a contributing member of the VFW National Home, numerous military organizations and her parish.

There is no doubt her leadership, especially over the last year, has led to another incredible year for the Auxiliary.

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

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Commander-in-Chief, Gold Medal of Merit and Citation awarded to Jane Reape, National President Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary 2022/'23. In esteemed recognition and sincere appreciation of her loyal and compassionate concern for America's veterans as the National President of the VFW Auxiliary.

Her theme, "Hands that serve, hearts that care," reflects her vision and support for our nation's veterans and will forever serve as the true and honorable

legacy of her presidency.

Her wealth of experience and lifetime commitment to the objectives of the VFW Auxiliary have justly earned her the highest level of admiration, respect, and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 24th day of July 2023. Signed by Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.
(Applause.)

AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT REAPE: Commander-in-Chief Borland, National VFW and VFW officers, Past Commanders-in-Chief, Past National Presidents, Auxiliary members and guests, I am honored and humbled to receive this award from the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

I am fortunate to have been elected to represent our 460,000 members as we worked alongside our VFW counterparts throughout the year. I am proud of the work we have done together as one team. Sisters and brothers, comrades and friends, all with the common goal of ensuring our nation's veterans are given the resources, respect, and recognition they deserve each and every day.

To my Commander-in-Chief, Tim Borland, and to all the VFW members, thank you for your service, sacrifices, and strength in the face of adversity, especially in recent years as we weathered the worst pandemic in over a century, from which we are now finally emerging.

I am grateful to be standing here beside you today, just as I was throughout the year as the VFW, and Tim included me and fellow Auxiliary members in many of their travels and important events. We are always eager to show our support for and solidarity with the VFW. Thank you for that.
(Applause.)

AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT REAPE: Less than two years ago, we saw the end of a war that lasted two decades; one that left many of our servicemen and women with horrible health issues caused by burn pits.

Much like our Vietnam Veterans who are suffering the effects of Agent Orange, they are struggling right now to get the benefits promised to them that they have earned and to receive the healthcare they so desperately need.

The VFW, fully supported by the Auxiliary, pushed for the passing of the PACT Act to help make it easier for these veterans and those who served before them to get the help they so desperately need. Now, we, as members of the two oldest and most dedicated veterans' service organizations in the country must continue to work to ensure that no veteran goes without and to show every veteran counts.
(Applause.)

AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT REAPE: Additionally, with pandemic restrictions lifted, we look forward to getting back into V.A. facilities and hospitals to

spend quality time with those who served our country honorably and are now struggling with the aftermath of isolation. Welcoming our soldiers home is a goal and duty of our organizations, but the work does not stop there. If anything, it's only beginning.

I am so proud of the work we do each and every day for our veterans, their families, America's youth and our communities. In our long history, we have made a positive difference in the lives of millions, and this will only continue as we move forward, arm in arm, working together toward our common goals.

I wear this medallion not for myself, but for all the members of the VFW Auxiliary.
(Applause.)

AUXILIARY NATIONAL PRESIDENT REAPE: We are one, and we are here because of you, our veterans. Together, we are truly a family.

To every veteran here today, thank you. Thank you, again, for your service, sacrifice, and strength. Thank you for putting your lives on the line. Thank you for the friendships I will cherish forever. Serving as VFW Auxiliary National President has been an incredible honor.

God bless all of you. God bless our service members, and God bless the United States of America.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: So I did it. I was told not to forget my wife.
(Laughter.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I did. But before I thank her, there's a few others I got to just throw out real quick. Class of 2022/2023, all your department -- all the department commanders out there, thank you so much for your hard work.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And my class commanders of 2011/2012, my cousins, thank you for the support. And I am going to tell you right now, TEAM, Together Everyone Achieves More. That is a true fact, because we had a TEAM this year.

I want to thank Duane Sarmiento, my Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: My Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Al Lipphardt.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Our – our Quartermaster General,

Marc Garduno.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Our Assistant Adjutant, Brian Walker.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Our Adjutant General, Dan West, from Texas.

And a very true friend of mine for almost 25 years, my Chief of Staff, Cynthia Archuleta.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We have TC Rollins.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And this guy from New York, Dan Kell.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And my Inspector General, all the way from Guam, Shawn Watson.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: That -- Oh, and I forgot, my National President. Sorry about that, Deb. Deb Halter.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Chaplain. Good job as chaplain. And last, but not least, my beautiful bride, my beautiful wife, Shannon. Without her, I could never have got this done because I had many stressful days. I love you very much and thank you for the support.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Okay. I got that done. That's what -- that's what happens when you do it from the hip. Whoops. Oh, well. We move on.

We now have a video message from Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema who unfortunately could not be here today. Please turn your attention to the big screen.

(The video was played.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: SCOTT STUMP, CEO
DESERT SHIELD & DESERT STORM NATIONAL MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: After Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990, over a half a million of American's finest brave fought to expel one of the largest military forces in the world, and once the dust settled, more than 300 brave men and women died as a result of their commitment to freedom and democracy.

A major facet of our mission as an organization is to ensure those who have gone before us in war are remembered and honored properly. Time and time again, VFW members have spoken loud and clear in support of constructing the Desert Shield and Desert Storm Memorial.

We were the first major veterans' service organization to financially back this project and proudly watched the groundbreaking ceremony last July. With the memorial's dedication slated for 2024, here today to provide us with an update on the memorial is Chief Executive Officer and President of the National Desert Storm Memorial Association Board of Directors and VFW life member, Scott Stump.

(Applause.)

SCOTT STUMP: Thank you, Chief. Auxiliary and VFW leadership, Auxiliary members, comrades. Good morning.
(Good morning.)

SCOTT STUMP: Let me see now. Phoenix in July; Saudi Arabia in August. I'm really not seeing or feeling a big difference. Are you.
(Laughter.)

SCOTT STUMP: I guess it's like they always told us in 29 Palms, what you're feeling really isn't heat and you're not really hot because it's dry heat. Yeah. Semper Fi, Mack.
(Shouting.)

SCOTT STUMP: It's a sincere honor and privilege to be here with you this morning. I personally owe a great debt of gratitude to the VFW. When, as a young veteran, I joined way back in January of 1992, and I was quickly elevated to Post leadership where I served as the Post Senior Vice Commander. And I found myself in a unique situation where I was actually leading, guiding, and directing people who were 40 and 50 years older than me. I learned so much from them. The friendships that were cultivated and the mentorship that I received is near and dear to my heart to this day.

And, unfortunately, they're all gone now. They were World War II veterans. But they live on within me, and the lessons and the examples that they showed are with me in every decision I make throughout the rest of my life.

I can sincerely -- I sincerely hope that all of you in the audience can share similar stories such as mine about the wonderful relationships that are cultivated as a result of our membership in this wonderful organization.

Well, I'm here to give you the update on the Desert Shield and Desert Storm Memorial.

Now, most of you are probably aware that we're now in the 13th year. Yes, 13th year. And depending on what day it is, I'm the one who usually gets either the credit or the blame for initiating the process back in November of 2010 in the basement of my house. It's kind of a Steve Jobs' story without the money. (Laughter.)

SCOTT STUMP: Now, legislation was initially introduced in 2012 -- in May of 2012. That legislation was subsequently passed unanimously and signed into law on December 19th of 2014. At that point, we entered into the site approval phase. And this is supposed to be an 18-month process. After a lot of toil, heartache, disappointment, indignities suffered by our fellow veterans, we finally made it to the other end after 39 months. And we were able to secure the site at 2300 Constitution Avenue NW, which is adjacent to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, as well as the Lincoln Memorial.

So what a fitting location and we -- we were able to get that on June -- (Applause.)

SCOTT STUMP: We were able to finally secure that location on June 18th of 2018. So it was five years ago this last -- this past month.

Another huge milestone, and you heard the Chief mention, another huge milestone occurred in November of 2015 when I personally received the first \$100,000 installment of the \$500,000 VFW pledge. Now, ladies and comrades, I cannot express to you how important and how critical that donation was.

Not just in the amount, but the timing of that donation, which allowed us to go through a process we could not have envisioned would have ever gone on that long. It was absolutely critical to our success and where we are today.

I also owe a great debt -- a debt of gratitude, we all do, to a number of you in the audience here this morning. Your Posts, your Districts, your Departments, Georgia, you're a rock star wherever you are. Thank you. (Applause.)

SCOTT STUMP: Your kind generosity is humbling, and it has truly made a difference. And I know it's not adequate, but all I can say to you this morning is, thank you. Thank you. Thank you for your support. It truly has made an absolutely huge difference to get us where we are.

So what have we been doing for the last five years? Well, you heard the Chief talk a little bit about a groundbreaking ceremony last year. We did that a

little bit early because the Kuwaiti ambassador was retiring. That's kind of the back story. I won't get into that all of that.

But since then, our design team and the artistic team has been hard at work creating, designing, and now navigating -- and we're almost through it -- but navigating through the very complicated design approval process. We have the site approval process. Now we're back onto the design.

And if it was only as easy as sharing our personal preferences, you know, we've always elicited feedback from you all and other veterans. Unfortunately, Washington doesn't work that way. And we're working collaboratively with these approving agencies.

And make no mistake, the end product is going to be absolutely breathtaking, and it is going to be a phenomenal memorial to all that happened and all who served back in 1990/1991.

Now, you're seeing some of the slides up here, and I have to give you a warning on those slides. This gives you the different perspectives. And I will tell you that there is no 2D representation that's going to do this justice. Okay. And I would ask all of you to suspend any type of judgment until you actually visit this in person, and I think you're going to be blown away with what you see. We've got phenomenal -- a phenomenal team working on this that are extremely talented.

Now, of course, the separate design elements that we have that you're seeing on the screen, they're intended to focus on the key themes that we have. Of course, all who answered the call, some numbers have it over 500,000, some have it over 600,000, but those who answered the call and those close to 400 that did not -- did not make it home are at the heart of everything that we do.

The unique coalition contribution will also be remembered. And, of course, the pivot. And by "the pivot," I mean that change in the way that the U.S. public treats, interacts with, and views not just people currently in uniform, but those who have served, all of you, the veterans.

I think President Bush said it best before a joint session of Congress on March 8th of 1991, when he said, quote, "We set out to confront an enemy abroad. And in the process, we transformed a nation at home."

A lasting transformation that continues on to this day, ladies and gentlemen, thankfully after the moral stain on our country's soul left by the way so many of our Vietnam Veterans were treated upon returning home.

Ladies and gentlemen who served in Vietnam, would you mind just standing up? I would like to recognize you this morning. If you wouldn't mind. Let's give them a hand, please.
(Applause.)

SCOTT STUMP: Thank you for going before us. And using a phrase born during Desert Storm, Thank you for all of your service.

So what do we have left? As we head into the home stretch and approach the finish line, our goal is to receive our construction permit from the National Park Service some time this September with the goal of commencing actual construction

some time before the end of this year.

And, of course, the ultimate goal is to have this completed and dedicated some time during the first quarter of 2025, which would coincide with the 34th anniversary of Operation Desert Storm. That's hard to believe, isn't it? We're coming in on 35 years almost.

So you heard me mention just a few minutes ago about the importance and the critical timing of the VFW donation. And I want to show on the screen, you've got a little slide that shows what they call the donor recognition panel.

Okay. This is going to be located on site, very prominently within the footprint of the memorial. And it's for any donor of \$1 million or more. And that's stipulated by NPS. We have nothing to do with that. Have no control over the amount.

And at this point, I need to ask all of you a favor if that would be right. Okay. I'll get to that in a second. But I need to ask you a favor.

I've been working with VFW leadership over the last several years, many who have come and gone, to see about getting the VFW the recognition it deserves and getting the name up on this prominently located plaque.

Now, NPS, the National Park Service, estimates that we're going to have between four and a half and five million visitors every year. That's a huge audience, folks.

And I know when I first started in the VFW in '92, and I'm sure it's still the same, we always talk about outreach. We talk about getting new members, young veterans in. This is a tremendous opportunity for exposure. And it's a real no-brainer on the return on investment.

Now, don't get me wrong. Any construction project, you're always going to need more money. I don't care if you're expanding your Post. Whether you're dealing with a termite issue like I am right now. That's another story. Or whether you're building a memorial as we are.

An example of that is I just received a few days ago a call from our chief engineer in D.C. and the D.C. water utility is requiring us to move a pipe that's not even in the ground yet, but move it. It's about this big, and move it in another direction and they're charging us 70,000 for that.

You know, this stuff inevitably comes up, and it's to be expected, and I don't want to focus on that this morning because this morning, it's all about the VFW. I also need to highlight the fact that this total investment of \$1 million would still be on the modest side based upon past support for the projects VFW has been involved in. So it's not out of line.

And I would be extremely remiss if I didn't mention the fact that we have a donor who has a matching donor challenge on the table, up to \$750,000, dollar for dollar. So that means if VFW does 500,000, this gentleman will match it another 500-, and it becomes a million. It's tremendous.

And as the tagline says, "Nobody Does More for Veterans," and I don't

believe that anybody does. And I know that our Desert Storm Veterans, some up on the stage, this show of support would mean a lot to this generation of veterans among our ranks, while they're still among our ranks.

Now, in the past, some of the – some have actually suggested that possibly the Posts, the Districts or the Departments could bridge this gap, and it could come from that. And, folks, at this point, at this juncture, it only makes sense that the National Headquarters take hold of this and get it done while this small crack in the window of opportunity still exists.

The last time I was in Phoenix, it was in 2014. It was February. The weather was a little bit cooler. And I received a call to go back to Washington and testify before the Natural Resources Committee in the hopes of getting our Bill out of committee and on the floor for a vote and get passed.

So I went back. I did my thing in Washington. Of course, it was cold. It was frigid. I came back to Phoenix. I stayed in a hotel.

The next morning, I got up and I was driving to Los Angeles. And, of course, being the eternal tourist, I want to see the George Patton Desert Warfare Museum in California. If anybody's been there, I had never been there.

It was 2014. I didn't have a smart phone, and I'm not a real smart guy to begin with. So I had two strikes against me right out of the gate. So I commence to get lost. And I found myself in a proverbial ghost town. It's called Desert Station, California.

And the only real sense of activity or anything that looked even open was a U.S. post office. So I made my way in the post office to get directions. And, lo and behold, they're closed for their two-hour lunch break.
(Laughter.)

SCOTT STUMP: So I'm heading out the door, and a gentleman is heading in, and we strike up a conversation. And he says something to the -- amounting to, Hey, what brings you to Desert Station? And we got talking and, lo and behold, he was a Desert -- I mean, I'm sorry. He was a Vietnam veteran.

And I told him, Hey, I was in Washington yesterday. We're working on this memorial. You know, I had to testify before Congress. You know, telling him the whole story, and he's just taking it all in. And all a sudden he got a real big smile on his face.

And he said, I knew it. I knew it. I had you pegged for a colonel the second I laid eyes on you.
(Laughter.)

SCOTT STUMP: And then I got a big smile on my face. And I said, Well, I'm not a colonel. I have never been a colonel. I don't want to be a colonel. I was a lance corporal in the United States Marine Corps.
(Shouting.)

SCOTT STUMP: And he said something to me -- all of a sudden the look on

his face changed, and he said something to me that I will never forget as long as I live. He looked at me with that funny look on his face, like he stepped in something in his backyard, and he pointed at me and he said, Why in the world would they have a lance corporal testifying before Congress? That's an important job for important people. Not somebody like you.

True. So I replied to him as nicely as I could, I said, Well, sir, a lance corporal testified before Congress because I was the one willing to testify before Congress.
(Applause.)

SCOTT STUMP: And this morning, I would just like to ask all of you to please be the ones willing to just do it. Please approach your department, VFW headquarters, and national leadership and urge them to make this happen and to get the VFW the recognition it so rightfully deserves. And to help bring home this very, very long overdue memorial.

Let's do the right thing together, folks. I hope I can count on you. God bless you all. I hope you have a wonderful convention. Thank you so much. 16
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: So before I proceed, since he mentioned donations, I was supposed to bring a check and present it to Marc Garduno.

For those of you that should know, Jane Reape and I have had a great year, and we just had a fun competition to perform this year to raise money for the Voice of Democracy scholarship program, to see who could raise the most.

So at the patriotic rally, whoever raised the most is going to put a pie in the other one's face. It's going to happen.

So I'm sorry, Jane.

But I don't have the check on me, Marc, but I'm going to bring it back at lunch. I have a check for \$8,736.28 to present Marc Garduno, which will put the comrades back ahead of the Auxiliary.

So, what I'm trying to tell you is you got one day to raise money if you want to put a pie in my face. I don't think you can do it. I'm just challenging you. So, Jane, there's your challenge. I love you. I really do. And I'm just looking forward to the patriotic rally. We're going to give you the totals at the patriotic rally when we find out.

But, Marc, I will give you that check at lunch.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: VICE MINISTER WU CHIH YANG,
VETERANS AFFAIRS COUNCIL, REPUBLIC OF CHINA (TAIWAN)

Since 1979, America has enjoyed a robust unofficial relationship with the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan.

Signed by then President Jimmy Carter, the Taiwan Relations Act continues

to allow the United States and the Republic of China on Taiwan to maintain the exchange of ideas and commerce, as well as shores up the U.S.'s commitment to assist in Taiwan to maintain its ability to defend itself or herself.

This people-to-people relationship is reflected throughout both societies in all aspects of life, from sister cities to student exchanges to industry partnerships, and even the two nations' like commitment to care for their veterans.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is proud of its special relationship with Taiwan's Veterans Affairs Council, a bond that coincides with our long-lasting national resolution supporting the Republic of China on Taiwan.

Now, it is with great honor to welcome to the 124th National Convention, a man who has served his country for almost 40 years. He is a graduate of the Air Force Academy Class of 1983, an alumni of the National Defense University, and earned his Masters of Science and Technology Engineering Management degree from George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

During his time at the Veterans Affairs Council, he has served in subsequent positions of increased scope and responsibility, to include Senior Inspector, Senior Executive Officer, Deputy Department Director and Department Director.

Ladies and gentlemen, comrades, please join me in giving a warm welcome to Vice Minister of Taiwan's Veterans Affairs Council, Vice Minister Wu Chih Yang. (Applause.)

VICE MINISTER WU: Thank you. Commander-in-Chief, distinguished guests, and all Americans heroes, good morning. (Good morning.)

VICE MINISTER WU: It's my great honor to be here in Phoenix on behalf of the Veterans Affairs Council, our Minister Kuan Feng, to attend the 124th National Convention.

During the meetings of Commander Borland to Taiwan, we are ready for him to meet our president because we cherish his visit.

During the meeting, Commander Borland invited our president to deliver messaging via a recorded video for a National Convention. So now, I will like to present my president's congratulatory speech to the National Convention, please. (The video was played.) (Applause.)

VICE MINISTER WU: Thanks for your attention. Later, we will also sign our joint proclamation with you to renew our

existing brotherhood alliance. Of course, before we leave the stage, it's already signed by my Minister Kuan Feng in advance because he cannot present to this convention.

Well, this proclamation, which marks a significant milestone, this act demonstrates the unwavering friendship between us, emphasize our commitment to protecting democracy and freedom's values, and highlight our determination to recognize the contribution and the value of veterans. We also look forward to building an even stronger relationship based on this solid foundation.

Lastly, I would like to present Commander-in-Chief Tim Borland with the Medal of Honor of the Veterans Affairs Council, First Class, in recognizing his dedication to maintaining the friendship between our countries and promoting international justice and the well-being of veterans. Colonel Huang, please announce the citation.

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

A Medal of Honor of Veterans Affairs Council, First Class, is hereby awarded on the date of the 24th of July, in the year of 2023. General Kuan Feng, retired minister, Veterans Affairs Council, Republic of China.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: It's a picture of the prime minister.
(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: PRASAD REDDY, PRESIDENT/CEO, TWISTED X

COMMANDER IN-CHIEF BORLAND: More than four decades ago, as our next guest completed his American nationalization ceremony, he pledged to return the kindness, support, and encouragement he received from the Veterans of Foreign Wars and to the VFW Auxiliary members who welcomed him to America with open arms, smiles and a copy of the U.S. Constitution.

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

Founded in 2005, Twisted X has spent almost two decades designing and developing handcrafted, design-patented, comfortable western and comfort casual footwear for men, women, and children. It's also launched a specialty line of patriotic VFW-inspired boots, complete with unique American flag elements.

Now, without further delay, I am pleased to introduce Mr. Prasad Reddy, founder, president, and CEO of Twisted X.
(Applause.)

PRASAD REDDY: I'm just so humbled to -- to see all of you standing up for me, because I'm not what the -- you are the ones that will be standing -- we should be standing for all the time. Not -- not the other way around. Anyway. First, good morning to the Commander-in-Chief, VFW officers, and the members and the distinguished guests. It's an honor and privilege to be invited to be here.

Every time, I was telling the Commander-in-Chief last evening, when I come here, I got this big speech prepared and all this stuff, but I lose it. Because when I see all these -- this is an awesome and a special sight to see all -- all of you in one place. The true heroes that helped to protect and provide peace and safety to all American citizens, including myself and my family. And there are no words for those thanks.

But, again, as I said, the Commander-in-Chief, has the code saying that every veteran counts. And I admire that because all of you, every veteran, has sacrificed to make every American citizen count because you are the ones who made -- brought peace and safety to all of us, and there are no words of appreciation.

And sometimes, we, living in safety and peace, forget all of the sacrifices you did to provide us that. And that's where the VFW comes in. To provide the -- they go extra mile to provide any help they can to all of you, the true heroes of this country. And for that, you know, veterans, of course, is the most important thing. We -- in the company, we always discuss this. How can we be part of it?

And just to show because of the -- the suicide prevention, counseling, whatever it is. We've opened a counseling center in conjunction with the Wise County -- which is where our offices are -- Wise County Health System to provide counseling services, of course, free of charge, to veterans and first responders that need help.

And it's all free.
(Applause.)

PRASAD REDDY: That's one small way, you know, we can help. We want to do it. The other thing we do, of course, as Commander-in-Chief said, the kids. The young adults matters so much. So the Voice of Democracy program is very near and dear to our heart. And the then Commander-in-Chief BJ came to me and said, that's available for sponsorship.

Would you like to do that? Think about it a week. Let us know. And I said, it's done. Just -- just on the spot.
(Applause.)

PRASAD REDDY: I think it's one of the greatest programs to bring all of the young adults to think of all the current topics, there is honoring the veterans, the democracy, the principles of what this country was founded on. All these various

topics. It's a great thing.

And most of the kids, as well as us, unless we are challenged with something, we don't think about it. And when this contest comes, and I'm certain that all of them are thinking about it, which is making aware, and they do a great job. I have seen it. You'll probably hear the speeches.

And one last thing is, you know, you and, again, the Commander-in-Chief, had this thing saying that. You were there for us, and he said, VFW will be here for you. And on behalf of Twisted X, my family, myself, we promise you that we will be here and support VFW and supporting all of you.

(Applause.)

PRASAD REDDY: And it's a great honor and privilege to be here.

(Applause.)

PRASAD REDDY: As a point of that, I have a small token of appreciation. A small check. I keep -- we keep talking about in our company, you all write checks with no numbers. It's all done. Selfless. All we can do is write a check with a few numbers.

So that's what I've done.

And I would like to present it to the Commander-in-Chief.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Prasad Reddy, Twisted X, just donated \$50,000.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: What an honorable man.

I just went to Texas to visit him and the VOD winner and all the sponsorships that he does. Twisted X is an amazing company.

Prasad, just one more time, thank you so much for what you do for our younger generation.

(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/SPEECH: SCOTLAND STEWART
NATIONAL VOICE OF DEMOCRACY WINNER, DEPARTMENT OF TENNESSEE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: You know, during my travels, I got to see many, many young Americans give their VOD speeches and their Patriot Pen speeches. And I was in Tennessee, and this young man impressed me with his speech. And I walked up to him and his family, and I said, You've got a good shot at winning the national award. You really do. And I have nothing to do with those graded. And, lo and behold, he won the national award.

76 years ago, that's how long VFW's Voice of Democracy program has

been reaching, inspiring, and helping to mold future leaders of the great American youth. Since its inception, this premiere scholarship contest has helped to ensure our nation's heritage will never be lost. Allowing students the opportunity to give voice to how they perceive our nation and how many liberties afforded to them.

Each year, what is reflected in this program is an extension of the values and ideals that our nation holds dear.

Last year, we asked high school students across the globe to reflect and tell us, Why is the veteran important?

Scotland Stewart, a sophomore, Franklin High School, in Winchester, Tennessee, answered with a poignant essay, reminding us, the brave men and women who have served, the veterans of America's great military risked their lives so that we might live ours in the shadow of peace.

His moving essay, earned him the esteemed title of National 2022/2023 Voice of Democracy winner. And in March, I had a wonderful opportunity to present Scotland with his first place check of \$35,000.

Scotland represents the many thousands of young people who participated in the scholarship program every year. And he, along with his peers, have clearly shown our nation will be in very capable hands when it's time for them to lead us into the future.

Please join me in a huge warm welcome and celebrating Scotland Stewart's achievement as the 2022/2023 Voice of Democracy winner.

(Applause.)

SCOTLAND STEWART: All right. Morning everyone.
(Good morning.)

SCOTLAND STEWART: It's great to be back at the VFW again. Great to be on the stage again.

I want to thank Commander Borland and Mr. Reddy, of course, again, for their continuing support of the Voice of Democracy program.

Outlining the importance of preserving our nation's history, our nation's values, our nation's beliefs, and our younger generation's fight to preserve those values as well.

I think our nation, especially this younger generation, has definitely lost sense of true values. The true dignity of what it means to be an American. And I think the VFW does an amazing job of preserving those rights, preserving these beliefs, and supporting the veterans who selflessly fought to do so.

To protect those rights.
(Applause.)

SCOTLAND STEWART: So I've summed up what it means to be a veteran in four words: Honor, integrity, loyalty, and service. These are simple words to most

of us, but to our nation's veterans, these are their core values in life. These words sustained them as they defended us.

With many organizations and charities like the Wounded Warrior Project, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Stars for Stripes, taking rides across our nation, many may sit back and wonder, Why are veterans important? What significance do they hold within our nation? Why should we expend so much effort for so few people?

Like trophies in a case, pictures in a frame, statues in a museum, our nation's veterans serve as a key living piece of remembrance of our nation's history. Their lasting battle wounds tell stories of war. Their scars resemble our nation's fight for freedom, and their medals represent their lasting commitment to defending America.

With revisionists attacking our nation's history and inalienable rights, veterans provide the personal stories of valor and sacrifice that remind the next generations of the true positive impact their service to our nation has had. These courageous men and women literally placed their lives on the line in an effort to protect our nation – excuse me -- to eliminate foreign threats against our nation. Something most others veterans don't have the ability to comprehend or declare.

Veterans do this not for fame or fortune, but for America and her future generations. In a day where our nation's children and young adults turn to entertainers and celebrities as their potential role models, veterans serve as a moral compass of the virtues of sacrifice and giving to a greater cause.

Our veterans' sacrifices represent loyalty, integrity, and honor. And their service to our nation should not be ignored.

Unfortunately, in America, respect and remembrance of our veterans has declined beyond an acceptable level. The plight of our veterans once returning home is disgraceful. An estimated one out of every four homeless men have served in the U.S. military and over 500,000 veterans each year remain without a home. Every single day in America, 22 veterans commit suicide.

Unfortunately, because of shameful truths like these, those willing to step forward and serve our nation are becoming rare. The percentage of Americans who can claim veteran status has declined from 18 percent to 7 percent. With the sacrifice these brave men and women have made for our nation, those statistics are unacceptable.

Tough to live under these conditions and remain unrecognized and uncelebrated after doing something that requires such a supreme amount of bravery and integrity should embarrass our politicians and should instill guilt on those who have done nothing to help with the cause.

Although these statistics show the negativity occurring towards our nation's veterans, they highlight just how important it is to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation.

So why are veterans important? These brave men and women fight the battles abroad, so that we don't have to fight here at home. They provide the very liberty that allows us to enjoy the rights guaranteed in our Constitution,

while placing themselves in harm's way to do so.

Imagine waking up every day knowing that day may be your last. Having no certainty of your survival, but the possibility of being involved in a battle that may leave you dead or permanently injured.

Consider constantly wondering if you'll ever see your spouse or your children again. Understand that in order to return to the safety of your own home, you must first survive an enemy assault intended to kill you. This horrifying scenario is the daily life of an active duty military member.

In the day and age where we bow down to singers and athletes, the very least we can do is thank those who place themselves in said scenarios. We as a society should contribute to causes and charities that help our nation's veterans, as well as vote for individuals that prioritize the needs of those who selflessly sacrificed their lives for us.

Veterans of the U.S. military are important because they risk their lives on the battlefield so that we can safely live ours in the shadows of peace. In return, we owe them the same honor, integrity, loyalty, and service that we receive from them in defense of our nation.

Thank you all very much.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Kids, our future. Future vision.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Like I said, when I visited Tennessee, I said, Wow, that is a good speech, and I have a feeling it's going to go a long ways and it did.

Congratulations, Scotland, and good luck in the future.

(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: WAYNE PEACOCK, CEO USAA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: The United Services Automobile Association, better known as USAA, is a name that I'm sure everyone here is familiar with. As one of our biggest supporters, the VFW has been fortunate to have such a strong, decades-long relationship with a truly outstanding company like USAA.

Wayne Peacock is the president and CEO of USAA, the member-focused financial services company that exists to empower the military community to achieve financial success. It offers insurance, banking, and investment and retirement solutions to its more than 13 million members.

Wayne has more than 30 years of USAA experience, starting as its real estate investment subsidiary in 1988. Before becoming CEO in February of 2020, he was president of USAA's Property and Casualty Insurance Group.

He is a member of the Business Roundtable and a member of the Federal

Reserve Board's Insurance Policy Advisory Committee. He also serves on the board of trustees of The Institutes, a risk management and insurance knowledge provider.

Wayne is active in community, industry, and trade groups, and is a proud Eagle Scout.

Ladies and gentlemen, please put your hands together and join me in welcoming to our 124th VFW National Convention, our esteemed guest, USAA president and CEO, Wayne Peacock.

WAYNE PEACOCK: Well, good morning, VFW. I will tell you it is great to be in your company. And it is great to be in the company of so many people who are about what is right and just for America. So I'm just really excited to be here today. I will also tell you if the 30th floor of the Sheraton is any indication, I know you guys are all having a great time as well.

And I would also say how about Scotland, right? If we're worried about the future of America, like, we should feel very, very positive today hearing from just an amazing young man like him.

Tim, thank you very much. And thank you to all of our gracious hosts for inviting me to be with you here today. I just want to say on behalf of our 13 million USAA members and our 37,000 employees and teammates, to everyone in the VFW community, thank you for your service, your sacrifice to this great nation.

I also want to say thanks to the members of the Auxiliary. We know that you are truly the heart of the VFW.
(Applause.)

WAYNE PEACOCK: My mother-in-law raised four kids from Korea to Germany to the Pentagon to Korea, to Colorado Springs, to the Pentagon to FORSCOM. So what I'm about to say next I think is really true because I know that from personal experience. That spouses have the toughest job in the military, and we want to recognize all that you do and say we are grateful for your service and your sacrifice as well.
(Applause.)

WAYNE PEACOCK: At USAA, we have one focus, and that is serving those who serve. And our mission is truly to help achieve financial security. We do that by providing highly competitive products, exceptional service, and trusted advice.

And the USAA and VFW have been partners, as Tim said, for more than 13 years. And today, we're proud to serve 75 percent of the VFW membership. Now, I do a little bit of math every now and then, so that means there's about 25 percent of you who could still take great care and take advantage of USAA membership.

Just a small plug here this morning.

I want to talk soon about a really special way that our organizations are coming together. But, first, since we're in Phoenix, I thought I would spend a little bit of time about the significance of Phoenix to USAA and to me.

Back about 25 years ago, 24 to be exact, I had an opportunity to come out

here and lead the team that bought the land and really built the USAA presence here in the Valley of the Sun from ground up. Today, we have about 4,000 of our teammates here in Phoenix who are serving every day with insurance and banking solutions, but also a big group of our teammates who are inventing and innovating with new technology solutions to be able to serve members in the future.

You know, Arizona is the 13th largest population of veterans in the country. And nearly one in four of our Phoenix teammates are either a veteran or a military spouse, which is about the same average of all of our USAA teammates across the globe. So we take great pride in being an employer of choice for the military community, broadly, but here in Phoenix as well.

We're proud to support local veterans and families in need, as well as the promotion we do around financial well-being and education throughout the area.

Now, across this great country, USAA and the Veterans of Foreign Wars have shared a legacy of serving and supporting the military community. And as we saw earlier this morning, advocating for veterans' issues.

And like the daily temperatures here in Phoenix, we're both over 100 now. USAA just celebrated our centennial anniversary last year, and, as you all know, the VFW will reach its 124th birthday in September.

And I'll tell you, the thing that really inspires me about the VFW is your emphasis on service. You're still serving, even though it's been many years since many of you wore the uniform. You're all about serving your communities and veterans really well. And for more than a decade, USAA and the VFW have offered mutual support to that great veterans' community.

But there's a really important way that we are collaborating now through a coalition of corporations, nonprofits, and philanthropic organizations that have come together to help prevent veterans' suicide in an effort that we call Face the Fight.

As the VFW knows well, veterans' suicide requires urgent attention, and the VFW has been a leading voice calling on Congress, the V.A., and the DOD to work together to reduce the number of service members and veterans who die by suicide. The VFW has been a passionate advocate to strengthen care and research for mental health. But the suicide rate among veterans is still 1.5 times the rate of the general population. There are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbors, and, unfortunately, they are the children of veterans as well.

And at USAA, many of them are our members. The brave men and women who have given so much through their service, only to end up in crisis at home. Since 9/11, veteran lives lost to suicide are four times more than the number of lives lost in combat at Afghanistan and Iraq combined. I'll say that again: Since 9/11, veteran lives lost to suicide are four times more than those lost in combat in those two conflicts.

We know it's a complex problem. And, importantly, it's not just a mental health issue.

Yesterday, we had a great workshop sponsored by NVS and the Wounded Warrior Project that focused on the innovative treatments for PTSD. And I will say,

we are making progress and we're getting the word out to more veterans.

But, you know, more than half of those who die by suicide don't have a mental health diagnosis. They're struggling with other risk factors: Financial insecurity, trouble finding or keeping a job, relationship issues, alcohol and drug abuse, or just the challenging transition from the military to civilian life.

These factors take an extreme toll and, without help, can lead to thoughts of suicide. Each life lost devastates families, friends, and communities, and, unfortunately, there are way too many of these stories.

The VFW has been calling attention to this heartbreaking issue for years. But I think some people would ask, where do we start when the problem is so insurmountable? And I would say we start by talking about it. By eliminating the stigma around asking for help or seeking care.

Now, at USAA taking care of military families is mission critical. And we know you feel the same way. It's who we are. It's who we have been for more than 100 years. And for us, this is personal. We know that many of our service members today are living paycheck to paycheck. They're overwhelmed by uncertainty, worry, and what might be next.

Our member service representatives see that and hear it in the voices of our members every single day. And more and more, they're hearing from USAA members who threaten self-harm. It's not why they're calling us, but oftentimes, a financial hardship or a fraud attempt is what pushes them to the edge when they decide there's only one way out.

Recently, a National Guard member called to report fraud on her account, making her already precarious financial situation worse. She went on to say that she was financially destitute and that she was sitting in her car, in her uniform, with her loaded 9-millimeter service weapon on her lap.

On that day, what initially was a call for USAA to help, turned out to be a call for help. Our representative brought out a member of our USAA security operations center to talk to the member, to ease her fears, and to listen.

We confirmed her location, reached out to local law enforcement and asked them to do a welfare check. They arrived. Established rapport with the member and convinced her to turn over her weapon and to seek treatment. What I know for sure is that USAA helped save a life that day.

A few years ago, a call like that was a couple times a month. We're now getting multiple calls on a weekly basis. So much so, that our member service representatives are actually trained today to respond to members who need that type of help.

We are absolutely grateful for --
(Applause.)

WAYNE PEACOCK: And we're grateful for the times where we can make a difference. But I'll tell you, we're much more saddened when we can't. Helping veterans fight this fight is at the core of who we are. So today, USAA, the VFW, and

the rest of our coalition are talking about Face the Fight to raise awareness and support for veteran suicide prevention. So let's watch a video and hear more about this important work.

(A video was played.)

(Applause.)

WAYNE PEACOCK: The aspiration of Face the Fight is to cut the veterans' suicide rate in half by 2030. We're doing this because the evidence is clear. Veteran suicide is not inevitable; it is preventable.

We pull together experts and their guiding research, working alongside the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to advance work that's already underway.

But we've also created the Face the Fight philanthropic fund to support organizations that deliver on-the-ground help to veterans in crisis in affected families. And together, more than \$40 million has been committed to Face the Fight to provide philanthropic grants and nonprofit organizations that can help stop veteran suicide. This includes over a half a million dollars from our USAA teammates over the last few weeks, including those right here in Phoenix.

So thanks to the VFW and all of our coalition partners and supporters, we are stronger. We're always stronger together. We're glad to be working arm in arm with the VFW on this vitally important issue. You are a powerful voice in support of the military community, and we're thankful to know that you remain tireless in supporting our veterans and serving our country.

I'm confident that we can make a difference, a significant difference together for America's veterans. Every veteran counts. God bless you, the VFW, and God bless America.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All right.

Who's ready to get fired up?

(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: SEAC (RET.) JOHN WAYNE TROXELL,
VFW NATIONAL AMBASSADOR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Well, that's the thing about this next speaker. You can always count on him to raise the energy in any room. I'm talking about our National Ambassador SEAC retired John Wayne Troxell.

A native of Davenport, Iowa --

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: -- Troxell began his military career by enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1982 as an armored reconnaissance specialist.

During his 38-year career, Troxell served across the country and around

the world at almost every position of leadership within the Noncommissioned Officers Corps, to include command senior enlisted leader at the battalion, brigade, regimental, corps, major command, sub unified command, and combatant command levels.

His combat experiences span over three decades, with services in Operations Just Cause in Panama, Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf, Iraqi Freedom twice, and Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

Troxell's career culminated serving as a senior enlisted advisor to the 19th Chairman and Joint Chiefs of Staff, now retired U.S. Marine Corps General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., from December 2015 to 18 December 2019, before retiring himself from active service in April of 2020.

Since retiring, he is still on the go and engaged with audiences of veterans and service members alike. Active-duty units, installations, and veteran-focused nonprofit organizations frequently request his attendance as a motivational speaker at events focusing on leadership, readiness, and health and fitness.

He also serves as an advisor and brand ambassador for many businesses such as Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey, Down Range Supplements, and TRX Elite, as well as nonprofits, such as Hiring our Heroes and the Allied Forces Foundation.

In February of this year, Troxell added the title of "author" to his already extensive resume, publishing his book "Surrender or Die - Reflections of a Combat Leader," where he shares invaluable insights, lessons, and strategies for success, empowering individuals to overcome adversity, embrace challenges, and emerge stronger than ever before.

Troxell lives with his wife, Sandra, in Lakewood, Washington, and is a life member of the VFW Post 10281 in Vine Grove, Kentucky.

Please join me in giving a resounding welcome to our VFW National Ambassador, our comrade, SEAC retired John Wayne Troxell.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: Good morning. How's everybody doing today?
(Shouting.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: It's time to get fired up. We're at the National Convention here.

To Commander-in-Chief Borland, sir, thank you for your leadership. I know that you're on your way out here, but the past year, you've done some phenomenal things for our organization, and it culminated today with the signing of the Joint Proclamation with our Taiwan partners.

So thank you for your leadership over the past year, sir.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: To all my fellow VFW comrades, Auxiliary group members, supporters, vendors that are here today, and to our

Taiwan partners, I say thank you Chih Chih for you being here today.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: This convention is important for many reasons. We're here to continue to educate our members on the direction that the organization is going, continue to build synergy and cohesion across the entirety of what we're trying to accomplish. And continue to develop our vision and focus to remain the most relevant veterans' service organization on the planet, period.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: Now, I have to tell you, we live in a world today that is probably the most contentious environment that our nation has been in. The Global War on Terrorism is over as of 31 December 2022.

And now we are focusing on what our defense department is calling "integrated deterrence"; meaning, we are looking to stay out of war by building these relationships with our partners and allies that will be a deterrent. It's a pretty good strategy to have to make sure we have no further loss of life in combat.

And as some in Washington, D.C., will say, that we are entering into an era of persistent peace. I think it's the most dangerous assumption we can have as a nation to think that extended peace is in front of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, we all know that the world is a very contentious place, and we have people out there, we have nations out there, and nonstate actors that want to do harm to the United States, our homeland, and to our partners and allies.

So to have an assumption that persistent peace is on hand is something that I think is very dangerous.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: And that kind of thinking can lead to complacency as a nation, within our military, that all of a sudden, could cause us to start losing competitive advantages that would get after an integrated deterrence.

And you know, when I see things in our nation, like a balloon, whether it was a Chinese spy balloon, a recon balloon, or whether it was Mary Poppins on a cross-country tour from the Aleutian Islands all the way to South Carolina, and we allow it to come across our homeland unfettered, I get concerned.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: Because teammates, we cannot be so concerned about potentially offending adversaries that we forget to defend our homeland.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: And if the first line of defense is a

bunch of beer-drinking NASCAR folks that take their Mossberg shotguns and their Busch Light Beer bottles and start shooting and throwing them at a balloon at 30,000 feet in the air, we got a problem, ladies and gentlemen.

But I will tell you the good thing about that is, that showcases that if there is a potential invasion or a threat to our homeland, it's going to be 300 million Americans that are going to rise up against that threat and say "Not on our watch." (Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: Now, China is the pacing challenge in our national defense strategy. And not only militarily, but economically, information and in the diplomacy domains, we have to compete with them over the long-term.

And in terms of integrated deterrence, the more we as an organization can build relationships with similar organizations from other countries, like our partners from Taiwan, the more we are going to be not only taking care of our veterans collectively, but the more we are going to showcase that we are going to be strong as partners and allies, and we, ourselves, as an organization are going to be a deterrent to any potential aggression. (Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: And if you look at Russia, who is still, because of their economy and because of their nuclear weapons' capability, especially at the tactical level, they still have a threat to us. Even though they're getting their nose bloodied every day by the Ukrainian military –

Oh, by the way, for the last seven years, that has been trained by the United States military, and also, that have been outfitted with things like John Deere tractors from the great state of Iowa, that are -- (Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: -- these farmers in Ukraine are using to hijack Russian tanks and continue to impose costs on Russia's invasion. (Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: That shows you the strength of the United States, not only our military, but our industrial machine.

And then we can't forget about North Korea and Iran, rogue nations who have global aspirations. Kim Jong Un certainly, in North Korea, with his nuclear capability. And Iran through its proxy forces and its threat network to continue to not only get disrupt global order, but to cause any kind of harm they can to us and our partners and allies.

And we cannot forget that ISIS and Al-Qaeda, and all terrorist organizations are still a threat to our homeland. It may be nascent right now, but let there be no doubt that they want to plan, prepare, export, and execute terrorist attacks in Western Europe, North America, and most importantly in our homeland.

So our ability to continue to be strong and be a deterrent to all of these

threats as a nation and with our powerful military, is what we're going to have to do as we move forward in the future. But let's take a look at what's been going on in our homeland over the last three years. It started with COVID in January of 2020, that caused a lot of things to happen within our country, our way of life was kind of disrupted and everything.

And then it in May of '20, a significant event happened in the murder of George Floyd that caused unrest in our country throughout the summer of '20. And in the events of January 6th, 2021, whether you want to call it an insurrection, a riot, or a bunch of people just acting stupid, it had a significant impact on our nation.

And then we cannot forget the abrupt disorderly withdrawal that we made out of Afghanistan in September of 2021.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: The strategy that caused it to be an abrupt, disorderly withdrawal was one thing, but the actions of the troops on the ground, like it is every conflict we have, were superb. They evacuated over 124,000 people out of Afghanistan, and they met the timeline they were supposed to meet to have everything out by 31 August.

Our troops will always get the job done, even though they have to manage the risk that isn't mitigated at the strategic level, and they will continue to be a shining beacon of what the United States of America is all about.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: You know, and then Russia invading Ukraine in February of 2022, and now our focus of our Armed Forces has been on assisting Ukrainians. Don't get me wrong, I think it's a great job and a great idea for us to support the Ukrainians.

My counterpart when I was the SEAC, the Ukrainian SEAC Aleksander Kaczynski, is still in his position over there. And while he's in their headquarters in Kiev during the day, he's in fighting positions at night as the whole nation rises up to stop this Russian aggression. But you look at all of those things coupled together, and you throw in social media, and kind of the polarization politically in our nation, and now we have a recruiting crisis on our hands in our Armed Forces.

The U.S. Army will not meet its numbers for two years in a row. The Navy and Air Force will not meet their numbers this year. The Marine Corps and the Coast Guard will meet their numbers, but they will be breaking the tape at the end of the fiscal year to do it.

And so this, ladies and gentlemen, could lead to a national security crisis. If we cannot recruit the appropriate number of men and women to enter our Armed Forces, that will allow us to continue to have the requisite capabilities necessary to not only deter but defeat any threat in large-scale combat, we have challenges on our hands.

And let there be no doubt. If we do not have the capabilities to defeat any nation state like the ones I talked earlier, then we're certainly not going to deter them at all. So we have to continue to get after building our Armed Forces through our organization and showcasing what military service is all about.

I say it all the time. I've never seen a goldfish be able to deter a piranha in a fish tank.

So the bottom line is, we've got to continue to do our part to get after building our military and making sure military service is attractive to this young generation.

I will tell you, over the past three months, I've been on a CEO thank you tour with a very influential person. She is the Chief Executive Officer of Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey, Grant Sidney. She's on the board of Endeavor that just made the merger between UFC and WWE, and she is arguably the most influential African American woman in the business world since Oprah.

And for the last three months, we have visited 33 bases, initially to show our support and thank our troops for their nation and thank our veterans.

But early on, we realized because of this recruiting crisis, because of issues with retention, quality of life, and quality service, that that thank you tour immediately went to a call to action.

And what can she do as a very influential CEO, and what can I do as a retired SEAC with a global network from a senior enlisted and service members around the world, what can we do to continue to make military service more attractive? And be able to continue to take care of not only our current service, but the veterans as they get out as well.

So, in my opinion, in today's world we live in, this is a further call to action to us at the Veterans of Foreign War. And we do great things. We've done with it the PACT Act. We've done it with this Joint Proclamation. We do it every day getting after benefits and care for our comrades, our veterans, and their families.

But I think we have to continue to inspire this young generation to show how attractive military service is. Every one of you out here, every one of us has a story about our time in the military. And you truly believed in what you were doing then, and you truly love your country because you're here today and you're part of the greatest organization on the planet, the VFW.

So tell your story. Get out there and tell these young people what military service did for you. What being a part of veterans' service organization, like the VFW, did for you.

We cannot continue to allow a divide between generations. We have to transcend these generations by continuing to talk about military service and how attractive it can be. How the cool things people can do, and, in the end, what it does for our nation.

And then, ladies and gentlemen, in the hypersensitive world we live in now, it is not a sin to say, I love my country.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AMBASSADOR TROXELL: And say I'm going to do something about it. And I'm going to proudly support our Armed Forces. And I'm going to proudly support our nation. And I'm going to proudly support our homeland and our way of life. All of us are ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen, and we got to do our part. We are the number one global choice for partner security in the world right now. But let there be no doubt, the Chinese want to replace us.

They're on a 100-year plan and they're looking to replace us as the number one global power. And as a lot of people talk about all the time that I'm around, all we've known all of our lives, is that we are the number one global power.

I, for one, and I don't want my children or grandchildren or future generations of the Troxell family to have to live in a country that is not the number one global power.

So we've got to continue to get after it. We've got to continue to support our troops. And in the end, we as an organization have to make sure that we are as relevant as we can be to the men and women that look to serve, that are serving, and that they are no longer serving, but are still proud to have served our country.

So, in closing, I will ask you this question, ladies and gentlemen. What are we as an organization prepared to do to continue to remain relevant to the men and women in this nation that we need for military service. But, more importantly, to the men and women that are serving, and then those 20 million that are no longer serving.

And in the end, this call to action, I think, if we accept it, we get fired up about it, we go out and do it, we will continue to be the greatest nation on the planet, with the most powerful nation in the world, with the greatest veteran support organization in the world, known as the Veterans of Foreign War.

So God bless you all. God bless the VFW Auxiliary group, our partners and allies, but, most importantly, God bless America.

Thank you so much. Boom.
(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: SCOTT MATHIS & BARBARA WAGNER,
VETERAN CHANNEL TEAM, HUMANA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: That's a hard act to follow. I told you get ready.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, our friends at Humana are no strangers to helping veterans. Whether it's fighting food insecurity to help ensure veterans and military families have access to healthy food, and advocating for increased and expanded access to the highest quality healthcare available, from coast to coast, over the years, they've shown time and time again their commitment to veterans and their families.

With 1.3 million veterans living in a household that relies on Supplemental

Nutrition Assistance Program, and nearly 28 percent of veterans reporting having suicidal thoughts in the past two years, Humana's mission is to serve as a trusted source for addressing health-related social needs of veterans and their families has made them the great ally to our military and veteran community.

Please turn your attention to the big screen for a special video message from a great friends at Humana.

(The video was played.)

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: What our two organizations have accomplished together is truly an impressive feat.

Now, please welcome to the stage for a special presentation Humana Channel Development Lead Barbara Wagner, a veteran and Regional Veteran Executive with Humana's Veteran Channel Team, Scott Mathis.

SCOTT MATHI: Good morning

(Good morning.)

SCOTT MATHIS: It's great to be back this year and be on stage at the 124th National Convention.

As many of you know, at Humana, we are proud of our longstanding relationship with the VFW. We are excited, again, this year, to continue our support of the NVS program with a donation of \$25,000.

(Applause.)

SCOTT MATHIS: The scholarship program ensures veteran service officers are highly trained to help our veterans get the benefits that they well deserve. We deeply understand the value of our service officers, and the important role they play as advocates for individual veterans who need assistance.

We thank you for this partnership.

Thanks.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Ladies and gentlemen, as if we weren't thankful enough for Humana's dedication and support already, we have yet another reason to be appreciative of our longstanding relationship.

Together, tackling food insecurity remains our charge. Standing by while our brave service members, veterans, and their families go hungry simply isn't acceptable.

This year, we raised the bar high with a goal of providing one million meals to those in need through the Uniting to Combat Hunger campaign and, boy, did we deliver.

From gleaning farm produce and donating canned goods, to graciously volunteering to sort seeds in the exhibit hall, your hard work not only achieved our goal, but it surpassed it. Now, it brings me great pleasure to announce, we

surpassed that goal. Together we'll deliver more than 1,023,224 meals to veterans in need.

(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: RYAN GALLUCCI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, VFW WASHINGTON DC

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you all who contributed to this important campaign and helped make a positive impact in the lives of so many.

The next person I have the pleasure of introducing should be very familiar face to you all. Ryan Gallucci joined the VFW team back in 2011, and since his first days with us, he's held multitude of positions to include as a Deputy Director of the National Legislative Service, a Deputy Director and Director of our National Veterans Service, as well as Deputy Executive Director before being appointed Executive Director of the VFW Washington, D.C., office on 1 March of this year.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: During his time in the VFW, Ryan has been instrumental in the implementation of numerous veteran-focused initiatives, including modernizing the VFW's cornerstone benefits assistance program, which assisted veterans continuously during COVID-19 pandemic.

He has also worked directly with Congress and federal agencies to craft and implement transition and educational policies benefitting veterans, such as the state tuition protections, and redesigning the Transition Assistance Program known as TAP.

He served as an advisor and later chairman of the Secretary of Labor's Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment, Training, and Employer Outreach, providing feedback to the Department of Labor and Congress on the employment needs of veterans and the efficiency of federal employment programs for veterans.

He also established the VFW-SVA legislative fellowship program, which offers student veterans the opportunity to learn about veterans' advocacy hands-on in Washington. Ryan is a native of North Kingstown, Rhode Island.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: He served in the Army reserves from 1999 to 2007. And served in the Iraq War from 2003 to 2004 as a civil affairs specialist with the 443rd Civil Affairs Battalion.

Ryan's work and dedication to our nation's veterans and the members of our organization is clearly demonstrated in the determination and hard work he puts in every day. Our organization is lucky to have someone with his insight, knowledge, passion, and forward-thinking approach driving Capitol Hill efforts.

A life member of VFW Post 3150 in Arlington, Virginia, it brings me great pleasure to welcome to the stage the

VFW's newest Executive Director of our Washington office, Ryan Gallucci.
(Applause.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: Good morning, VFW.
(Good morning.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: First, thank you, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, for such a -- Wow. That was an introduction.

All right. Well, good morning. Thank you for that introduction, and I'm proud to be able to be up here to provide you an update on the work at your VFW Washington office.

Now, look, our team has been very busy since the 123rd National Convention in Kansas City. You may remember that we were joined via Zoom by Jon Stewart, championing and honoring our PACT Act to expand toxic exposure benefits to veterans.

After convention, VFW mobilized in a way that I hadn't seen in a very long time. Members sent tens of thousands of messages to Congress compelling them to put aside petty partisanship and pass the PACT Act. It seemed touch and go for a little while, but the VFW was not going to rest.

VFW Legislative Director, Patrick Murray, and his team literally slept on the steps of the Capitol joining in the fire watch until the Senate passed the Bill on August 2nd.
(Applause.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: But this isn't just about the team in Washington. VFW leaders from across the region and around the country came together to push back against the partisan bickering. I know many of you in the room picked up the phone, called those members of Congress, called your senators to get them to take action.

But not only that, state leaders from Virginia -- Oh, talk with my hands a lot.

State leaders from Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, even Michigan and Massachusetts, converged on the Capitol, and the VFW won the day.
(Applause.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: Now on August 10th, Commander-in-Chief Borland joined President Biden at the White House for the historic signing of the PACT Act. And the President, as you heard, believes his own son, Beau, died from toxic exposure in Iraq, and he wouldn't let go of the chief's hand because he knew what the VFW brought to this fight.
(Applause.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: But, hey, look, the story doesn't end there for the VFW. In many ways, it was just the beginning. Because starting on August 10th,

VFW National Veterans Service set into motion its plans to train the VFW's global network of accredited service officers to understand the PACT Act and start helping veterans.

PACT Act demanded a new way of thinking about how VFW delivers claims service to our veterans. And under the leadership of new National Veterans Service Director, Mike Figlioli, and his leadership team, VFW has done just that. You may have seen pactactinfo.org highlighted on the VFW website and across social media. Now, this new referral tool was VFW's way of not only reaching more veterans who need help, but also pushing back against those predatory claim shark companies who want to illegally charge veterans tens of thousands of dollars just to access their earned benefits.

To date, more than 10,000 veterans have used pactactinfo.org to link with VFW-accredited free help. And guess what? Hundreds of those veterans have chosen to join the ranks of the VFW simply by seeing what we're doing here to help link veterans with benefits for free and fighting back against predatory claim sharks. (Applause.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: So here we are, nearly a year after passing the PACT Act. We're linking veterans with benefits. The VFW is testifying more than any other veterans organization before Congress, and our work is just getting started.

When Commander-in-Chief Borland testified before Congress in March, he highlighted five critical legislative priorities for the VFW, all of which now have bills in Congress thanks to the tenacity of your VFW legislative team.

We're fighting predatory claim sharks through the Guard Act with the support of Representative Pappas and Senator Boozman.

We're improving access to accredited representatives in the military Transition Assistance Program through the TAP Promotion Act championed by Wisconsin Congressman and proud VFW member, Derrick Van Orden. (Shouting.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: There's Wisconsin folks.

We're confronting suicide as a socioeconomic initiative, not just a healthcare initiative through the Not Just a Number Act championed by Senator Tester.

We're fixing inequities in V.A. survivor benefits or DIC through the Caring for Survivors Act, and we're ending the unjust concurrent receipt offset for military retirees through the Major Richard Star Act championed again by Senator Tester and Representative Bilirakis from the State of Florida.

Now, I've got to call your attention to the screen. We're going to pause for a moment here because we actually have an action alert going right now for the Major Richard Star Act.

So in a few moments, you should see a QR code popping up. There it is.

So please take out your phones now. You should be used to this. We did it last summer for the PACT Act.

Take out your phones now. Take action. Tell your senators to pass the Major Richard Star Act. Oh, wait. No. I'm just kidding. Okay.

But there's more. There's one more. Chief Borland's testimony came a couple of weeks after returning from visiting troops in Poland and Italy who have diligently supported Operation Atlantic Resolve deterring Russia's aggression in Ukraine and reinforcing our NATO allies.

In Poland, Chief Borland and I heard firsthand about the challenges soldiers face in austere conditions supporting OAR. We heard it loud and clear. That commanders had a hard time explaining the mission to not only service members, but also their affected families.

Like the families of the 606 Air Control Squadron in Aviano, Italy, who had 72 hours to turn around from a deployment in the Persian Gulf and redeploy to Romania in support of Atlantic Resolve after Russia invaded Ukraine.

This is why Chief Borland's sixth priority was to properly recognize the brave Americans holding the line on the eastern flank of NATO with the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal.

Two weeks ago, Department of Defense acknowledged Atlantic Resolve as a contingency operation, and the President even authorized limited activation of the inactive ready reserves. Some of you in the room probably remember that. You're probably stop loss to recall from the IRR the last time we did that.

So what did we do? The VFW worked quickly to once again call on DOD to authorize the medal and properly recognize this service. Chief Borland's commitment to this underscores the importance of the VFW's overseas mission, which we restarted in earnest last year after the COVID-19 hiatus.

It was an honor to accompany Chief Borland to the many countries around the world to understand the needs of today's fighting force. Rekindling our relationship with defense POW/MIA accounting agency to ensure the fullest possible accounting of our missing. And supporting veteran-to-veteran interaction to advance American interests in places like Taiwan, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.

In Belgium, we met with NATO to learn about the mission deterring Russia. Then in Germany, we met with service members and leaders in places like Ramstein Air Base, Landstuhl Military Medical Center, where we learned that not only is the force very much operational, as you heard the retired SEAC speak to before, but, tragically, many Americans don't seem to think so.

This is where the work gets hard. But this is historically where the VFW makes the biggest difference for our fighting force.

In Italy and Thailand we learned firsthand about the structural problems of V.A.'s foreign medical programs, such as delayed paper check reimbursements and an overall lower standard of care and benefits for our veterans.

In Laos and Vietnam, Chief Borland, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Sarmiento, Public Affairs Director Rob Couture, and I accompanied DPAA to two

excavation sites, and Chief Sarmiento had us get our hands dirty.

But, look, this just scratches the surface because there is more on the horizon for Chief Sarmiento's year. To include visiting our comrades and allies in the Philippines to recognize the anniversary of the Leyte landing. Meeting with unaccompanied service members in places like Bahrain. Further advancing our veteran-to-veteran diplomacy in Laos and Vietnam. And honoring our history at the 80th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy.

As the Veterans of Foreign Wars, we are uniquely poised to take on this mission and ensure that our deployed military is not forgotten while Americans naively believe we are no longer at war.

So why am I telling you all this? Later today, this delegation will deliberate on organizational resolutions that serve as our marching orders in Washington. There is no more important work in the VFW as this allows us to hold our leaders accountable for providing earned benefits and care to our service members, veterans, and families who have justly earned them.

I'm an Iraq Veteran and the first post-9/11 veteran selected to serve as the Executive Director of your Washington office.

I first joined the VFW in 2006 solely off the causes of service and advocacy that I learned about from the VFW Department of Rhode Island. (Applause.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: Small but loud.

And I'm honored to follow in the footsteps of my mentor and Past Commander-in-Chief, Bob Wallace, to consider the century-plus legacy of your VFW Washington office and honored to share the work with you today.

Earlier, I mentioned that many Americans are naive to the needs of today's military. So make no mistake, as the SEAC said, this is a very dangerous time for veterans. Historically, this is when our nation's leaders start to forget about their commitment to those who wear the uniform.

We saw this in the fledgling days of the VFW after World War I when Congress axed veterans' benefits in the name of fiscal responsibility. Sound familiar?

This inspired leaders Past Commander-in-Chief Jimmy Van Zandt and Marine Corps Major General Smedley Butler. (Applause.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: There it is, okay.

To travel the country to tell Veterans it was time to get mad. It was time to join an organization that does something. Time to join the VFW. We're at a similar inflection point today.

We cannot take for granted victories like the PACT Act, forever GI Bill or the Mission Act. We're going to need to be bold in defense of the ideals we fought to preserve.

(Applause.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: Okay. So here we go. Here's a call to action. Visit vfw.org. Sign up for the Action Corps. If you clicked on the QR code, do that. Send the action alert. And keep up to date on the work of your Washington office.

Tell anyone who has questions about the PACT Act to visit pactactinfo.org to get connected to free resources and never pay for benefits assistance. And tell service members and veterans to join the VFW so that we can hold the line for their earned benefits.

Finally, never forget as members of the VFW, this is your VFW Washington office, and we're open for business. Come see us in your nation's Capitol. Join us at a Congressional hearing. Ask us about your earned benefits. We're here to serve you and to ensure that we preserve the VFW and its missions of advocacy and service for at least another 124 years.

(Applause.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GALLUCCI: With that, comrades, Commander-in-Chief Borland, I want to thank you for this opportunity to share our work with this delegation and remember that every veteran counts because every day is Veteran's Day in your VFW Washington office.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Now you see why I promoted Ryan as our Executive Director of the D.C. office. He's very energetic, very knowledgeable, and he's going to do a job -- you know, Bob Wallace was there almost 30 years.

Ryan's only 42. Going to be 42. So I said, You're going to be there another 30 years, too. And he looked at me and goes, I don't know about that. But we got -- we definitely got someone in there that's going to definitely do well up there.

All the promotions have been just outstanding. There's no doubt in my mind we're going to get legislation passed. And look at that, the priorities are already in action.

Isn't that great. Already in action.

(Applause.)

ANNOUNCEMENT: VFW LEGACY LIFE PROCLAMATION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you, Ryan.

When you make the choice to become Legacy Life member, you are choosing to not only gain access to exclusive benefits, you're showcasing the world that you believe in and support the vital work of the VFW does.

President Jimmy Carter once said, quote, "I have one life and one chance to make it count for something. My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference." End of quote.

For the VFW, our Legacy Life members have the opportunity to do just that. Membership in this fraternity is comprised of renowned and committed VFW members. Their mark, left on our organization are unrivaled, and we can't thank each of you enough for your dedication and support.

Today, I am pleased to recognize several VFW Posts, each of which have earned a Legacy Society Post Proclamation in recognition of having at least 25 Legacy Life members. Ladies and gentlemen, please stand as your Post is recognized.

With 25 Legacy Life members: Red Lion Post 1446 in Red Lion, Pennsylvania.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: F. Michael Sicks, Post 1785, in Clearfield, Pennsylvania.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Cecil County Memorial, Post 6027, in North East, Maryland.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Ralph Fulton, Post 6423, in Elsmere, Kentucky.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Oswald L. Fayard, North Bay Post 6731, in D'Iberville, Mississippi.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Colonel Lewis L. Millett Hill, 180 Memorial Post 8180, and Manuel Alvarado, Post 9186 in San Antonio, Texas.
(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Cory-Dullum, Post 1010, East Helena, Montana.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And Bangchang Utapao, Post 12146, in Thailand.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: With 50 Legacy Life members:
Jefferson County Memorial, Post 3522, in Charles Town, West Virginia.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And Bob Milby, Post 6450, in Chester,
West Virginia.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: With 125 Legacy Life members,
Airport Cities, Post 10454, in Grapevine, Texas.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: To the members of these fine posts,
congratulations on a job well done. (Applause.)

ANNOUNCEMENT: CONFERENCE STREAMERS/CONFERENCE CUP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: This year, 48 departments earned All-
American, taking my charge to remind America that every veteran counts right to
the front lines.

Today, I want to take a moment to also distinguish and honor the VFW
departments that saw and put the bar high and pushed higher and farther than ever
you could imagine.

Finishing at least 100 percent in membership and with the highest
percentage of membership in their respective conferences. I now would like to
recognize our best of the best.

Those departments are: South Dakota for the Big 10 Conference with 102
percent.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Delaware from the Eastern
Conference with 103 percent.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And from the Western Conference,
Washington, with 104 percent.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And last, but not least, leading the
nation in membership, from the Southern Conference, the Department of
Louisiana, with 106.68 percent.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Now, it's time to award what you have

been all waiting for. Bragging rights. Just like the Stanley Cup. The VFW's Commander Cup embodies all VFW stands for and not only sets its holders apart as the conference with the highest percentage in membership, at the end of the membership year, but entitles them with official bragging rights as the best of the best for that year.

And so, it gives me great pleasure to present the 2023 conference membership trophy, again, to the Southern Conference.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: The Southern Conference includes members from Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: So please join me in giving each of them a big round of applause for their hard work this past year.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, at this time, if I could have the leaders from South Dakota, Delaware, Louisiana, and Washington, come forward for presentation of their conference streamers.

(Applause.)

PRESENTATION: 2023 ALL AMERICAN AWARDS TO
DEPARTMENT, DISTRICT, AND POST COMMANDERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: When I hear the words All-American, it touches my heart. That's for sure. Words like role model, energetic, commitment and resolute come to mind. As an organization, we have set the bar high for our leaders. And this year's All-American commanders have demonstrated their worth and – over the past year.

Having reached 101.6 percent nationally in membership as an organization, to say this year's recruiting efforts were a success, would be an understatement.

And today, it brings me great pride to celebrate and honor these commanders' unrelenting passion and devotion on our organization. I'm proud to announce that we have 48 Department Commanders, 232 District Commanders, and 854 Post Commanders who have earned the highest, most distinguished title and most are here with us today as All-Americans.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now be joined by Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al

Lipphardt to present the All-American commander awards to this exclusive group.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Alabama, Tammy C. Johnson.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, Michael Kemery.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Jeffrey Todd Byrd.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of California, Martin W. Yingling.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Connecticut, Mario J. Richards.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Delaware, William R. Hall.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: All the way from the Department of Europe, Angelo D. Aldridge.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: It's a long way from Europe, so...
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Florida, Ronald D. Mills.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, Dean A. Rakoskie.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Hawaii, Frank Bragg.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Idaho, Bobby D. Tettleton.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Bobby J. Edwards.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Indiana, Richard W. Leirer.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Iowa, Ronald D. Leber.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kansas, James A. Ratcliff.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kentucky, Merlin N. Sesco.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, Don A. Reber.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Maine, Jennifer L. Lane.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Maryland, Bryan M. Lankford.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Massachusetts, Michael A. Raymond.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Michigan, John A. Griffith.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Minnesota, Dale E. Hoogeveen.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Missouri, Royce R. Kelb.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Montana, Jeffrey D. Schepp.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Nebraska, Jeffrey M. Baker.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Nevada, Daniel M. Sanders.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Hampshire, Leon Rideout.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Jersey, Jay E. Boxwell.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Mexico, Christopher L. Archuleta.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of North Carolina, Timothy P. Woods.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Ohio, John T. Greene.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Oklahoma, also known as District 15 in Texas, Jeremy Owen.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of the Pacific Areas, Warren Maxson.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Pennsylvania, Henry R. Mannella.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Rhode Island, Joe "Tiger" Patrick.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Carolina, Edward G. Stefanak.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Dakota, Thomas A. Hafner.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Republic of Texas, Carl L. Toomer.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Utah, Therral D. Curtis.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Virginia, Geoffrey D. Lyster.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Washington, Paul M. Herrera.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of West Virginia, Corrina A. Boggess.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Wisconsin, Michelle A. Rathke.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Wyoming, Danielle P. Smith.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, that is your list of all of department commanders. If they would please assemble behind Commander-in-Chief Borland for a group photo after which we will start with the district commanders that made All-American.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I just want to let everyone know that the Department of the Pacific Areas and the Department of Kentucky had every post at 100 percent.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, this is your All-American District Commanders from the Department of Alabama, Brandon E. Bagwell.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, District 10, Commander Lori A. Byrne.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, District 8, Commander Brit Deuce Brandt.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Thomas A. Hohman, District 13.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, District 1, Jerry T. Tobey.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Adam C. Strange, District 7.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of California, David A. Kuta, District 7.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Connecticut, John A. Kennedy, District 1.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Delaware, Fulton F. Loppatto, District 4.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Europe, John J. Casey, District 1.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Florida, Michael E. Cline, District 1.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Florida, Chris A. Gates, District 19.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, John R. Goolsby, District 5.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, James M. Jensen, District 6.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, Jason L. Nichols, District 7.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Idaho, Lee R. Hartwig, District 2.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Idaho, Troy H. Junier, District 5.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Dustin H. Dixon, District 12.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Christopher D. Maynor, District 15.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kansas, James J.

Boyle, III, District 5.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kentucky, William B. Thomason, District 11.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kentucky, Glen E. Phillips, Jr., District 8.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kentucky, David S. Wilson, District 1.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kentucky, Scott A. Van Tassell, District 4.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kentucky, Justin D. Hollon, District 5.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kentucky, Justin D. Hollon, District 10.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kentucky, Jeffrey M. Keen, District 5.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, James M. Prestenback, District 30.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, Philip Lawrence, District 11.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Maryland, Michael Johnson, District 4.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Maryland, Claudia E.

Walter, District 1.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Maryland, Joseph A. Cicchillo, District 3.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Massachusetts, Craig L. DeOld, District 5.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Massachusetts, Heath E. Joseph, District 7.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Minnesota, Jarrod T. McReynolds, District 7.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Missouri, E. Buddy McEachern, District 9.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Nebraska, Norman L/ Anton, District 9.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Jersey, Barbara A. Hagemann, District 12.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Jersey, Yvonne Zirrith, District 8.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New York, Marcello J. Royunda, District 6.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of North Carolina, Mike A. Baker, District 8.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of North Carolina,

David L. Martin, District 7.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Ohio, Iris Foster-DeNieuwe, District 11.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Ohio, Luther L. Sawicki, District 7.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Oklahoma, Dan M. Fuller, District 5.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Oklahoma, Jason W Burns, District 14.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Oklahoma, Brandy M. Schafer, District 10.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Pacific Areas, Donald E. Kelley, District 3.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of the Pacific Areas, Randy S. Riggs, District 5.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of the Pacific Areas, James E. Collins, District 7.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Pennsylvania, Jessica M. King, District 29.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Pennsylvania, Frederick W. Hechler, District 18.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Carolina,

Curtis W. Peterson, Jr., District 1.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Carolina,
Todd A. Haviland, District 7.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Carolina,
Thoenis S. Brown, District 2.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Tennessee, Kimberly
A. King, District 5.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Reggie L.
Williams, District 3. The No. 1 District Commander in the VFW. 10
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Barbara A.
Ampong, District 30.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Joe H. Pipes,
District 19.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Sean P. Ellis,
District 4.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Jorg Kitchen,
District 2.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Virginia, Jeffrey I.
Dombroff, District 8.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Virginia, Benjamin T.
Guinan, District 10.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Washington, Daniel
A. Bujok, District 4.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Washington, Glenn Albert, District 9.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of West Virginia, Cody Heaney, District 1.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Wisconsin, Manuel C. Salas, District 1.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that concludes the District All-American.

We will now present the Post All-American recipients.

All right, ladies and gentlemen, comrades and patriots of the Auxiliary, from the Department of Alabama, Brandon E. Bagwell, Post 3073.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Alabama, Colt J. Drouillard, Post 3128.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Alabama, Robert A. Schmidbauer, Sr.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Alabama, Brian E. Hampton.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Alabama, Eric J. Roloff.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Alaska, Herschel J. Deaton.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Alaska, David A. Hutchinson.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, Susan M. Warner.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, Nedra Sealey.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, Frank J. White.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Department of Arizona, James J. Shanley.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, Joseph P. Dora.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, Derek L. Hulsebus.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, Jason G. Khalaf.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arizona, Chris Branch.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Marc A. Calcaterra.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Teddy A. Pipkin.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Dominic J. Listerman.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Arkansas, Norman G. Powell.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of California, Michael J. Lynn.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of California, Mark R. Steinberg.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of California, Angelo J. Maldonado.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of California, Michael A. Hill.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of California, Michael A. Cano.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Connecticut, Joseph C. Beal.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Connecticut, Charles M. Pickett.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Delaware, Thomas D. McGee.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Europe, Dwight Johnson.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Florida, Chris A. Gates.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Florida, David A. Cain.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Florida, Just R. Moss.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: I'm going to have fun with this one.
Past Commander-in-Chief, John E. Hamilton, who had to do it the hard way
and go in reverse order. From the Department of Florida.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Florida, Kevin S. Hice.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, Dwayne M.
Kilbourne.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, Lamar R.
Pounds.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, Wayne
Collins.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, DW Miles.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, Theodore
A. Beal.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, Curtis S.
Talley.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Hawaii, Wayne N.
Yoshioka.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Idaho, Tammy L.
Clement.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Idaho, M. Lucky Gallego.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Idaho, Ralph W. Binion, III.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Idaho, David T. Frei.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Joshua Seed.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Alonzo J. Skipper.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, John W. McGlynn, Sr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Ronald L. Knapp.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Euphamiea A. Louer-Wagoner.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Daniel L. Tate.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Mathius L. Carter.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Seth E. Floyd.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Indiana, Roger A. Ferguson.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Indiana, Kenneth A. Lange.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Indiana, Edith M. Toll-Seiler.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Indiana, Joseph H. Wolfe, III.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Iowa, Gregory B. Allen.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kansas, Hans Hull.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kansas, Richard D. Brown.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Kansas, David P. Babin.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, James H. Minchew, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, James D. Moore.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, Thomas L. Boniol, Sr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, Albert M. Cusimano.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, Carl J. Karnish.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, Walter R. Korb.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Louisiana, Robert E. Boudreaux, Sr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Maryland, Michael J. Eason.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Maryland, Craig M. Conrad.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Massachusetts, Eric Segundo.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Michigan, Christopher A. Templeton, Post 1669.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Michigan, Kimberly A. Napoleon.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Minnesota, Timothy V. Kent.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Minnesota, Paul B. Lindahl.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From Department of Minnesota, Edward J. Keough.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Mississippi, David R. Thompson.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Mississippi, Ira Turner, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Missouri, Marvin G. Dotson, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Missouri, Tommy K. McLerran.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Missouri, Bruce E. Watson. 3
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Missouri, Gerome E. Cummins, Post 3265.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Missouri, Donna M. Kinder, Post 8045.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Nebraska, Darrell R. McMillan.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Nebraska, Celeste K. Johnson.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Nevada, Candace F. Lopez.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Nevada, Daniel D. Myers.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Nevada, Luke E. Bialczak.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Jersey, Juan R. Class.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Jersey, Filipe Manuel Oliveira.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Mexico, Darrell Melon.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Mexico, Andrew J. Norris.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Mexico, Mark A. Bowman.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of North Carolina, Edward E. Beard, Post 6018.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of North Carolina, Wendy L. Silvera.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of North Carolina, Robert R. Kennedy.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of North Carolina, Mike A. Baker.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of North Carolina, William P. Wade.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of North Carolina,
Bridget Lightner.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Ohio, John R
Gorman.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Ohio, Federico
Rojas, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Ohio, Michael H.
Romans.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Oklahoma, Dan M.
Fuller, Post 577.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Oklahoma, Ron J.
Albert.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of the Pacific Areas,
James E. Collins.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Pennsylvania, Craig
A. Fisher.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Pennsylvania,
Thomas A. Sally.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Pennsylvania, Steven
L. Sellers, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Pennsylvania, Lyle R.
Dynda, Post 7810.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Rhode Island, Howard F. McMillian.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Carolina, Reginald A. Bell.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Carolina, James Reed.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Carolina, Con W. Farley.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Dakota, Lyle Sunderland.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Dakota, Charles D. McKean, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the great State of Texas, Eric Michael Theodore Grotegut.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, John C. Maines.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Juan Martinez, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Wayne A. Strickland.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Daniel J. Rich.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Jack A. Sturgill.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Willie E. Keller, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Preston R. Callaway.
From the Department of Texas, James W. Brown.
From the Department of Texas, James W. Pratt.
From the Department of Texas, Jorg Kitchen.
From the Department of Texas, Richard D. Shawver.
From the Department of Texas, Reggie L. Williams.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Jimmy R. Douglas.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Lupita M. Perez.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Texas, Eddie L. Terry.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Utah, William J. Greer.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From Department of Virginia, Doris M. Wollett.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Virginia, Todd A. Taylor.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Virginia, Mitchell L. Rubinstein.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Washington, Charles A. Bond.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Washington, Billy J. Wright, Jr.
(Applause)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of West Virginia, Thomas L> Torrence.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of West Virginia, William H. White, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Wisconsin, Michael E. Zientek.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Wisconsin, Mark W. Klein.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All right. For those of you that remained in the hall. We've got one more before we recess for this afternoon. Introduction of Triple Crown winners. To earn the coveted VFW Triple Crown, a commander must achieve All-American at Post, District, and Department level.

The VFW's own Triple Crown winners must have a proven history of exceptional leadership, be established at recruiting new members, and demonstrate a strong support of VFW programs.

By achieving All-American in the Post, District, and Department levels, these commanders join an elite group, such as myself, and can boast this achievement. I'm honored to recognize this year's VFW Triple Crown winners here on stage behind me.

From the Department of Arkansas, William Beams, Jr.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Okay. Now here. From the Department of Florida, John Hamilton.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Georgia, Dean Rakoskie.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Illinois, Bobby

Edwards.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Indiana, Richard Leer.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Massachusetts, a two-timers Michael Raymond and Eric Segundo.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Minnesota, Dale Hoogeveen.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of New Jersey, Luddie Austin and Barbara Hagemann.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Pacific Areas, Warren Maxson.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of South Carolina, Edward Stefanak, Jr.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the great State of Texas, Richard Shawver.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: From the Department of Utah, Danny Zaharias.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: And from the Department of Virginia, Geoffrey Lyster.

Let's give this group of commanders a big round of applause as we say congratulations for attaining such a notable record of achievement.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: After they get their pins, we are going to recess until 2 p.m. See you at 2 p.m.
(A recess was taken at 12:48 p.m.)

RECONVENE BUSINESS SESSION

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Sergeant-at-Arms, please have the comrades rise to salute the flag. 17
(Saluting colors.)

CONVENTION CREDENTIALS REPORT: BETTY GRIPP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now request that Betty Gripp give us the initial credentials report.
(Chanting.)

BETTY GRIPP: Good afternoon, Commander-in-Chief and council members and delegates. The opening credential report for the 124th National Convention at the close of business 4 p.m. yesterday, July 22nd, 2023. Total delegates registering their credentials are: 7,922. Department Commanders: 44. Total Past Commanders-in-Chief: 10. Total National Officers: 48. Grand Total Delegates: 8,024. But the total in attendance and signing in: 1,701.

That's my report.

CONVENTION RULES REPORT:

CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN HAMILTON

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you, Betty.
I will now call upon our chairman, John E. Hamilton, for the convention rules.

CHAIRMAN HAMILTON: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

The Committee of Convention Rules met Sunday, July 23rd, 2023. I would like to thank the members of the staff for their assistance, Quentin and Zach.

Your Committee on Convention Rules, again, met Sunday, July 23rd, 2023, and agreed on the following recommendations, which are respectfully submitted for your consideration.

That in accordance with the conjunction with the national bylaws and the manual procedures and with the exception noted here, the current edition of the Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, shall be recognized as parliamentary authority for this convention.

Two: That when a registered delegate desires to make a motion or address the convention, the delegate shall rise, address the chair as "Comrade Commander-in-Chief" and after being recognized shall state their name, Post number, and Department before proceeding.

Three: A registered delegate shall be permitted to speak but twice on any one subject, or any pending resolution for a period not to exceed five minutes each, except by consent of two-thirds of the voting strength of the convention present and voting, provided that the chairman of the convention committees may speak as frequently as necessary in conjunction with reports of their committees.

In the event of a controversy, the presiding officer shall not entertain any motion which will curtail further debate without affording the maker of the motion or a member of the delegation presenting the resolution an opportunity to speak for five minutes of final rebuttal.

All resolut- --

Four: All resolutions offered by individual registered delegates must bear the endorsement of the Department Commander, or if absent, the Department Adjutant. All resolutions must be submitted to the Office of the Adjutant General for numbering and referral to committee no later than 12 p.m., Wednesday, July 26th, 2023, and must be accompanied by a written explanation as to why the resolution was not presented to the Department Convention for consideration.

Five: All resolutions offered on the floor at the convention will initially be in writing and shall automatically and without reading be referred to the Adjutant General for assignment to the proper committee.

Six: Committee chairmen in reporting on resolutions referred to their committee shall first read the number of those resolutions on which favorable action is recommended.

Specific resolutions may be set aside for individual acts at the request of any delegate. The others being voted upon collectively after action has been taken on all such resolutions, the chairman shall read the number and the title of those resolutions which committee has disapproved.

A resolution disapproved by the committee shall be automatically rejected unless a motion is made and seconded that it be approved. In which case, it shall be brought up for debate on the – and convention action.

Seven: This convention will not consider any resolution dealing with expenditure or appropriation of organizational funds.

Eight: The convention will not consider any resolution endorsing legislation sponsored by any other veterans' organization or requesting us to join with any other organization in sponsoring legislation not expressly proposed by the members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Nine: All delegates to this convention may speak and debate, make motions and vote during convention proceedings only. Excuse me. Delegates. Delegates to this convention may speak and debate, make motion to vote during convention proceedings.

Ten: Delegates shall vote individually or any -- on any item of business coming before the convention. They cannot be required to vote as a block with others from their delegation.

11: Voting strength shall be determined by those delegates registered as of the close of the credentials reservation booth the previous day and as required to the National Convention.

The department commanders will receive prior to the beginning of each business session a list of Posts that have properly registered delegates. Only delegates representing those Posts listed on the report will be accorded voting

privileges.

12: On roll calls, the Department Commander of each delegation shall poll their delegations, registered delegates on the floor, and shall announce the vote of their delegation.

13: Registered delegates of a delegation may arrive at a vote in any manner but must announce it in terms of full units and not in terms of fractional parts of a vote.

14: Reconsideration of a motion or resolution upon which final disposition has been made shall not be allowed after the meeting at which it was acted on has been recessed, unless the body is notified of such contemplated action prior to the close of that meeting.

15: When the report of a Department Commander of the delegation is not accepted with all the registered delegates of the delegation, and a poll of the department registered delegates is demanded by three registered delegates of said department, the Adjutant General shall poll the registered delegates without discussion or question.

16: In accordance with the Section of 621 of the National Bylaws, voting shall be by acclamation as defined within Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, excerpt -- except a roll call may be demanded by 10 registered delegates representing Posts in 10 separate departments or by order of the Commander-in-Chief.

17: Nominating speeches for the national officers shall be limited to five minutes each. The time allocated to encompass all seconding speeches shall be limited to four minutes total.

Nomination and election of national officers will be held in – held according to the Congressional Charter Bylaws in Section 617 of the National Manual of Procedure.

18: Registered delegates and persons recognized by the chair shall be entitled to a respectful hearing and the chair shall have the authority to clear the gallery or the floor or have the Sergeant-at-Arms escort from the floor any person or persons who may create any disturbance which interferes with the orderly procedure of the convention.

The Commander-in-Chief –

19. Excuse me. The Commander-in-Chief, as may be necessary and appropriate, to informing the membership of the activities of this convention authorized that all parts of the convention be streamed through the website of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

20: Consent of two-thirds of the voting strength of the convention present and voting is necessary for the rules of this convention.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I move that these rules be adopted by the convention at this time.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: The chairman of the convention rules made a motion to accept them as read. Is there any changes? Any changes? Any changes?

Seeing none, the convention rules will stand as read.

Thank you, Chief.

CHAIRMAN HAMILTON: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, additionally, Robert's Rules of Order calls for the adoption of the convention agenda.

Therefore, I move that the convention agenda currently displayed on the VFW Convention app, and as from time to time may be adjusted by the Commander-in-Chief, be adopted as the official agenda of the 124th National Convention.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Motion's been made to adopt. Any question? Any question? Any question?

It stands.

CHAIRMAN HAMILTON: Commander-in-Chief, that concludes my report.

NATIONAL BYLAWS, MANUAL OF PROCEDURE AND RITUAL COMMITTEE REPORT
BY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF VINCENT "BJ"
LAWRENCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you. I now call upon Vincent "BJ" Lawrence for the report on Committee of National Bylaws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual.

PAUL SPERA: Good afternoon. Comrade Commander, national officers, delegates to this convention. My name is Paul Spera. I'm a delegate to this convention and I am a proud member of North End Post 144 in Boston, Massachusetts.
(Applause.)

PAUL SPERA: Thank you very much. The chairman –

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Just read it.

PAUL SPERA: Just read it? You don't want me to tell them?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: No.

PAUL SPERA: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

The Committee on National Bylaws, Manual of Procedure and Ritual met Sunday, July 23rd, 2023. I would like to introduce the chairman of the committee, Past Commander-in-Chief BJ Lawrence.
(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: I would also ask that all the members of the committee please stand to be recognized at this time.
(Applause.)

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: Committee members, make sure you know where the mics are. Please give these comrades a big hand.

You already did that. Comrades, the proposed amendments are in the booklet you received in your registration packet. Please refer to your booklet as I

read the proposed amendments the committee recommended for adoption.

First, I will read the committee's recommendations for approval. Then I will initiate a motion to adopt those proposed amendments. If a delegate wishes to set aside a proposed amendment for discussion, they will approach one of the microphones, state their name, Post number, Department, and ask that the amendment be set aside.

After set asides have been identified, we will vote on the motion to adopt the other proposed amendments the committee recommended for adoption. Then, we will discuss and vote on the set asides.

After, I will read the proposed amendments the committee rejected, unless these proposed amendments are adopted through a motion, duly seconded, and passed with an affirmative majority vote, they will die based on the recommendation of the committee.

Commander-in-Chief, the committee recommends for approval the following proposed bylaw amendments: B3, B4, B5. 10

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, the chairman has moved to accept B3, B4, and B5. Are there any set asides? Any set asides? Any set asides.

Seeing nobody at the mics, approved.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: Thank you. Now, I will read the proposed Congressional Charter and Bylaw Amendments the committee rejected, which will die unless a motion is made and duly seconded for adoption.

B1, B2, B9 were deemed to be out of order. Are there any motions to adopt these proposed amendments? Any set asides?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Any set asides? Any set asides? Any set asides? Seeing nobody at the mics, those motions will die.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: Commander-in-Chief, The committee duly voted to refer the following proposed Congressional Charter and Bylaw Amendments back to the submitting state for further consideration and clarification: B3, B4, B5.

All right. Page 4. Where's page 3? I will now read the proposed amendments to the Manual of Procedure that the committee recommended for adoption. Commander-in-Chief, these proposed amendments are: M5, M6, and M7. 20

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Chairman just recommended adoptions of those amendments. Are there any set asides? Any set asides? Any set asides? Motion passed.

CHAIRMAN LAWRENCE: Thank you. Now, I will read the proposed Manual of Procedure amendments the committee rejected, which will die unless a motion is made for adoption.

Commander-in-Chief, the committee rejected the following proposed Manual of Procedure amendments: M1, M2, M3. And was it just M4 that was withdrawn? M4 was withdrawn. These are recommended for rejection.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE CURT WATTS: Commander-in-Chief Borland, Curt Watts,

Department of Oklahoma, delegate for Post 2027. I stand to ask for a point of privilege that we have some lights turned on so the delegates can see. We're having trouble -- our delegates are having trouble seeing what we have. Thank you, Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We're going to take a few-minute break just to turn on these lights and then we'll get back to this.
(A break was taken at 2:21 p.m.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Recommendations to reject M1, M2, M3, and withdraw M4. Are there any motions to bring them forward? Any motions? Any motion? Any motion? Seeing none, they will die.

We're going to wait until the lights come on before we go forward.
(A break was taken at 2:22 p.m.)

FINANCE AND INTERNAL ORGANIZATION COMMITTEE REPORT
BY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF RICHARD EUBANK

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I now call upon the Chairman Richard L. Eubank for the report on Committee on Finance and Internal Organization.

CHAIRMAN EUBANK: Good afternoon, comrades. Richard Eubank, Past Commander-in-Chief, Delegate, Post 10165, Department of California.

My Vice Chairman was John Moon, Past Commander-in-Chief.

Commander-in-Chief, thank you very much. Comrades, I'm pleased to report that the Committee on Finance and Internal Organization met on Sunday afternoon at 1400 hours in Room 20- -- 120CB and discussed guidance before the committee.

The proposed resolutions were distributed to each department and posted online. These resolutions are contained in the booklet that you received at registration, plus each member of the committee received an additional booklet at our meeting.

Commander-in-Chief, the committee recommends rejection, Resolutions 201, 202. And the committee rejected both 101 (sic) and 202 by majority vote.

Commander-in-Chief, this concludes my report. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, both 101 (sic) and 201, have been recommended for rejection. Are there any motions?

I recognize mic No. 3.

DELEGATE DAVID BOZARTH: Commander-in-Chief, David Bozarth, Post 257, Department of Missouri. I make a motion to approve resolution 201.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Do we have a second? Do we have a second? I recognize mic No. 3.

DELEGATE RANDY ENGENESS: Commander chief, Randy Engness, Department of Wisconsin, Post 2204.

I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Motion on the floor and a second to

approve 101 (sic). Now up for discussion. 201, now for discussion.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Commander-in-Chief, the biggest problem that we recognized in the committee the other day was -- yesterday was there is a lack of understanding about submarines and submarine duty among the membership.

This lack of understanding included a lack of understanding of the SSBN Deterrent Patrol insignia. The understanding was that the patrol insignia was for all submarines. It's only for one class of the submarines, which is one fourth of the submarine force.

And that the expeditionary medal is awarded in a haphazard manner. Sometimes it's awarded; sometimes it's not for submarine duty.

We submariners here, a common comment from our brother and sister veterans and citizens, I could never do that, and how did you do it? Yes, we submariners have doubly volunteered. First to serve in the Navy; then in submarines.

Yes, submarine duty is an all volunteer force. We, the double volunteers, served in the job and service where others wouldn't or couldn't. We volunteered to accomplish missions, patrols, tasks, and service that we will never be able to share the details of due to ObSec.

We, again, double volunteers, served and continue to serve with honor, pride, patriotism, and in silence. We and our duty are the least understood, most frequently forgotten, and least recognized veterans and duty in the United States veteran and military establishment.

We desire for you to better understand, better recognize, and better advocate for the rights, recognition, and benefits we earned and deserve.

That is why we ask you to support and approve resolution 201 to establish a National VFW liaison office for submarines.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you, Comrade. I now call upon the chairman to discuss why 201 was rejected.

CHAIRMAN EUBANK: Commander-in-Chief, when the committee met, there was a lot of discussion, rightfully so, from both sides.

What we went by was the finance for internal organization and the reason rejection for the -- create a VFW national submarine liaison office, and I will read that recommendation from national.

"This resolution would, for the first time in VFW history, create positions in the national office focused exclusively on one type of military service. The VFW should not engage in this business for creating MOS-related fractions within the organization.

"The good natured and/or service rivalries are sufficient. This is not where the resources of the Veterans of Foreign Wars would be focused. The Veterans of Foreign Wars already provides a voice for submariners, like -- just like MPs, supply clerks, grunts, as well as others.

"It was with the Veterans of Foreign Wars' voice that represented all

veterans, particularly all combat veterans, that resulted in the GI Bill, the Choice Act, Blue Water Navy benefits, the elimination of the widow's tax, and the Mission Act and the PACT Act.

"The Veterans of Foreign Wars already serves submariners and all the veterans proudly."

And so there was really no reason from the committee that there's no special need for justification for such a national level office.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other discussion on 201? I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE MARTIN AGUIAR: Commander-in-Chief, Marty Aguiar, delegate of this Post from Department of Nevada, Post 10054.

I rise and oppose to this with regards to my 30 years of -- in the Navy as -- and retiring as a Command Master Chief, every single sailor is afforded the opportunity to have their records validated and have their awards updated without them being redacted. And any of the members' medals are available on page 4 of their service record.

So for eligibility purposes, these members, if they received any of the medals authorizing them for inclusion into the VFW, it's already there without it being redacted in any way, shape, or form.

Plus, if we go down this road, what are we doing about the SEALs? What are we doing about the SWCC? What are we doing about Green Beret? What are we doing about all these other combat communities that feel that they're special as well?

There's no reason for the submarine community to feel that they're above and beyond everybody else.

I rest my case.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 3.

NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER WISEMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Ken Wiseman, National Council Member from the Department of Virginia.

I spent 13 years in the Navy before I was medically discharged, two and a half years of that was in the submarine community. They're not being picked on. They are understood. And any conjecture otherwise is not what is needed here.

My comrade, who also served in the Navy, is very correct that you can get your awards validated. Let's talk about awards that submarine sailors earn. Their submarine warfare insignia does not require deployment to be earned. You can complete that pierside.

And so we have a scenario where we are in so many ways setting aside one group of veterans to be treated differently because of how a few felt from their time and service. Well, I can tell you from my time in the submarine community, Chief, I was never disrespected for it. I am opposed to this, and I ask my comrades

to also vote no. I yield back.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 3.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Chief, just a moment of -- a bit of clarification.

The submarine warfare insignia cannot be awarded, by regulation, pier side. It requires a minimum of six months of sea time with the commanding officer validating and asserting that the crew member has sufficient sea time to be able to handle and work the submarine at sea.

So not pier side. They have to be at sea, by regulation.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Seeing no one at the mics, we will now go to a motion and second to adopt 201. All in favor say aye.

All opposed say nay.

(Chorus of nays.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: 201 dies.

Any motions for 101 (sic)? Any motions to adopt 101 (sic)? Any motions to adopt 101 (sic)? Seeing none. Motion 101 will die.

Okay. I stand corrected. That was 201.

Now, is there any motions for 202 to adopt? 202 to adopt? I recognize mic No. 3.

DELEGATE RANDALL TOLLIVER: Commander-in-Chief, Randall Tolliver, Post 6660, Department of Missouri. Sir, I recommend approval of resolution 202, the VFW boycott of Chinese manufactured goods.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Do we have a second? I recognize mic No. 3.

DELEGATE BERNADETTE KUCHARCZUK: Commander-in-Chief, this is Bernadette Kucharczuk, Post 2294, Department of New Jersey. I second the motion to adopt.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We have a motion and a second to adopt 202. Is there any discussion?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: As was discussed this morning by our very motivated speaker, the People's Republic of China is both a military and an economic adversary of the United States.

In fact, the 2017 National Defense Strategy issued by the Department of Defense declared China as a strategic competitor and further noted that it's leveraging military modernization influence operations and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage.

As it continues its economic and military ascendance, it is there to displace the United States as the world's foremost super power.

In addition, the 20 July 2022, United Nations Special Report stated that the People's Republic of China is, it is reasonable to conclude, using forced labor, also known as slavery, in both its

industrial and agricultural manufacturing sectors.

I would like to submit, sir, that the department -- excuse me -- the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States cease purchasing Chinese manufactured goods in both the store and for organizational support, sir.

That's all I have to say.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other discussion on 202? I recognize mic No. 1

DELEGATE MARTIN AGUIAR: Commander-in-Chief, Martin Aguiar, Post 10054, Department of Nevada. Where it is understood that there is a desire for us not to purchase manufactured goods coming out of China, there is absolutely no way we can feasibly do this.

With the cost of textiles and everything else that happens around the world, pretty much everything comes through China. Everything that happens at the VFW store, all of our ball caps and everything else, no matter how we outsource them in any way, shape, or form, we still cannot guarantee that any of the textiles that we are receiving come through China.

There's no way we can validate this, and there's absolutely no way that we would be able to afford to operate the VFW store without purchasing the textiles that we need in order for us to operate our business.

Where it is understood that the gentleman's request makes sense, there is just no feasible way that the VFW can operate right now as it stands without utilizing resources that come from China. Everything we do in this country has got some type of textile or some type of goods that comes from China.

Whether it's remanufactured in the United States or not, there is still no way that we can vet, challenge, or disapprove of anything that we are manufacturing today in the United States without some part of it coming through China. Period. That's my point.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrade, are you opposing adoption.

DELEGATE MARTIN AGUIAR: I am opposing adoption. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other discussion on 202? I recognize mic No. 3.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sir, just a little addition.

I'm not proposing that we try as an organization to backtrack all component manufacturing processes. But if it has a "Made in China" label, I submit that we do, as an organization, have the authority of where we spend our dollars and who we support economically to do so. Thank you, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE WILLIAM HINDS: Commander, William H. Hinds, Jr., Department of Oklahoma, Moore Post 8706.

I understand that everything that we have through textiles comes through China, Vietnam, one of those southeastern Asian countries. I support this in the fact that I believe that we need to take a stand. We need to move our country forward into hopefully opening up textile industries again that would provide jobs and opportunities for our people throughout the United States.

If we don't take a stand against China and their imperialistic intentions, I believe that probably we're going to be in a very dire situation before too long. So I would recommend that we take a strong stand and say that we need to stop this.

And then, hopefully, we can look at the course of looking for other solutions that would enable our country to move forward as well as the VFW. Thank you for your attention.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Seeing no one at the mics, I'm going to give the --As you were. I see someone coming up to mic No. 1.

DELEGATE MARTIN AGUIAR: Commander, I know this is my second time to speak, so I'll make it quick. Marty Aguiar, Department of Nevada, VFW Post 10054.

This resolution calls for an immediate stop of purchasing any of the textiles or anything else that we receive overseas. So if we adopt this motion as it stands today, then we are basically asking the VFW to stop purchasing anything that is made overseas.

I rest my case.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Seeing no one at mic 1, 2, or 3, I'm going to give the chairman an option to discuss this just a little bit more before we go into the vote.

CHAIRMAN EUBANK: Comrades, the reason the -- the committee recommended rejection, and I'll read the -- the information we got. This will be contrary to the convention rules and could be ruled out of order.

Moreover, this resolution is beyond the scope of our chartered purpose. We should remain focused on veteran-specific issues. From practical standpoint, it would be virtually impossible to implement the spirit of this resolution. This measure will prevent purchasing "Made in China" products, but does nothing to prevent the sale of the products made in other countries using resources from China.

China is the world's largest exporter of textiles with an annual revenue of \$150 billion. The textiles are sent all over the world where the finished products are shipped. This resolution would be not prevalent. But forthcoming -- forthcoming. Excuse me.

Finally, the resolution eliminates the freedom of those focused in only purchasing the lowest cost products from the store. Anyone who purchases any product can presently inquire or search as to its origins of the product, and they are free to then decide whether to purchase it or not.

Commander, that was the reason.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other discussion on 202? Any other discussion? Any other discussion? We are now going to vote to possibly approve 202.

All in favor, say aye.

(Chorus of ayes.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All opposed nay.
(Chorus of nays.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: It dies.
I would ask that all committee chairmen, both BJ Lawrence and Richard Eubank, to stand by until the end of the convention in case any questions come up. Thank you.

I'm going to call upon Dan West to do some admin notes on a couple of the resolutions.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, as a matter of full transparency as best we possibly can do on such short notice, I need you -- to direct your attention to your resolutions book.

Resolutions change note for resolutions 305, 308, and 310 have been moved to the 400 and 600 series.

Resolution 305, 308, and 310 from the general 300 series were reassigned during the staff comments meeting on July 6th, '23, after the proposed resolutions amendments book went to print. That would be what you currently have in front of you.

Resolution 305, free application for federal student aid was moved to the veteran service resolution 600 series as 642.

Resolution 308, recognition of adding 74 sailors on the Vietnam Memorial Wall and 310, expanded the dates of eligibility for the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal were moved to the National Security and Foreign Affairs 400 series. R308 is now 420 and R310 is now 421.

The Schedule of Resolutions and Amendments book still shows resolutions 305, 308, and 310 and, in general resolutions, but the website, document repository, and e-mail notifications to members' e-mail and department officers that included all resolutions and amendments plus copies of resolutions for distribution at the committee meetings all reflect these changes.

Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

GENERAL RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE REPORT BY
CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ROBERT WALLACE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We are now going to report on Committee on General Resolutions. I call upon Past Commander-in-Chief Chairman Robert E. Wallace.

CHAIRMAN WALLACE: Good afternoon, everyone.
(Good afternoon.)

CHAIRMAN WALLACE: Commander-in-Chief Borland, I'm pleased to report to you that your convention Committee on General Resolutions convened at 2 p.m., Sunday, July 23rd, 2023. Roll call was taken, and preliminary matters were

discussed. The committee carefully deliberated each of the resolutions assigned.

Commander-in-Chief, I would like to report the committee has recommended for adoption the following resolution as submitted: No. 302, Buddy Poppy distribution on military installations.

In addition, the following resolutions are recommended for adoption as amended: 301, create patrol insignia awards for the SS, SSG, SSN and SSGN submarine crews.

Amended to be resolved to read as follows: "Be it resolved, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States commence efforts to petition the United States Navy submarine force commands, commanders, and U.S. Navy officials that the Pentagon is to design, approve, and authorize patrol insignias for the SS, SSG, SSN, and SSGN crews retroactive to 1947 and holding the same award rank as the SCPI and SSBN Deterrent Patrol insignias.

Number 304, Deported veterans. Amended as follows: "In the eighth whereas, remove the word 'particularly' and add the word 'honorably' after the word 'served' in the first sentence. And add in the be it resolve the words 'and honorably served' after the United States Armed Forces."

Commander-in-Chief, I hereby move for their adoption.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: There's a motion from the committee chairman to adopt those motions. Are there any set asides? Any set asides? I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE MARTIN AGUIAR: Commander-in-Chief, Marty Aguiar, VFW Post 10054, Pahrump, Nevada, Department of Nevada.

I would like to set aside Section 301. I make a motion to set aside Section 301.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: There's a motion to set aside 301. Is there a second? Is there a second? Is there a second? Seeing none, motion dies.

One more time, any set asides for these motions?

Seeing none, they are adopted.

CHAIRMAN WALLACE: Commander-in-Chief, I'll now read those resolution numbers entitled "Rejected by the committee" for the record.

Rejected 303: National flag to honor and remember those who died while serving in the Armed Forces of the United States.

306: Offer ranked choice voting in federal elections.

307: Supporting eligibility determination for applicants.

309: Purpose of our organization.

And also, please note that resolutions 305, 308, and 310 were reassigned to other committees prior to convening our committee meeting.

I wish to express appreciation to the members of the committee. Their hard work and dedication, and especially to David, on the staff, for his guidance and professional knowledge.

Thank you, Commander-in-Chief, and I sincerely appreciated the appointment.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Are there any motions to adopt the

rejections? Any motions to adopt any of the rejections? I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE WILLIAM WHITE: Comrade Commander, William White, Post 3466, South Charleston, West Virginia. I make an amendment that we adopt 303, the national flag to honor and remember those who have died while serving in the Armed Services.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: So that's a motion?

DELEGATE WILLIAM WHITE: Yes, sir, that's a motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We have a motion to adopt 303.

Is there a second?

NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER WISEMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Ken Wiseman, National Council Member, Department of Virginia. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We have a motion and a proper second to adopt 303. Is there any discussion? Any discussion? I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE WILLIAM WHITE: Comrade Commander, William White, Post 3466, South Charleston, West Virginia. As a member of the Armed Forces, I am by here no means trying to take away the distinguished reputation of the American flag.

This flag does not replace the national American flag. This flag is a flag that is given to family of service members that has their name embroidered on the bottom of it for that family to fly on special occasions throughout the year, i.e., Memorial Day weekend.

Just like down in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, they got the field of flags for all the service members that have died. You can purchase a flag.

The -- there are currently 27 states that have accepted this flag in their state legislature to be flown in their national -- I guess you could say, capitol or any installation within that state that is a government state. They are: Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin, Utah, Virginia, and Vermont, Wyoming, and West Virginia.

Now, during the deliberation that we had, somebody brought up the word about where do the proceeds go to when people buy the flags? Well, if anybody has any question about this organization, all they need to do is go to honorandremember.org.

The Honor and Remember flag was designed by a man named George Lutz. He is a veteran of the United States Marine Corps. He lost his son in Iraq who was an Army veteran. He designed this flag, and his goal in life was so that nobody -- so that he wouldn't forget about his son. That's why this flag was designed.

This flag is sponsored by major corporations, and some of these are going to shock you. One of the biggest one is NASCAR. If you ever watch a NASCAR race, you're going to see this flag embroidered on the side of the vehicle.

Also, they do the race, the Coca-Cola 600 every year for Memorial Day weekend. George Lutz invites and takes a group of individuals who are Gold Star family members. Proceeds from buying this flag go to helping Gold Star family members. He helps pay for their way to come down to go to the racetrack for that weekend. He provides tickets. Meals. The accommodations. The whole nine yards. So when people ask where do the proceeds go to from this, they go back to the community to help the families of the fallen soldiers or sailors or airmen, Coast Guard, Marines, et cetera.

Now, I have also -- During the deliberations, it was brought up, we don't need another flag to nationally recognize or get behind. Okay. And if that is the thought, then why do we also recognize, and I mean no disrespect, the POW/MIA flag? It took 17 years -- and I said "no disrespect." I said "no disrespect." It took 17 years to get that flag adopted to be flown next to the American flag.

Now, hear me out on this. If you're driving down the road, you see the American flag flying on the porch, you see the POW/MIA flag flying on the porch, that would lead you to believe that somebody in that house still has somebody that's either POW or MIA.

Hear me out. I'll give you plenty of time to argue. And, trust me, I have a big back and I will take it. There's a big line in our opening statement that says, "Don't let any petty jealousies come between us. I take that to heart."

So if you're driving down the road and you see the American flag, and you see the Honor and Remember flag flying on the front porch, what would that lead you to believe? Possibility there's somebody in that household that may have somebody that was killed in action. That's all I'm saying.

And that's all I have. Thank you, Comrade Commander.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 3.

DELEGATE MARY ASBELL: Commander, Mary Asbell, Department of South Carolina, Post 9539.

I sat in on the general resolutions seminar yesterday, and I think there is really a split decision that we really need to take into account.

One, we're comparing it to the POA/MIA flag, which, to me, means two very separate different things. I served multiple tours overseas in Afghanistan, Kuwait, (inaudible) and I have had multiple members that worked for me not only killed in action but had to be brought home.

There's a difference when we talk about killed in action, those that are coming home with flags on their casket, than we're talking about the thousands of members that are still not accounted for. To take this and accept it as a national representation I think oversteps a few boundaries.

The gentleman that makes them provides them to families. They're available for purchase. If people want to purchase them and provide them to families of members that were killed in action, I fully support that.

However, I think we're crossing a very thin line when we start to compare apples and oranges. Apples and apples: Killed, missing, whatever the case may be. We personally -- he said South Carolina. I can tell you for a fact that we don't fly it in the State of South Carolina.

So I just think that before people decide to vote on this, we really need to look at what it is they're asking for in this resolution, because it's not just to have the flag available. It's asking us to go to the federal government and fly a flag next to the POW/MIA flag that we're taking on responsibility at a national level to recognize.

So I think we're crossing a very fine line, and I think it definitely needs to be understood what we're voting on. (Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE LEONARD GRIFFIN: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

My name is Leonard Griffin, Post 3848, Department of Nevada, and I am against this. And I do take exception.

My dad never came home from Korea. We haven't seen him yet. And to take another flag, to disrespect all of these people from Vietnam, Korea, World War II, for this organization would be a disgrace to what we stand for. We support all veterans. We support everyone.

But I am definitely against this section. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 3.

DELEGATE ASHLEY LITTLE: Ashley Little, Post 5458, delegate.

I stand in opposition to this. As you all know, we have our flag. I have been to many veteran and active duty funerals, and I take so much pride. And some of those are active duty members or Guard or Reserves that were killed in action. And I'm sure they're very proud to be draped with our Stars and Stripes.

And with that, I call for the question.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: The call for question has been called.

All in favor on the call in question, say aye.

(Chorus of ayes.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All opposed nay.

That passes.

We now go to the original motion for the adoption of 303.

All in favor of the adoption of 303, say aye.

All opposed nay.

(Chorus of nays.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Motion 303 dies. Is there any other motions to adopt any of the rejections that were recommended by the committee?

I recognize mic No. 3.

DELEGATE JOHN KEEN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, John Keen, Delegate, Post 1, Colorado. I move that we adopt 306.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: There's a motion on the floor to adopt 306.

Is there a second?

I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE MARK PRIMMER: Commander-in-Chief, Mark Primmer from the Department of Europe. I second the motion.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: There's a motion on the floor. Proper second that we adopt 306. We will now go into discussion.

I recognize mic No. 1.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you, Comrade Commander.

If you read the -- be it resolve, you'll notice that there already is a law on the books called the Uniform and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act. All this resolution does is expand the State's obligation to use a rank choice voting ballot because the time delay in getting these ballots back from overseas, and the turbulent election seasons we have, somebody may vote for a candidate who is no longer in the race by the time their ballot is counted.

By allowing overseas members and family members to rank their choices, it guarantees that their vote will be counted.

Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Any other discussion on 306?

I recognize mic No. 3.

NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER HACKETT: Commander-in-Chief, JR Hackett, National Council Member, Post 9365, Department of Alaska.

I stand in opposition to this. And this is my reasoning behind it.

We did this in Alaska. And, basically, what you do is you give somebody three votes, when you get one. If you don't understand how rank voting works, it's like this. There's four applicants. If you voted for the worst one, then you get your second vote. If you still didn't vote for the first two, then you get the third vote.

I rest.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now call upon the chairman to discuss why 306 was rejected.

CHAIRMAN WALLACE: Comrade Commander, the committee felt it was out of scope of the VFW to tell people how to figure out the rank choice. It's a State issue. VFW's issue is get veterans and get the citizens of our country to vote, but let the states determine how they're going to run their campaigns.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 3.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Comrade Commander, just to follow up on the

two statements that were made.

First of all, I don't think that's an accurate representation of how rank choice voting works. If somebody wins on the first ballot, then the -- then the ballot is over. The election has been determined.

Rank choice voting is also known as instant runoff voting, so if nobody wins on the first round, and you have to go to a runoff election, like was recently occurred in Georgia, you already know what that member's second choice is if the -- if their candidate was eliminated in the previous round.

So you don't automatically get subsequent votes. We just don't have to reach back out to that veteran who has maybe changed duty stations since the last time they voted. We already know what their vote is because of the way the ballot is structured.

And to answer the committee's recommendation, this is a federal law that already tells the states that they must provide overseas veterans and their family members with a ballot. So it would just be clarifying and providing additional choice to the requirement that the government -- the federal government has already imposed on the State.

And like I said in my initial statement, it is a way to ensure that our overseas service members and their family members have their votes counted. And I think that is well within the bounds of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other discussion on 306? Any other discussion on 306? Any other discussion? Seeing none, we are now going to vote.

All in favor of adopting 306, say aye.

All opposed, nay.

(Chorus of nays.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Motion fails.

One last chance. Any motions for adoptions on the recommendations for rejections? Seeing none, they will all die.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT BY
CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF JOHN STROUD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Past Commander-in-Chief Bob Wallace, if you could just standby until the end of this business on Thursday, then I will dismiss you in case we have any other questions that do come up.

I will now call upon the Committee for National Security Affairs Chairman, Past Commander-in-Chief John Stroud.

CHAIRMAN STROUD: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, John Stroud,

Delegate, Post 2313, Department of Nevada.

I report that the Convention Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs convened at the Phoenix Convention Center at 2 p.m. on Sunday, July 23rd, 2023. Roll call was taken to ensure only assigned committee members were able to vote.

After reading your directions to the committee, and discussion how the process would take place, the committee deliberated each of the 19 resolutions assigned to the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee.

The Vice Chairman of this committee was Past Commander-in-Chief Bill Thien. And the chairman of the subcommittee on POW/MIA was Past Commander-in-Chief Larry Rivers. And I will be presenting all of these resolutions today.

I will now proceed by listing the resolution numbers and titles that the committee recommends for approval as written.

Resolution No. 401: Preserve the all-volunteer force.

Resolution No. 402: Eliminate sexual assault and harassment in the military.

Resolution No. 403: Assure DOD compliance with the TAP law.

Resolution 404: Keep defense budget relevant.

Resolution 405: Link military pay increases to private sector increases.

Resolution 406: Provide full concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and V.A. disability compensation.

Resolution 408: Awarding the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for expeditionary operations in Eastern Europe.

Resolution No. 411: Recognition for Afghan and Iraqi combat translators.

Resolution 412: Support the Republic of China on Taiwan.

Resolution 413: Support the Republic of Korea.

Resolution 414: Support of NATO deterrents and support to Ukraine.

Resolution 419: Honduras.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I request the delegates accept the committee's recommendation to approve these resolutions.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Chairman on these resolutions has just recommended approval. Is there any set asides? Any set asides? Any set asides?

Seeing none, resolutions are approved.

CHAIRMAN STROUD: Thank you, Comrade Commander-in-Chief. I will now list the resolution numbers and titles that the committee recommends for approval as amended.

Resolution 407: Preserve the integrity of TRICARE benefit.

Resolution 415: Support the State of Israel.

Resolution 417: Bring back United States Navy recruiting in the Philippines.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I request the delegates accept the committee's recommendations to approve these resolutions as amended.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: There has been a motion to approve

these resolutions as amended. Any set asides? Any set asides? Any set asides?
Seeing none, they are approved as amended.

CHAIRMAN STROUD: I will now list the resolution numbers and titles that the committee recommends for rejection.

416: Support the awarding of the Vietnam Service Medal for those involved in the SS Mayaguez incident.

418: Honoring the oaths of U.S. service members.

Resolution 420: Recognition of adding 74 sailors on the Vietnam Memorial Wall. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, these resolutions are recommended for rejection.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Coming from these committees, these resolutions have been recommended for rejection. Are there any motions to adopt? Any motions to adopt?

I recognize mic No. 3.

DELEGATE JACK FARRELL: Commander-in-Chief, I'm Jack Farrell out of Post 11575, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, also known as Mayaguez Memorial Post, VFW Post 11575.

I would like you to reconsider or make a motion to approve the awarding of the VSN medal to those members that were involved in the Mayaguez incident.

At the present time, those members who were killed during the incident are memorialized on the Vietnam War Wall in D.C. One of the things that people don't realize is that we –
(Point of order.)

DELEGATE JOHN FARRELL: Point of order.

Sorry.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there a second on resolution No. 416? Is there a second? Is there a second? Seeing none the motion dies?

Is there any other motions to adopt any of the recommendations for rejection? Any other motions? Any other motions? Seeing none, they will die.

CHAIRMAN STROUD: I thank the committee for its hard work on these resolutions. This is the important work of our organization, and I thank my comrades in this committee for their dedication to serving the needs of our veterans.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, this concludes the committee's report on National Security and Foreign Affairs. I will now proceed to the subcommittee on POW/MIA.

Commander-in-Chief, I report that the Convention Subcommittee on POA/MIA convened in the Phoenix Convention Center, 2 p.m. on Sunday, July 23rd, 2023. Roll call was taken to assure -- ensure only assigned committee members were able to vote.

After reading your directions to the committee, and discussion how the process would take place, the committee deliberated each of the two resolutions assigned to the POW/MIA subcommittee. I will now proceed by listing the

resolution numbers and titles that the committee recommends for approval as written.

Resolution 409: Protect POW/MIA full accounting mission funding.

Resolution 410: Call for more unilateral POW/MIA actions by Vietnam.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I request the delegates accept the committee's recommendations to approve these resolutions.

I can also report that there were no resolutions rejected by the committee.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, from the committee, there's been a recommendation to approve these resolutions. Are there any set asides? Any set asides? Any set asides?

Mic No. 2?

DELEGATE MIKE MUSGROVE: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Mike Musgrove, Post 2350, Elko, Nevada. I want to make the motion that Resolution 421 be adopted.

The committee rejected it. They rejected it, and from what I've heard, it was because it was out of order. There was something that our department convention, it was brought up at our department convention in the past. It had also been passed by a Post and the District.

So I would like to make the motion that we adopt 421. And I think I'm out of line right now.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Point of order, Comrade.

I've already asked for discussion on those motions. I saw none. The chair has already called it as it died. So we do not -- we cannot bring that forward.

DELEGATE MICHAEL MUSGROVE: We never got to 421, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Did we or did we not?

CHAIRMAN STROUD: Okay. That resolution does not appear because it was ruled out of order by the committee, and it has not appeared on this because it was pulled out of order by the committee. That's why it was not up for discussion today. We're going to vote on the POW/MIA.

DELEGATE MICHAEL MUSGROVE: Commander-in-Chief, just -- it was moved to 421 from 310, and we were just curious as to why it never came up. It was not recommended for rejection. Now, John says it was ruled out of order. I don't understand how this means that it's totally dead or we can't bring it up at this convention, or do we have another avenue to go?

Thank you, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrade, since this was ruled out of order, we're not penalizing you for not bringing this up, but what we're going to tell you is if you want to bring 421 back, you're going to have to resubmit 421. We're not going to bring it up, because it was ruled out of order.

Decision. We're still on the motion 409 and 410 to approve. Is there any set asides? Any set asides? Any set asides? Seeing none, Motion 409, 410 are approved.

CHAIRMAN STROUD: I thank the committee for its hard work on these resolutions. This is the important work of our organization, and I thank my

comrades and this committee for their dedication to serving the needs of our veterans. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, this concludes the subcommittee report on POW/MIA resolutions.

VETERAN SERVICE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE REPORT
BY CHAIRMAN AND PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KEITH HARMAN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Once again, I would like the committee to stand by until close of business on Thursday when the committees are dismissed in case we have any questions. I will now call upon the Committee on Veteran Service Resolutions. Past Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman.

CHAIRMAN HARMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief Borland, I report to you that our convention Committee on Veteran Service Resolutions convened at 2 p.m. on Sunday, July 23rd, 2023. Roll call was taken. Preliminary matters were discussed.

The committee was -- was divided into three subcommittees to carefully deliberate each of the 42 resolutions that were -- that they were assigned. The subcommittees were established as follows: Subcommittee 1 on Health, chaired by Ken Deist from Arizona. Vice Chairman, Benjamin Dales from Iowa. Staff advisors were James Moss, Assistant Director of Veteran Service and Health Policy for the NVS. And Megan Thomas, Associate Director of National Legislative Service.

Subcommittee 2 on benefits chaired by Eric Drake from Ohio. Vice Chairman Shawn Ransford from Indiana. Staff advisors were Chris Macinkowicz, Assistant Director of Training and Quality Assurance of NVS, and Kristina Keenan, Deputy Director National Legislative Service.

Subcommittee 3: Economic Opportunities and Others chaired by John Grew from Minnesota and Vice Chairman Flora Clay from Virginia. Staff advisors were Brad Hazel, Assistant Director of Compensation and Pension NVS, and Patrick Murray, Director of National Legislative Service.

Before proceeding to the report, I wish to express my gratitude for Mike Figlioli, Director of National Veteran Service, and Pat Murray, Director of National Legislative Service for the valued technical guidance which they and their staff provided to the committee.

I also want to thank Brad Hazel, NVS staff, for whose services our committee's secretary coordinated the results of our deliberations.

Commander, with your permission, I will begin the committee's report by presenting those resolutions the committee recommended to be approved as written, then proceed to the report of resolutions that were recommended approved as amended. And those resolutions that were recommended for rejection.

If for any reason, you or your delegates of this convention would like to set aside for further discussion, please so indicate at the microphone.

I will now proceed by reading the resolution numbers and titles that the

committee recommended for approval as written.

Resolution 601: Adequate Department of Veterans Affairs Budget.

602: V.A. pharmaceutical copayments.

603: V.A. Medicare and TRICARE reimbursements.

604: Nursing home eligibility.

605: Traumatic brain injury healthcare.

606: PTSD and mental healthcare.

608: Expand V.A. caregiver benefits.

609: Sustainable community care options for veterans.

610: Foreign medical care program.

611: Electronic health records management.

612: Extend service connection presumption to blast survivors.

613: Tinnitus and hearing loss presumptive.

615: Toxic exposure.

617: V.A. life insurance.

618: Domiciliary programs and temporary total ratings.

620: AMA remands.

621: VSO involvement with VASRD.

622: Review of V.A. decisions.

623: Improved education and benefits for survivors.

624: Veterans' housing and food security programs.

625: Ensure veterans success in education.

626: Vocational readiness and employment training program.

627: Veterans' support employment training programs.

628: Veterans' entrepreneurship.

629: Underserved veterans.

636: Expand veterans' treatment ports. 637: Continue fighting to end homeless -- veterans' homelessness.

638: Supporting women veterans.

639: Military sexual trauma.

640: Protect the home of surviving spouses.

And 642: Preapplication for federal student aid.

Comrade Commander, I move for the committee's recommendation to approve those resolutions.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Recommendations out of the committee to approve the following resolutions. Is there any set asides?

I recognize mic number 3.

DELEGATE TODD SCHROEDER: Comrade Commander, Todd Schroeder, Post 3115, Department of Kansas. Respectfully request to set aside Resolution 629 and 638.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other set asides? Any other set asides? Seeing none, all other resolutions are approved.

We will now go to the set asides. Any discussion?

One at a time, Comrade.

DELEGATE TODD SCHROEDER: Comrade Commander, specifically, request that those two be set aside because they are addressing essentially the same thing.

638 is in support of women veterans, where 629 is addressing underserved veterans.

In the whereas under 629, they specifically delineate women, LGBTQ plus, race, ethnicity. So we've got redundancy in these two resolutions.

I also want to point out the fact that we just spent deliberation over 201 where we didn't want to create dissension or fractions amongst MOSs in the military or within our ranks in this organization.

Why are we being so specific about who is considered an underserved veteran? Every single one of us has served in the military. Every single one of us is willing to die for one another. We've proved that. And we continue to prove that by being VFW members.

I believe that both of these are necessary, but they're not necessary as two separate resolutions.

And, furthermore, I don't think it's necessary for us to continue to highlight specific categories of social justice issues. We're veterans. We take care of veterans. Regardless of whether you served as a man and you're living in your civilian life as a woman. It doesn't matter. You served this country, and we're going to take care of you.

I don't know how to move with this, but I think if for any reason we continue to operate this, we're opening ourselves up for contradictions and conflict. And I wanted to bring that up because we're an organization that moves in straight lines, and this provides an opportunity for zigzag, and we need to stop. We need to stop. We need to do a better job of avoiding these situations.

I rest.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE KELLY SILVA: Commander-in-Chief, Kelly Silva, Post 1677, Department of Arizona.

I oppose what my comrade stated. As a female veteran, I don't get the care. We are one of the least amount of veterans that actually apply for our veterans benefits out there.

Women do not tend to go to a male doctor because they don't feel comfortable. To push the V.A. to be able to allow women to choose their doctor and what sex their doctor is will allow women to be able to apply for their benefits and get the care that they need.

So I do oppose what my comrade stated. 17

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 3.

NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER WISEMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Ken Wiseman, National Council Member from the Department of Virginia.

I spent three and a half years as an accredited service officer and everything that my comrade just said about women applying for benefits is 1,000 percent true. Especially with issues related to sexual assault.

And I can tell you, myself, as a gay veteran, I get care at V.A. And it is good

care. But not a lot of LGBTQ veterans know what the options are, and not a lot of them know that they can get help filing the paperwork.

This isn't about some miracle new solution. This is about better outreach and better engagement.

And I'll tell you now, this would be the same story and we would need to pass a resolution if it had to do with, you know, heart attack medication or anything else. Sometimes people just need to know that the options are there, and that's what this resolution does.

So I hope my comrades will vote yes. And I yield back.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE WELMA JAMES JACKSON, JR.: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Welma James Jackson, Jr., Post 3766, Department of Louisiana.

Both of those resolutions are completely different. And very shortly, reflecting on my experience as a Department Service Officer, when I was in the field – when I was in the field, it was six months before I saw my first female veteran. And within two minutes, I knew I was out of my depth because she wasn't comfortable.

When I saw my other veterans that were identified by the other categories on that list, I knew I was out of my depth because they weren't comfortable. And so there is a need for everything that we're resolving here.

When we're the ones that aren't different, of course everything is all right and we don't need any change. But the world is different for other people. And if it wasn't, they wouldn't ask for things to be different.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 1.

DELEGATE ERNEST LAWRENCE: Comrade Commander, Ernest Lawrence, Post 5408, Georgia Department.

Sir, we're all green. Some are blue. Okay. But if we start holding out for all of these little things, every one of us has a different story. Every one of us has a different story.

Some of us may be scared to go in front of somebody. Some of us may be intimidated to go in front of somebody else. We can't adjust the VFW to fit for every little thing because we fit for every one. We don't just fit for one particular thing.

And if we keep separating this the way we're doing, you're going to have a whole book that's 10,000 pages wide of who we're supporting. We support one group, and that's veterans. That's me.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I recognize mic No. 3.

DELEGATE CHRISTINE TRON: Comrade Commander, Christine Tron,

Department of Massachusetts, Post 545.

I'm in favor of -- of amendment -- of 638 supporting women veterans. Right now, in Room 230, How to Engage Women Veterans, we need to show we support women veterans by supporting this amendment.

Thank you, Comrade Commander.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I'm going to take one more. Mic No.

1.

DELEGATE NICOLE HORSEMAN: Commander-in-Chief, Nicole Horseman, Department of Kentucky, Post 680.

I'm going to say something that was actually discussed earlier this afternoon, in relation to some of my comrades, what they have said. Yes, we are all green. We are all veterans.

Our future Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief stated yesterday right here at this convention, she is a veteran first. However, I have very specific medical needs that my male counterparts do not have. I need things. When I had my babies, I needed care that none of my male comrades are going to need.

We can also break that down to wars. Vietnam Veterans need medical care for very specific exposures that me, as an Iraq Veteran, does not need.

So we have to support pushing the V.A. for some of these very specific actions because not everyone's care and treatment is identical.

Thank you, Comrade.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All right. We're going to take these one at a time.

Resolution 629 was set aside, unserved veterans. It was recommended by the committee for approval.

All in favor for approval of 629 say aye.

(Chorus of ayes.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All opposed nay.

That resolution passed.

Now we're going to go to the set aside 638, supporting women veterans. It was recommended by the committee for approval.

All in favor, say aye.

(Chorus of ayes.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All opposed no. Ayes have it.

CHAIRMAN HARMAN: I will now read the resolution numbers and titles that the committee recommends approval as amended.

Resolution 607: V.A. healthcare for women veterans.

614: V.A. claims workload. 616: Digital claims process. 619: Protecting V.A. accreditation.

632: Micellar cancer study.

Comrade Commander, I move for the committee's recommendation to approve these resolutions as amended.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: From the committee, a recommendation for approval as amended. Any set asides? Any set asides? Any set asides?

Seeing none, those resolutions are approved.

CHAIRMAN HARMAN: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief.

I will now read the resolution numbers and titles of the committee's recommendations to reject.

Resolution 630: Fort McLellan. This resolution is recommended to be rejected in favor of Commander-in-Chief Resolution 615, which encompasses all toxic exposure.

631: Improving V.A. medical healthcare in favor of Resolution 606.

Resolution 634: Tinnitus and hearing loss presumptive service connection. Recommend rejection in favor of Resolution 613.

635: Increase veterans' burial benefits.

And resolution 641: Green Star Service Flag.

Comrade Commander, I recommend that we do not adopt these resolutions based on the committee's recommendation.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: From the committee, these resolutions were recommended for rejection. Are there any motions for adoption? Any motions for adoption? Any motions for adoption? Seeing none, they will die.

CHAIRMAN HARMAN: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. This concludes my presentation.

Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Once again, I would ask the chairman to stand by until close of business Thursday in case there is any questions for the rest of this convention.

I want to make a quick announcement before we go to closing ceremonies, or recess that is, until tomorrow. And that is all my commanders that recruited over 100 members this year, I promised them and their guests or spouse a steak dinner. I have made reservations at Wren & Wolf, W-r-e-n & Wolf, restaurant, which is just down the road from the Hyatt. That reservation is for 6:45 p.m.

If you're not in the room, but you do have -- we do have some commanders in this room, please pass that -- pass that on to the commanders who have recruited 100 plus, because I am going to live up to that personal bet that I gave them.

So they will get steak dinners tonight. Ken Wiseman, did you have something to say before I close?

NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER WISEMAN: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, since you're asking, just a -- it's a point of order. 633, we don't know that that one was called out for adoption or rejection.

Can I get a -- a status of that, sir?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I call upon the chairman to answer that question, please, on Resolution 633. It was approved as written.

NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER WISEMAN: Thank you, sir.
I yield back.

CLOSING CEREMONIES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now please perform the closing ceremonies for today's sessions.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes, sir. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, sir.
Comrade Chaplain Deborah Halter, would you lead us in our closing prayer.
(Salute to colors.)

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: As we close through the day, guide us, God, to think about the things we've learned today and explore more on the things we need to do tomorrow. Help us to process all the information that we have been presented with and use it effectively to assist our fellow veterans.

May our evening be full of rekindling old friendships and making new friends and great contacts. Help us to prepare for the rest of this week as the slate is full of important items to work on that need our focus as the finer details will make the VFW more successful for the care of our comrades.

May the delegates still arriving arrive safe. May we all return tomorrow morning ready to work together for the greater good of our comrades. Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.
Cover.

Comrades, honoring the flag of our nation, please join me in a final salute to the colors.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, this session has been properly adjourned.
(Salute to the colors.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms.
We are now adjourned until 8 a.m. tomorrow morning.
(The proceedings adjourned at 3:40 p.m.)

BUSINESS SESSION
TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2023

(The Business Session of the 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the Phoenix Convention Center, Phoenix, Arizona, was called to order on Tuesday, July 25, 2023, at 8:00 a.m., with Commander-in-Chief Timothy Borland presiding.)

CALL TO ORDER
SALUTE TO COLORS
INVOCATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DEBORAH HALTER
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now reconvene the 124th VFW National Convention.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please conduct the opening ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes, sir, Comrade, Commander-in-Chief, sir.

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, comrades face the flag of our nation, please, showing me the opening salute to our colors.
(Salute to Colors.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade National Chaplain Deborah Halter, will you please lead us in our opening prayer.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Good morning, comrades. Please join me in prayer as far as your faith and your traditions allow.

Almighty God, we recognize we are blessed to be able to meet with those that we worked with this past year. Bless us as we come together to continue our business of serving veterans. We ask that you continue to give us guidance today in all matters that we are concerned with.

Inspire in us the desire to listen and to learn from each person that brings forward ideas and the information as it is brought forward. We honor those who earned awards this morning, and we are grateful for their hard work. They are a shining light to the work we do in the VFW.

Please give them and those that worked so hard your blessings. Although our schedule is full, we take time, Lord, to acknowledge our freedom to meet and to work. May we use that blessing of freedom to learn from each speaker and award winner with open minds and hearts. We ask this for the greater good of all that we serve. Amen.

(Pledge of allegiance was recited.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: That completes opening ceremonies of this 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

CONVENTION CREDENTIALS REPORT: BETTY GRIPP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms.
Please be seated. I would now like to call upon Betty Gripp to report on our credentials.
(Chanting.)

BETTY GRIPP: Thank you, Arizona.
Good morning, Commander-in-Chief, Council Members and Delegates.
Yesterday's report of 124th -- 124th National Convention at the close of business 4 p.m. yesterday, July 24th,
2023. Total delegates: 8,167. Department commanders: 43. Total past Commander-in-Chief: 10. Total national officers: 48. Grand total: 8,268, with a total checked in as of yesterday: 1,701 members.
That's my report, sir.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: DWIGHT HORA,
SUPREME COMMANDER, MILITARY ORDER OF THE COOTIE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: As always, she does a good job.
Thank you, Betty.
A trip to almost any V.A. hospital will reveal the important work the military order of the Cooties. Each year the Cooties spend thousands of hours bringing comfort and laughs to our hospital veterans. Their commitment to keep them smiling in beds of white is a grand tribute to the service and sacrifice to all veterans.
Our next guest was elected supreme commander of the Military Order of the Cootie last July.
Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the supreme commander of the Military Order of the Cootie of the United States of America, Dwight Hora, from the great state of South Carolina.
(Applause.)

DWIGHT HORA: Commander-in-Chief and officers, thank you for inviting me to speak at the national convention.
Comrades, thank you for being here today.
First thing I would like to ask, all Cooties, please rise. Thank you for the support of the veterans in hospitals.
(Applause.)

DWIGHT HORA: Commander-in-Chief and officers of the National Veterans of Foreign Wars national organization, the Adjutant General and the Quartermaster General should receive our financial report here in a few weeks.
We have had a tremendous year with the Military Order of the Cooties.

We ended the year with 13,220 members of the military order of the Cooties and the Military Order of the Cootie Auxiliary. These 13,000-plus members did over \$9.53 million worth of hospital report.
(Applause.)

DWIGHT HORA: That is a tremendous amount of work. And most of this work is done individually. They don't necessarily do it in groups when they go out to hospitals and visit sick and ailing veterans. They do this most of the time individually. But I would like to share a quick story with all of you.

As I've been on my travels this year, I visited a place or a state of -- what was it? Where is -- shoot. I'm sorry. I'm forgetting his name right now. But State of Kentucky, where are you at?
(Applause.)

DWIGHT HORA: When I visited Kentucky, they took me out to a nursing home. And a week before that, they had a birthday party for a 100-year-old Korean War veteran. When I went to this nursing home, they wanted to introduce me.

And this is the importance of the Military Order of the Cootie. I saw this gentleman. He was in a wheelchair. He could barely speak. But when I looked in his eyes, I saw a man who was a bigger and greater warrior than I could ever imagine being. I saw the life that he lived in his eyes.

And when I was leaving that nursing home about an hour later, it tore my heart up that I couldn't take my brother with me. And that happens to me individually a lot, and I know it happens to a lot of Cooties. And this is where our brotherhood in the Cooties really comes into play.

Because when we enjoy our camaraderie, it reenergizes us to go out and do it again. And then we get beat up when we see what's in the eyes of these veterans who are in the hospital, who are in the nursing homes, who are shut-ins. And when we hurt and we ache, we get together with our fellow Cooties and we reenergize ourselves.

And that's something that's very important to me, something that's very important to the Cooties. And I hope y'all understand, that's also why sometimes you see Cooties having a little bit too much fun. Somebody got that one. But I wanted to say, once again, Commander-in-Chief, thank you for allowing me to speak today, to give the report. And I wish you all a great and wonderful rest of your convention.

And for those Cooties, I look forward to seeing you at the supreme convention in two days. Thank y'all very much.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL AND CITATION TO
DEBRA ANDERSON, PAST QUARTERMASTER GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I'm pleased to introduce our next guest who has served both the VFW and our great nation for more than two decades. Debra Anderson was elected Quartermaster General for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States on July 27, 2016, at the 117th VFW National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, making her first -- making her the first female veteran to hold the position.

A bronze star recipient, her 13 years in the United States Army --
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: -- included military assignments across the world, including Nuremberg; Furth Germany, Fort Harrison, Indiana; Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and Fort McPherson, Georgia. Debra earned her VFW eligibility during her deployment as part of the division headquarters with the first infantry division Desert Storm in December of 1990.

She joined VFW Post 7356 in Parkville, Missouri, in 2006, where she maintains her gold legacy life membership. She is an All-American post commander, and has held multiple positions at the post, district, and national levels.

Prior to being elected Quartermaster General, Debra held appointed positions as assistant Quartermaster General and director of human resources and investment coordinator.

During her time at the VFW National Headquarters, she continuously displayed the highest level of professionalism and remained committed to selflessly serving her brothers and sisters in arms. She often spoke on behalf of the VFW and its members, showcasing the VFW's great strides toward diversity and inclusion.

Throughout her years of leadership, she faced organizational issues with ingenuity and thoughtfulness while always ensuring the VFW remained true to its mission.

And when COVID pandemic hit, despite the many unique challenges we faced, her resilience and positivity helped contribute to the success and work we accomplished.

Debra is a true leader, and her genuine kindness and strong work ethic have set the bar high for future leadership. I'm proud to present her with this distinguished service medal and citation.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished service medal and citation awarded to Debra Anderson in lasting appreciation and esteemed recognition of her honorable 12 years in faithful and staunch service to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Initially, as director of human resources and then culminating her illustrious career serving as the VFW's first female Quartermaster General.

Her genuine compassion and commitment to the visions and goals of the VFW and the professionalism with which she performed her duties, along with her

continued forward-thinking approach and dynamic leadership style has justly earned her the respect of her peers and that of the veterans, service members, and military families she served throughout her tenure.

Her loyalty and devotion have left a lasting mark and justly earned her the deepest admiration of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have, hereunto, set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 25th day of July 2023.

Signed, Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, Dan West, Adjutant General.
(Applause.)

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL ANDERSON: Good morning. Thank you so much for this recognition. I truly appreciate it. I worked almost 14 -- over 14 years at our national headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri, the last five and a half as your Quartermaster General. And it was truly the pinnacle of my career.

It is where I want it to be and where I achieved the most. It was very rewarding. It was also very challenging at times. But it is truly a unique experience, and I appreciate both the recognition and the opportunity to have served the VFW in that position.

When I entered the office, my goals were pretty simple. I wanted to leave the organization in a better place than when I found it. I wanted to do what I could do to move it forward in a positive manner, not just to maintain the status quo, but to go somewhere with it.

Specifically, I wanted to position the VFW for the future. I wanted to modernize it. I wanted to prepare for what comes next. If you were in a department that I went to visit, I was always talking about -- about the -- how it was founded, to be perpetual, how we wanted to always be preparing for the next generation and to be doing the things we needed to do to bring them up through the ranks so that we could continue to be a perpetual organization.

Within the headquarters, we did a number of things to support that modernization. We reinvented the logo to be cleaner and more modern. We focused on new merchandise, customer service. We offered websites to post and departments. And we focused on hiring the best people -- veterans when we could -- and then treating them right.

We also modernized our building with new work spaces and new mechanical systems. Always trying to improve the situation both for our members and our employees. And the good news is, I've seen that change and I see some of it right here at national convention. And it wasn't just me. It was all of our leadership and all of our staff really working to do what we could do to modernize the VFW, to bring in younger members, to bring in women, to -- to diversify.

And we see that in the results of the members now that are participating actively in the VFW. And I thank you for that.

In addition to modernization, I wanted to continue the high standards set by my predecessors. We really work to be ethical and fair and honest and

transparent in all of our financial dealings, in our budgeting, in our investments, to make sure that we were doing the right thing, that we were managing your money in the best way possible to -- to serve the organization.

I really worked on clarity and transparency, particularly with the national council so they would know what it was we were doing, what reports they were looking at, and could understand and ask questions.

And then we also worked to reduce the us/them mentality, to recognize that we're all veterans and we're all members of the VFW whether it's Post, District, Department, or National. Whether it's Washington, D.C., or Kansas City, we are all members of the VFW working for the betterment of veterans and the organization, and we did what we could to work together as a team, as one VFW, and not -- and not bicker with each other about minor things. So one VFW.

And as Commander Borland said, we survived COVID. We learned from it. We became more flexible because of it. But we just kept pushing through. We just kept the organization moving forward so that we could serve our veterans.

But I didn't do this alone. I've been surrounded by hardworking, amazing people through this entire journey. I want to first thank the past quartermaster generals that I worked with. Larry Maher has been an amazing mentor and friend as well as Bob Green and Joe Ridgley before his passing.

They were all amazing quartermaster generals, and I stood on their shoulders.

I appreciate all the hard working and creative employees at the VFW national headquarters. You've got some really wonderful people working for you there, both in Kansas City and Washington, D.C. In particular, in my job, Jim Lierz stands out as being the expert, the wise council, and a good friend. And, of course, Karol Shadle, my executive assistant, kept me organized and working with our team of Dena Keehne and Amy Ahuja, we kept things running in the quartermaster general office.

There are so many people that contributed to our success, but I don't want to keep you here all morning. But just know that -- that there's a great staff there.

I would like to also thank the AGs that I worked with, particularly Kevin Jones and Dan West, who have been really good partners in the headquarters. And, of course, the VFW and Auxiliary members that I met over the years who have impressed me so much with your dedication and your hard work and your sense of humor and your ability to get things done. I truly appreciate all of you for the work that you do.

And I wouldn't be done without talking about my family, in particular, my husband, Steve, who is not here this week, but who has always been a supporter in the background and making sure that I -- that I feel supported. And I love him and all of my family.

I had the good fortune of hiring Marc Garduno as an assistant quartermaster general, and he now continues as your quartermaster general, and I couldn't be more pleased with the job that Marc is doing.

And I want to mention that I'm also a big fan of Carol Whitmore's, and I'm so pleased to be on her staff when she takes command in 2025 as her budget chairman. So you'll continue to see me at council meetings and at conventions in that volunteer role.

I want to congratulate Tim Borland on his very successful year, and also Duane Sarmiento, Al Lipphardt, Carol Whitmore, and Tim Peters now on their success so far with the organization and their upcoming elections. I know they will all do a wonderful job.

In closing, the VFW still has work to do. We are always moving forward, and I encourage you to continue looking to the future. Look to the future, figure out what the organization needs to look like, and then take that initiative to make things happen.

I thank you again for this high honor, for this recognition. I truly appreciate it. Thank you.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: STEVE WOODWARD,
2022/2023 NATIONAL RECRUITER OF THE YEAR

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Before we name the 2023 national recruiter of the year, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge some very special individuals who have worked hard, day in and day out, to accomplish the vital recruiting mission of our organization.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize this year's elite recruiters. Each has recruited more than 250 reinstated or new veterans to our ranks.

Gentlemen, ladies, guests, please stand as your name is called to be recognized. Mr. Larry M. Gerit, from VFW Post 2704 in Ralston, Nebraska.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Joseph Young, from VFW Post 7108 in Helotes, Texas.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And only because it's in the script, myself, from Arizona.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Great job to all the comrades. Please give them a big round of applause. (Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Now, if you want to take -- we're going to take a moment to talk about a gauntlet I threw down last July when I challenged every single VFW member to recruit at least one new member to the organization. And running with it, we have to talk about our 2023 VFW national

recruiter of the year.

The VFW Department of Washington's own Steve Woodward. A life member of VFW Post 2224 in Puyallup, Washington.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Steven's success recruiting a remarkable 501 members into the VFW. His hard work and dedication should remind us all that the future leaders of our organization are out there. We just have to reach out and find them.

Please join me in giving a huge round of applause for the 2023 national recruiter of the year, Mr. Steven L. Woodward.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: National recruiter of the year award, 2022/2023, presented to Steven L. Woodward, Department of Washington. In special recognition and sincere appreciation of your exceptional efforts in recruiting the most new or reinstated members for this membership year out of all recruiters.

Your outstanding performance has earned you the designation as the national recruiter of the year. You are commended for your professional achievements and recognized for your dedication to the mission and goals of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 25th day of July 2023. Signed by Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We will now have Steve come up and say a few words.

MR. WOODWARD: Thank you, Chief. I appreciate that.

First of all, I want to thank the State of Washington; my team; Frank Purcell, which was my wingman; Paul Herrera, commander; and the Senior Vice Craig. Without them, this wouldn't have been possible.

We spent many, many hours and a lot of miles, every farmer's market, every state fair, it was amazing. If I – but without them, this wouldn't have been possible. Thank you all very, very much.

The only thing I can say with this, with recruiting, you just have to ask the question and get the sale. That's all we did. Thank you very much.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TIMOTHY BORLAND,
20 YEARS AS A CENTURY RECRUITER AWARD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: One thing that our comrade didn't say is he's also a certified national recruiter and one of the best. And because of that, I have decided, so has Duane Sarmiento as our incoming Commander-in-Chief, that he would represent the national organization at Sturgis next week, because we do

VFW recruiting there.

So, Steve, looking forward to seeing you.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, members are the lifeblood and heart of our organization. From the advocacy work we do to the vital programs and assistance we provide our nation's service members, veterans, and their families. You, our members, are on the front lines of every initiative, every campaign, every mission, and task that is set before you.

The work we do happens because of you. When I think about the positive changes we've made, it's been because of the strength and resolve of our membership. Recruiting new members to our organization is not always easy. In fact, it can be hard, tedious, time-consuming, and a very thankless job. But we wouldn't be where we are today without the efforts our recruiters put forth day in and day out.

The Century Award is earned by any member who recruits more than 100 members to the VFW within that membership year. And so it should come as no surprise that the man who has been leading our charge to make sure every veteran counts is no stranger to receiving this distinguished accolade.

For more than two decades, VFW National Commander-in-Chief Tim Borland has worked tirelessly and relentlessly to spread the good word of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and strengthen our ranks. In his 24 years as a member of the VFW, Commander Borland has single-handedly recruited more than 2,690 new and reinstated members to our organization. And that does not include the 700 for this year.

Tim isn't a leader that just talks the talk, but surges ahead to the front and sets an example of what hard work, dedication, and tenacity can achieve when you truly walk the walk.

It is now my great honor and privilege to ask our Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento, to present the Gold Legacy Life Member and our 2023 VFW National Commander-in-Chief Borland with a very special plaque in honor of achieving his 20th consecutive Century Award.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Yes, the plaque was signed by Tim Borland and Dan West.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, I'm the Commander-in-Chief, so who does sign those plaques, right? Yes, it's going to probably be a talk with my grandkids years and years down the road. Look, Grandpa signed his own plaque. I'm honored.

Thank you for that award.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce secretary -- Great. Okay. Adjust. Well, that's what we get for flying through these presentations. We don't have our next awardee, so we're going to go to the one that is here.

For 50 years, the United States of Defense has dedicated time, personnel, and resources to the sole mission of accounting for those Americans listed as prisoners of war or missing in action.

What began with a central identification laboratory in Thailand established to coordinate the recovery of American POWs and MIAs in Southeast Asia, morphed into the joint task force with detachments, laboratories, liaison offices, and other supporting units given the responsibility of accounting for those missing from past wars and conflicts.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, the Adjutant General messed up and put the papers out of order.

I'm sorry, Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Well, that really made it look good, didn't it?

Comrades, as it was stated earlier, when we first started this convention, it's been a -- a while since we've had a full room. I know we did last year. We're doing the best we can. We just got to overcome and adjust. Overcome and adjust. We will get out of here early, there's no doubt because we are flying through this. So I think that's good news, right?
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS: DAVID LOWE, 2023 JOHN A. BIEDRZYCKI
SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE YEAR AWARD

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Every time I say hoo-ah, Duane Sarmiento goes, What in the world is that?

Comrades, ladies and gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that we get to honor an exceptional individual whose unwavering dedication and outstanding contributions have earned him the prestigious title of the 2023 John A. Biedrzycki Accredited Service Representative of the Year.

Helping veterans attain the care and benefits they earned is what the VFW does best, and it's what we've been doing for more than 104 years.

So to receive this award, one must truly be exceptional, and that is in the case of this year's recipient, David Lowe. VFW Department of Oregon, state service officer from Portland, Oregon.

David attended basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky, in July of 1979, and graduated from Kemper Military School & College in May 1997. He was commissioned through ROTC and the field artillery officer in the U.S. Army Reserves in 1979.

During his career, he served in the Army Reserves, the Florida Army National Guard, and on active duty he earned his VFW eligibility during mobilization and deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2005 to 2007.

In 2020, David was asked by VFW Department of Oregon commander to step up as department service officer and has filled the role ever since.

As state service officer, David manages the Oregon service office, co-located with the V.A. Portland regional service offices. With only two accredited service officers and an accredited volunteer, his office handles approximately 4,000 veterans per year with anywhere from 500 to 800 open claims at any one time.

In addition, his office provides training and guidance to the 70 Post and 11 District service officers located throughout the state.

David is still serving as Post Commander of Gresham United Post 180 and is Past Commander for Oregon District 15. He is also a member of the Disabled American Veterans Chapter 1 in Portland.

Today, as we gather to celebrate the remarkable accomplishments of David Lowe, let us recognize his unwavering commitment, selfless service, and tireless efforts to improve the lives of our veterans.

He has truly embodied the core values of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and we are honored to present him with this well-deserved recognition for his outstanding contributions and unwavering dedication to our nation's heroes.

Please join me in welcoming and congratulating from the great state of Oregon, the 2023 John A. Biedrzycki Accredited Service Representative of the Year, David Lowe.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: John A. Biedrzycki Accredited Service Representative of the Year, 2022/2023, presented to David Lowe, Department Service Officer, VFW Department of Oregon. In special recognition of his exemplary achievements and support of the veterans' service mission and programs of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Thus, earning the distinction of the VFW John A. Biedrzycki Accredited Service Representative of the Year. His remarkable and steadfast service to our nation's veterans on behalf of the VFW Department of Oregon reflects great credit upon himself, his department, and our entire organization. His actions make real the promise that no one does more for veterans.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 25th day of July 2023. Approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed Timothy Borland Commander-in-Chief, Dan West, Adjutant General.

(Applause.)

MR. LOWE: Good morning.
(Good morning.)

MR. LOWE: First thing I would like to do is I would like every accredited service officers to stand up, please. (Applause.)

MR. LOWE: Look around you. These are the people that fight the good fight.

Fellow comrades, VFW leaders, honored guests, and especially my fellow accredited veteran service officers.

When a service officer receives this award, it's about their accomplishments. When the state service officer receives this award, it's about the accomplishments of – their accomplishments and of the office that they lead.

So I have to thank all of those service officers that have been under my guidance for the last few years.

I would also like to thank my lovely wife, Roseanne, for nearly 20 years, who has stood behind me on the good days and the bad.

I would like to thank the leadership and line officers of the VFW Department of Oregon. I couldn't ask for a better service office committee.

A special thank you to Andrea Summerlin and the rest of the veteran service office committee for submitting my name for this prestigious award.

I would also like to thank the staff at NVS, National Veterans Services.

I would like to thank Todd Gruchalla who has been a good friend of mine from when he was at the -- my counterpart in Washington and moved on to his national role. And my NVS mentors. Chris Macinkowicz, Brad Hazel, Greg Orto, Jeff Wisnewski, and especially Mike Figlioli and Ryan Gallucci.

Below the title or the name Veterans of Foreign Wars, we have a very important claim. No one does more for veterans. Six very simple words we brand on just about everything.

What does that really mean? And what does it mean to service officers? It's not just punching the blocks, finishing the programs, earning the red hat, the triple crown, or the next award. Doing more for veterans has special meaning for me.

Many, many years ago, I jokingly once told my grandfather that there were only two things I had to do in life: Pay taxes and die.

But, in all seriousness, he told me I had three things I had to do. Put a smile on one -- just one person's face, help someone, and make a difference, not just once, but each and every day. Serving as an Accredited Veterans' Service Officer provides me the opportunity to fulfill the mission my grandfather gave me.

The VFW only has a few hundred accredited veterans' service officers across the whole world. And I, like all of the veterans' service officers here, don't just do more for veterans; we change lives. We help veterans not only help themselves but encourage them to help each other.

On any given day, we help veterans without adequate healthcare get the healthcare they desperately need and are entitled to. We help families stay in their homes. We link up veterans with resources to help them with educational needs, including the unemployed and underemployed to train better -- train for better jobs through the veteran readiness, the VR&E.

We find resources for our wounded combat veterans who are often overlooked by the rest of society. We take care of all veterans whether they are VFW members or not. And we do this at no charge to the veteran. We do this without an expectation of any kind of remunerations, any kind of recognition.

We do this because it's a job that has to be done and we answer that challenge. We take care of survivors. We help spouses -- surviving spouses remain in their homes. We do all of this and more. This is not a year's worth of work. This is not a month's worth of work. This is each and every day.

We do this because we care. Because like -- like me, my fellow accredited veteran service officers want to make a difference. We want to do more for veterans. We don't just say those six simple words, we do more for veterans.

We live them.

In addition to living the six words, no one does more for veterans, I participate in the still serving campaign. Who all -- also participates in the still serving campaign?

(Applause.)

MR. LOWE: Please, give them a hand.

(Applause.)

MR. LOWE: Those of us who are in the still serving campaign are going above and beyond the mission of the VFW. We are going to each individual veteran and helping them, no matter what their -- what their issues might be. We go to them, whether they're a member or not, whether they're even eligible or not, because our job is to help the veteran.

This important program encourages all of us to continue our mission. Just because we have left the military, it does not mean the service left us.

We joined the VFW for a purpose. And I am still serving the veterans of Oregon to live out that purpose and mission. I challenge you to find a way to continue your mission, the legacy that is the VFW. If you have never visited your veteran service office, ask how you can volunteer. Visit the office, see what we do. Let us help others.

I would like to close by remembering that serving our veterans as a veteran service office is most -- one of the most important things we do in the VFW. No one does more for veterans. And we live that every day.

Please thank your accredited veteran service officers for still serving to fulfill this very important mission to do more for veterans. It is my honor and privilege to continue to work for all of you. Thank you.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, in case you haven't noticed, we're 40 minutes ahead of schedule and we can't launch the LCUs.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: We can't launch all the LCUs until the title of orders change. All right. So bear with us a little bit.

At this time, I would like to bring for a special presentation the past state commander of the Department of Illinois, Bobby Edwards, for a presentation to the Commander-in-Chief.

PAST COMMANDER EDWARDS: Comrades, when Commander-in-Chief

was a Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, he came to Illinois to our 34th Vietnam vigil the first weekend of every May. He was there to recognize one of the founding architects as well as committee members who put this memorial together, Michael Ferguson, who was part of Arizona and the western conference.

So this is in recognition -- in memory of Michael Ferguson to National Commander-in-Chief, Tim Borland. May God bless him and Michael Ferguson.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Well, I'll say a few more words about that.

When I was Junior Vice, I did go to Springfield, Illinois, to do this dedication. And, unfortunately, it was just after we lost Michael Ferguson. He was behind me as the state commander in 2012 for the Department of Arizona, and he was also a national council member for our organization.

If you didn't know Michael Ferguson, he was a double amputee from Vietnam War. He lived at -- I think approximately 52 or 53 years after Vietnam. His spirit was high. He always smiled. He always mentored.

I am telling you, Michael is going to be well missed because he was just a phenomenal comrade. And for any of you that met him, I guarantee you, he taught you something because he really loved the VFW.

So as -- in his memory, I will put that up on my wall proudly and always remember the friendship that I had with him, because when I went to that memorial, I didn't need no speech. I talked all about Mike and the things that he has done. And his wife, Gina Ferguson, was there in tears and happiness because of the words that were said. So we're going to always remember Mike.

Before I introduce this next presentation, I do want to thank the Department of Arizona for hosting this 124th VFW National Convention. (Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: FERN SUMPTER WINBUSH,
DEPUTY DIRECTOR POW/MIA ACCOUNTING AGENCY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And just take this as a note. If you do have a complaint, don't come to me. Go to the department commander. He'll answer all those questions.

Arizona, seriously, thank you for all the support through the years. You will always be my department. I will never, ever leave. So I don't know if that's good or bad, but I'll be around.

Okay. For 50 years, the United States Department of Defense has dedicated time, personnel, and resources to the sole mission of accounting for those Americans listed as prisoners of war and missing in action.

What began as a central identification laboratory in Thailand established to coordinate the recovery of American POWs and MIAs in Southeast Asia morphed into a joint task force with detachments, laboratories, liaison offices, and subordinate units given the responsibility of accounting for those missing from past wars and conflicts.

Today the defense POW/MIA account agency, established in 2015, carries on the mission around the world, devoted to the insurmountable task of accounting for over 81,000 missing Americans.

Through a partnership that has lasted for decades, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is honored to work alongside the more than 700 defense department uniformed and civilian personnel that make up this great agency in helping to fulfill our nation's promise to bring all our American missing service members home.

We are pleased to have one of DPAA's dedicated leaders join us today. In support of DPAA, Principal Deputy Director Fern Sumpter Winbush is responsible for leading the agency and formulating policy, overseeing business development, and increasing outreach initiatives to achieve the agency's goal providing families and the nation with the fullest possible accounting of missing personnel from past conflicts.

Retired as an Army Colonel after 31 years of military service, she held positions of increased responsibility in Germany, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Korea, and the Netherlands, culminating with the development of the operation enduring freedom in Kabul, Afghanistan, and subsequently as the commander of the Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Arlington, Virginia.

After her retirement in 2015, she was selected to serve in the current role with DPAA. We were honored to have her speak to us at the 2016 national convention.

So please join me in welcoming her back, Principal Deputy Director of Defense POW/MIA Account Agency, and VFW life member, Ms. Fern Sumpter Winbush. 14
(Applause.)

FERN SUMPTER WINBUSH: Good morning, VFW comrades.
(Good morning.)

FERN SUMPTER WINBUSH: Afternoon? Yeah. Something like that. It's morning.

I am ecstatic to be here. This podium is awfully tall. I don't know if I'm big enough to ride this ride.

Good morning, Commander-in-Chief Borland, and thank you and the VFW for the great hospitality shown to me and the DPAA team. We are -- we are excited to be here for the 124th National Convention, once again, to sponsor a DPAA booth and participate in the national security and foreign affairs POW/MIA subcommittee.

A very special thank you to Bob Jackson, Past Commander John Stroud, and the committee members for their steadfast commitment to our work of achieving the fullest possible accounting of those who are still unaccounted for dating back to World War II.

The VFW and DPAA have enjoyed a long legacy of partnering that has progressed the past conflict personnel accounting effort well beyond what many

people could have imagined. And, today, I'm going to attempt to validate that claim with a few interesting updates about what DPAA has been up to and our latest initiatives.

But, first, I must say, I would – I could not have come -- we could not have come this far without our VFW comrades.

So thank you very much. And I applaud you. Thank you.
(Applause.)

FERN SUMPTER WINBUSH: Next slide, please.

The 700-plus soldiers, sailor, airmen, Marines, and DOD civilians are working daily to research, investigate, recover, and identify our missing and unaccounted for Americans. As such, we are also the promise keepers to those who are still serving today, that should you go missing, after hostilities cease, we will come for you.

Next slide.

Our mission is both global and generational with over 81,000 unaccounted for, and about 38,000, we believe to be recoverable. This is a daunting task and progress is slow.

Fortunately, our efforts are widely seen as humanitarian around the world. We have maintained strong relationships with our host nation partners. They understand and can relate to our dogged determination and desire to get answers and to find and return our fallen Americans.

In fact, a couple of our host nation partners actually conducted recovery operations when we couldn't travel due to COVID.

Next slide.

Since our Director Kelly McKeague last addressed this forum, we have been making constant progress in our efforts to recover our nation's missing and unaccounted for. To start, we continue to do everything humanly possible to stay connected to the families.

And this year, we held a very successful two-day Vietnam War annual government briefing in Washington, D.C., with over 200 family members attending. Distinguished guests who addressed the families included the U.S. Ambassadors to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and representatives from the Vietnam office for seeking missing persons, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East and Pacific Affairs, your own Ryan Gallucci, Executive Director, and, lastly, the director for operations at the Defense Intelligence Agency, just to name a few.

Now, turning to our Korean War efforts, you may recall in 2018, we endeavored to disinter Korean War remains interred in 652 graves marked as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii.

Affectionately called the Korean War Disinterment Project, this multiphase plan will take five to seven years to disinter, clean, and sort the remains as we also begin to make identifications. Thus far, we have completed phase four of the seven phases.

Phase five is scheduled to begin in October of this year, and we have made

189 identifications and have about 378 sets of remains currently in our lab undergoing forensic analysis. This week marks –

Thank you.

(Applause.)

FERN SUMPTER WINBUSH: And I'm sure the applause is largely because you recognize -- because all of you have served, you recognize that when I say a number, that means a family.

(Applause.)

FERN SUMPTER WINBUSH: This week marks the 70th anniversary of the armistice signed on 27 July 1953, which forced cessation of combat operations on the Korean Peninsula. Even as we continue to identify Americans from that war, today in Hawaii, our Director McKeague, will participate in a repatriation ceremony with the Republic of Korea Vice Minister of National Defense, and the Indo-PACOM commander to return the remains of seven individuals that our lab determined to be Korean, returning them to their homeland where they will finally be laid to rest.

A single set of remains from the seven belonged to private class Che Yim Rock who will be escorted home by his nephew, Senior Chief Petty Officer Che Hong Jong. I can't even imagine what that senior chief is feeling right now.

I don't know too many senior chiefs that cry, but I'm sure he's welling up right now.

Amazingly, the seven sets of remains come from various accounting efforts, including what we call the K208 – many of you may have heard about -- which are the remains we received from North Korea from 1990 to 1994, in 208 boxes. And then, of course, the K55, remains that were in 55 boxes turned over in 2018.

Also, the remains came from disinterment's that began in 1999 where we resumed over 570 unknowns, identifying 200 of our Korean War identification project sets of remains.

And then, lastly, this group of seven came from previous joint recovery operations which took place in 2002 and 2008 in North Korea.

The Enoura Maru which is our newest project is our effort to disinter 431 sets of World War II remains, buried in 27 graves as unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.

These individuals were all POWs accidentally killed by U.S. forces who did not know the Japanese hell ships – as they became to be called -- transited -- transiting from the Philippines to labor camps in Japan had POWs on board. When the ships reached Taiwan, there was another aerial attack and several hundred more prisoners were killed.

The Enoura Maru casualties were first buried in mass graves in Taiwan, then recovered after the war. However, the story doesn't end there. Because the many family members of these hell ship POWs kept the faith, persevered, and convinced other family members to provide their DNA.

Because we were able to collect enough DNA reference samples, we have been given the approval by the Department to disinter all 27 graves at the National Memorial Cemetery at the Pacific in Hawaii.

Now, turning to our partnerships and innovation program, our partnerships with universities and organizations around the globe continue to expand with more than 100 partners to date.

Right now, we have 12 active partner field operations underway. Some conducting recoveries while others are furthering our investigations. One of our exciting partners' efforts is ongoing right now in a location called the Isle de Morgo, affectionately labeled the duck pond.

I had a chance to visit this site back in May. The site is pictured in that bottom right-hand picture on the slide. The site is protected, privately owned land, and this operation will be tedious as we work with the landowner, local partners, and volunteers from Italy on this remote island off the northern coast in search of a submerged bomber from World War II.

The duck pond is one of our most expansive projects, and to witness the local government and community embrace our efforts as if we were searching for one of their own is simply eye-watering.

Next slide.

I have so many more examples. But I was told I didn't have two hours to deliver remarks today. Oh, somebody back here said, yes, I do. No, I don't. But I'm going to pause here because I want you to actually see an example of what partners bring to bear on this past conflict personnel accounting mission.

I have a short video. It's only about four minutes, produced by Ocean Exploration Trust, Incorporated. One of our partners working underwater investigations and technology development. They are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established to support the ocean exploration program of the United States, and they own and operate the exploration vessel Nautilus you see on the slide, a 224-foot research and exploration vessel used for exploration and research of deep sea and oceanic environments.

As a small defense agency, we could never acquire, manage, operate, maintain the equipment, and train the personnel needed that this not-for-profit powerful organization brings to the table.

Enjoy the video.

(The video was played.)

(Applause.)

FERN SUMPTER WINBUSH: Now, that is pretty high speed, low drag. Y'all remember that term, right?

On behalf of the families of the DPAA's partners who graciously dedicate their resources to helping us achieve the fullest possible accounting and to provide answers to the families.

Next slide, please.

Before I close, I'd like to highlight two of our most recent medal of honor

identifications. The first is Lieutenant Colonel Baker. On April 8th, 2022, we accounted for U.S. Army Air Force's Lieutenant Colonel Addison Baker, 26, of Chicago, Illinois.

Lieutenant Colonel Baker was the commander of the 328th bombardment squadron heavy, 93rd bombardment group heavy, 9th Air Force.

On 1 August 1943, Lieutenant Colonel Baker would embark on Operation Tidal Wave, the largest bombing mission against the oil fields and refineries at Ploiesti north of Bucharest, Romania.

During one of his bombing runs, his B24 liberator was hit by enemy anti-aircraft fire. However, while his plane was on fire and before crashing in a horrific fireball, Lieutenant Colonel Baker delivered his bombs on target while avoiding the other aircraft in the formation.

For his actions, he received the medal of honor. Unfortunately, his remains were not identified following the war, and he was buried as an unknown in Belgium. In 2017, we began exhumation of unknowns believed to be associated with unaccounted for airmen from Operation Tidal Wave, and they were sent to our DPAA laboratory at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, for examination and identification.

To identify Lieutenant Colonel Baker, our scientists used anthropological analysis as well as circumstantial evidence. Additionally, scientists from the Armed Forces Medical Examiner's System used mitochondrial DNA analysis to confirm the identification.

Next slide.

Turning to the Korean War, on April 6th of 2023, we identified the remains of Army Corporal Luther H. Story of Georgia, assigned to Alpha Company First Battalion's 9th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

This 19-year-old hero achieved what many could not. And as I continue this story, something struck me. You know, I don't know what you were doing when you were 19, but I was busy flunking out of college, much to my parents' chagrin.

But for those parents and grandparents in the audience, give your kids some grace. They, too, eventually will finish school and could become the Principal Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

But I digress. Turning back to Corporal's story. 19 years old. I mean, just a kid. I also had the distinct honor and pleasure to meet his niece, Judy Wade, when I attended his funeral at Anderson (sic) National Cemetery in Georgia on Memorial Day.

It seemed like the whole town turned out, as well as the governor and other state representatives. I stopped counting at 300.

So incredible, I would like to quickly read his citation.

PFC Story distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty and action. A savage daylight attack by elements of three enemy divisions penetrated the thinly held lines of the 9th Infantry.

Company A beat off several attacks but was bypassed and in danger of being cut off and surrounded. PFC Story, a weapons squad leader, was heavily engaged in stopping the early attacks and had just moved his squad to a position overlooking the Nakdong River when he observed a large group of enemy crossing the river to attack Company A.

Seizing a machine gun from his wounded gunner, he placed deadly fire on the hostile column, killing or wounding an estimated 100 enemy soldiers. Facing certain encirclement, the company commander ordered withdrawal. During the move, PFC Story noticed the approach of the enemy truck loaded with troops and towing an ammunition trailer.

Alerting his comrades to take cover, he fearlessly stood in the middle of the road throwing grenades into the truck. Out of grenades, he crawled to his squad, gathered up additional grenades, and again attacked the vehicle.

During the withdrawal, the company was attacked by such superior numbers that it was forced to deploy to a rice field. PFC Story was wounded in this action, but disregarding his wounds, rallied the men about and repelled the attack. Realizing that his wounds would hamper his comrades, he refused to retire to the next position but remained to cover the Company's withdrawal.

When last seen, he was firing every weapon available and fighting off another hostile assault. Private Story's extraordinary heroism, aggressive leadership, and supreme devotion to duty reflect the highest credit upon himself and were in keeping with the esteemed traditions of military service.

Corporal Story's remains were identified in 2018. To identify Corporal Story, scientists used dental anthropological analysis, as well as DNA to confirm.

Next slide.

Commander Borland, I want to sincerely thank you and the VFW for all that you do for us, for our mission, and, most importantly, for the families who are still awaiting answers.

Thank you for resuming your annual visit to Southeast Asia, for prominently flying the POW/MIA flag at Posts and Departments, as well as encouraging VFW members to turn in wartime artifacts.

Thank you for your advocacy, for the quarterly and annual award gift cards we present to our DPAA award recipients, and, lastly, for sponsoring the refreshments for several in-person family member updates.

And, finally, thank you for inviting me here today. Everyone that's on this represented on this stage and in this room from each of the states, thank you for inviting me here to share our progress.

Next slide.

Again, thank you so much.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Well, there you go, comrades. I was

just telling you in my opening remarks yesterday that I buried a medal of honor recipient, Lieutenant Colonel Addison Baker. And there, she just told you all about how his remains were found.

It's very key to actually provide DNA samples to help out DPAA to 100 percent identify these heroes we brought home. DPAA does great work. Just great work.

I would like you all to watch a short video and then we'll proceed with our convention. Right now, we're going to go back and get some pictures with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and then we'll proceed with the...

So if we can just turn on the videos and we'll be commencing right after the video is over.

So please pay attention to the video.

Thank you.

(The video was played.)

(Applause.)

(The video was played.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: DENIS MCDONOUGH, SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Denis McDonough. Before coming to the V.A., he served as a 26 White House Chief of Staff and a Principal Deputy National Security Advisor.

He believes deeply, as he testified to Congress, that there's no more sacred obligation nor noble undertaking than to uphold our promises to our veterans, rather they come home decades ago or days ago.

Please join me in welcoming to our 124th National Convention, the 11th Secretary of the Veterans Affairs, Denis McDonough.

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: Thank you very much. Thank you so much, Tim, for that kind introduction, and for your unwavering, and as we just discussed, highly successful leadership of VFW.

Tim, I know the toxic -- the fight for toxic exposure benefits is deeply personal to you and that you've traveled the country encouraging vets to apply for the toxic exposure benefits they've earned, that you've earned, and so richly deserve. We have no more important partners than you and the team here at VFW.

Every single day, I see the real and concrete impact of your work, of your devotion to vets, and your partnership with V.A. So let me just acknowledge some of the other many great partners deserving of our gratitude.

Ryan Gallucci, your fantastic executive director.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: Hear, hear.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: I just want to say that he's a nice guy and everything, but he also kind of gets in my business. You know what I mean? So somehow that niceness wears off when we're screwing up.

Pat Murray, and the VFW legislative team.

You know, Pat --

(Applause.)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: I'll agree with that.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: You know, Pat slept on the steps of the Capitol to get the PACT Act across the finish line this time last summer. And I'll say this, every time Pat testifies in the House or the Senate, I stick around and listen. And I always learn something from Pat Murray and from that great team.

And let me just say, VFW's incredible service opportunities, including the service officer of the year whom I just talked with back stage, you've been working tirelessly to support the influx of vets filing PACT Act claims. And, of course, to each of you, the VFW members, it's great to see so many of you gather here today.

So good morning, everybody. This convention is an exciting time, even if it's a little bit hot, and it's an honor to be with you here in Phoenix.

Now, you've had one busy year at VFW. Since we got together last year, you represented more than 500,000 vets delivering over \$11 billion in benefits.

(Applause)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: Even in Washington, that's real money

You processed more than 10,000 referrals for free accredited V.A. claims assistance through your new pactactinfo.org website, ensuring that vets aren't taken advantage of. VFW is an awesome advocate for America's veterans. So thank you for all that you've done.

Since we got together last year in Kansas City, there we discussed the promise our country makes to honor our vets' service and their sacrifice. And I'm proud to say that together, with VFW, we're fighting like hell for our vets. And we're delivering.

Since President Biden took office, with your support, we've delivered more care and more benefits to more veterans than at any time in our nation's history. When it comes to delivering the benefits that vets have earned and deserved, we're processing veteran claims faster than ever before.

In fact, we've completed 8,000 claims a day, 75 different times this year.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: That's a milestone we had only reached six times in the rest of V.A. history. When it comes to providing world class healthcare

to veterans and their families, study after study shows that we're delivering better health outcomes for veterans than the private sector, which is why 90 percent of vets now trust us to deliver their care.

When it comes to honoring vets with the lasting resting places they deserve, we are now providing almost 94 percent of vets with access to burial sites within 75 miles of their homes. And we've expanded our veterans' legacy memorial program, which keeps veterans' stories of service and sacrifice alive long after they're gone to approximately 4.8 million vets.

And look, all of that work, every bit of it, adds up to the one statistic that will always matter most. Veteran lives saved or improved by the work that we do together.

When I spoke to you last year, I said that this year would be the year of execution on some of our most important priorities. So let me give you some very quick updates on how we're doing.

First, we're fighting like hell to end veteran homelessness. Last year, I told you about our ambitious goal to house -- permanently house 38,000 homeless vets.

Well, we exceeded that number. We permanently housed 40,401 vets.
(Applause)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: And we're doubling down on that this year. Aiming to house another 38,000 homeless vets while ensuring that they have the wraparound services and the support they need to stay housed and to address the issues that forced them into homelessness in the first instance.

Second, we're fighting like hell to prevent veteran suicide. Now, last year's conference, I discussed the rollout of 988 press 1, the new national suicide prevention lifeline that connects vets quickly and directly to the veteran crisis line.

Since its launch, the hotline has received one million calls, texts, and messages. A huge increase from previous years. This includes over 750,000 calls and an average speed to answer of 9.37 seconds. Every second counts in a time of crisis, and this increase in contacts means that vets are getting the help when they need it most.

Third, we're fighting like hell to ensure that vets get timely access -- timely access to world-class healthcare. In just the past year, vets had over 73 million outpatient appointments at V.A., and 37 million outpatient appointments with the community care providers across the country.

Meanwhile, we've seen a massive 3,000 percent increase in virtual home visits since 2020. Nearly 28 million such visits in that time span. Offering care that's more convenient to vets at the V.A. in the community and via telehealth, alongside focused process and technology changes has led to improved average wait times for new primary care appointments in nearly 60 percent of our facilities.

We still have massive room for improvement because we have to improve timeliness and overall access to care at V.A., including taking steps to improve our appointments scheduling systems. But we will remain dedicated to reducing wait times, increasing access and earning every veteran's trust. Each of your trust, day

by day, as the demand for V.A. care grows.

Fourth, we spent the last year fighting like hell to deliver for toxic-exposed vets. We're implementing what can be the largest expansion of veteran healthcare and benefits in decades, thanks to President Biden's new toxic exposure law, the PACT Act.

In fact, since the PACT Act was signed last August, veterans and survivors have filed over two million claims, 32.7 percent more than the same period last year. And last year, we set a record of over 1.7 million claims completed. We're on track to smash that record this year.

Moreover, vets have filed nearly 750,000 claims for toxic exposure-related benefits under the PACT Act. To date, nearly four million vets have received toxic exposure screenings, and V.A. has awarded over \$1 billion in earned benefits -- these are benefits you earned -- to vets, their families, and survivors filed PACT Act-related claims.

This new law has the potential -- this new law, which VFW ensured got enacted and would not have been enacted without VFW.
(Applause.)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: This law has the potential to help us deliver care and benefits to millions of toxic-exposed vets and their survivors, to bring generations of new vets into V.A. healthcare, and to increase the healthcare benefits of many, many more, including many of you in this great hall.

That brings me to my fifth and final point. We're fighting like hell to hire at an historically unprecedented rate. None of this goodness happens, from ending veteran homelessness to delivering toxic exposure benefits, none of it happens without growing the V.A. professionals that provide the care and benefits that our vets have earned.

So this year of execution has also been a year of hiring, hiring faster, more competitively, while retaining great staff. We're hiring at a record pace, growing VBA by 17 percent, and the VHA workforce by nearly 5 percent, the highest levels in the past two decades, in spite of nationwide labor and healthcare shortages, because people want to work with our nation's heroes. People want to work for you.

So this has truly been a year of execution, a year of fighting like hell for vets, their families, caregivers, and survivors. This year of execution isn't because of me, it's because of you, and it's because of the nearly 450,000 V.A. employees in your communities, your neighborhoods, across the country, who keep vets at the heart of their care, like my friend Sabrena.

Sabrena.

MS. SCHMELLA: Good morning. I am proud to be with you this morning.

My name is Sabrena Schmella. I am an Army veteran, and I am the great granddaughter, granddaughter, daughter, sister, cousin, and wife of veterans.

I am currently a training coach in the veteran service center at the Phoenix

Regional Office where we process veteran claims. Until last month, when my brother retired from the Marine Corps after 30 years of service, our family had someone continuously on active duty back to 1966.

My dad, a retired Army aviator and combat veteran of Vietnam, taught me when I became a veteran that no one can take away the title of veteran from you.

I came to V.A. because I missed working with soldiers. I'm so grateful to serve the best people, the people I know and love, and some of them I don't know but I still love, our country's veterans. I never forget that each and every benefit claim, application that we receive represents a person, a veteran, and their family.

And I'm so eternally grateful to work with our VFW colleagues and other veteran service organizations because I know how deeply you care about veterans. Across the country, the PACT Act has been a new focus on veterans exposed to environmental hazards while on active duty.

It is so important to me and my colleagues that all veterans receive the care, support, and benefits which they have earned and deserve. So we're leaning forward, we're working hard, we're processing claims in record numbers, as the Secretary mentioned.

In Phoenix, in the past year, we have processed over 12,000 PACT Act claims and awarded over \$45 million in benefits to veterans and their families. (Applause.)

MS. SCHMELLA: We have increased our staffing in Phoenix by 45 percent, and this staffing has gone directly to better serving veterans.

As the August 9th, 2023, date for PACT Act retroactive claims approaches, we continue to work these cases efficiently and accurately, granting every benefit we can under the law being able to grant presumptive -- I'm sorry -- presumptive conditions, tells veterans that we trust them and we believe them.

And it removes one more barrier as we review a veteran's claim. One big -- one veteran here in Phoenix comes to mind. I'll call him Jake.

Jake was represented by one of our VFW service officers. He's a retired Army noncommissioned officer with 21 years of service. He had Gulf War service in Southwest Asia and Jake has a cancer which is presumptive under the PACT Act. And it is the result of exposure to toxins during his service in uniform.

A year ago, before the PACT Act, his claim would not have been granted. But because of the toxic exposure legislation, we were able to grant him 100 percent compensation service connection backdated to August 10th, 2022. (Applause.)

MS. SCHMELLA: And we must keep in mind that Jake represents thousands of veterans like him. And, more importantly, Jake is getting the care he needs and that he earned. Jake has so much life left to live, alongside his wife and children and grandchildren, and because of the PACT Act, he has one less thing to worry about while he embarks on the battle of his life.

There are thousands of veterans out there like Jake, and it means so much

to serve them as well as they serve the rest of us.

Now, let's hear from my colleague Carlos.

(Applause.)

DR. DUARTE: Thank you, Sabrena. Good morning, VFW.

My name is Dr. Carlos Duarte. I'm the Interim Chief of Primary Care here at the Phoenix V.A. Healthcare System.

I lead a team of healthcare providers and administrative professionals to provide whole health team-based care to over 120,000 veterans enrolled here in Phoenix.

(Applause.)

DR. DUARTE: Here in Phoenix, we lead the region with the number of veterans screened for conditions related to toxic exposures covered by the PACT Act.

Nearly 54,000 veterans have been screened, and as my colleague Sabrena just mentioned, nearly 12,000 claims have already been processed in the past year.

(Applause.)

DR. DUARTE: Putting numbers aside, I would like to talk with you about how the PACT Act is designed to help our nation's heroes get medical services and benefits they earned and deserve.

But, first, let me tell you a little bit about why I come to work every day, committed and dedicated to serving our veterans.

While I'm not a veteran, I have veterans in my family and close circle of friends. Over the course of my career, I have come to appreciate how every veteran is different and has a unique story to share.

Whether it's a 22-year-old from Columbus, Ohio, or 102-year-old veteran, World War II, from Charleston, South Carolina, each one of them at one point in their life put their name on the proverbial dotted line to defend our country, some having made the ultimate sacrifice while others have come back still fighting a battle every day.

Some say going to war is easy. It's coming back home that is the hard part. In my professional take -- my profession taking care of veterans, I know that too well.

This is why the V.A. is here for you. We are here to help veterans transition and adapt to the civilian world, to provide support services to their family members, and to help veterans get help, wherever and whenever. The V.A. is committed to meeting the veterans wherever they are.

The V.A. is undergoing a once-in-a-lifetime modernization effort thanks to the PACT Act. Millions of veterans are expected to enroll due to the legislation alone, in addition to the 9.3 million veterans already enrolled and getting care across the country.

I'd like to leave you with a story shared by a member of my team. We had an older veteran who lives in Surprise, Arizona, who had attempted many times to obtain service connection. Something many of you are familiar with. His health conditions had declined over the years to the point where a spouse could no longer take care of him at home.

Their PCP had just found out about the PACT Act and referred them to their V.A. social worker who did a brief review of his chart while they were on the phone and then proceeded to provide further education, information, and an assessment which led to the spouse scheduling an appointment to file a PACT Act claim.

The positive claim decision came quickly, allowing the veteran to enroll in a long-term care facility under a V.A. contract instead of paying out of pocket, a cost that the couple could not afford.

This is one of countless stories I can share with you today. Stories of the PACT Act helping veterans and their families deal not only with toxic exposure, but all of the health challenges that life has thrown their way.

Thank you all for letting me share my story and a story of the incredible healthcare team here in Phoenix.
(Applause.)

DR. DUARTE: And now I'll introduce you all to Shawndin Tracy.

MS. TRACY: Thanks, Dr. Duarte.

Good morning. My name is Shawndin Tracy.

I'm the facility role house coordinator at the Phoenix V.A. Healthcare System. I am Dine, Navajo born and raised in Ganado, Arizona, located on the Navajo Nation. I belong to four clans.
(Speaking Navajo.)

I am of the Honeycomb Rock People, Cliff Dwellers People Clan, Born for the Water's Edge Clan. My maternal grandparents are One Walks Around Clan. My paternal grandparents are the start of the Red Straight People Clan.

As the daughter of a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, my father never spoke of his military service due to the negative treatment and antiwar movement he experienced.

It was not until recently that he showed interest in taking advantage of his V.A. benefits. My sister and I did not hesitate. Throughout his trials and tribulations, I'm proud to be his daughter. I'm proud he choose V.A. I'm proud of his service to our country, and I am proud that he, too, has signed up to receive PACT Act benefits that he earned.

I have personally witnessed the immense impact of the PACT Act on rural and American Indian veteran communities across four counties and nine American Indian nations in Arizona. Native Americans have a long history of proud service in the U.S. military.

To date, more than 3.6 million veterans of American Indian and Alaska native heritage have served honorably in the U.S. military, serving at far higher rates than any other group.

In spite of their many contributions, Native American veterans are among the least likely to use their earned benefits. Challenges and barriers -- challenges and barriers include a lack of transportation across long distances to V.A. facilities, lack of availability of culturally appropriate care. Difficulty navigating the V.A. system, and a history of complex federal, state, and tribal relationships.

Many of the veterans I speak to have never accessed the benefits they're entitled to. They haven't trusted V.A. or they have had bad experiences with V.A. in the past. In my heart, it is my calling to help fix these problems.

The PACT Act has brought historic opportunities for V.A. to reach out to rural and tribal veterans around the country on their turf in an area familiar to them.

The PACT Act is allowing us to show up for women and underrepresented veterans in a comfortable environment focused on their unique needs, and it's allowing us to focus on veterans holistically, a one-stop shop, not solely on toxic exposure, but also addressing mental health, suicide prevention, homelessness, and a myriad of health issues affecting these communities.

It's showing veterans a new face of V.A., many for the first time, that we are there for them as people first, that we truly want to be there and help in any way that we can.

So no matter where in the country you call home, in communities large and small, and no matter your background, I urge you to reach out to your local V.A. team, find an outreach event, and sign up for the benefits and care that you have earned.

It's an honor to give back to the men and women who have suffered and sacrificed for our safety and to serve them every bit as well as they have served all of us.

Now I'll hand the microphone back to Secretary McDonough. Thank you. (Applause.)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH 2: Shawndin, Carlos, Sabrena, thank you so much. Now you see why I'm so excited to be part of this V.A. team. These three great leaders represent the very best workforce in the federal government, the most passionate, highest performing public servants in the country, folks who want to make a real difference in the lives of veterans. I'm blessed to call them my colleagues.

And you heard each of them share their same deep devotion to serving vets, the same deep devotion that characterizes each of V.A.'s employees. The reason I come here every year is to hold myself and all of V.A. accountable to you. We work for you.

So if you hear we're not living up to the highest ideals, exemplified by Sabrena, Carlos, and Shawndin, I want you to let me know. Ryan, your executive

director, surely will let me know.

Because vets, each and every one of you, have earned and deserve exactly what these three great professionals just talked about, which is our very best.

And we will never settle for anything less.

With that, let me just close today's remarks with one final request. I was just talking to Tim about it.

To all vets, family members, caregivers, survivors in the audience, please apply for your toxic exposure benefits right now. Right now at the claims table that is right here.

Applying on or before August 9th, this year, means that benefits will be backdated to August 10th of last year, the day President Biden signed the bill into law.

We're only a couple weeks from that deadline. So don't wait. Apply today. Reapply if you've been denied before for the V.A. care and benefits you have earned. Now, you can still apply after August 9th, 2023, and we hope you do if you have not yet applied.

But if you do apply on or before the 9th, you will get an effective date of August 10th last year.

Now, listen, there are going to be people out there who try to convince vets that they need to pay somebody to help them apply for their benefits. That's just not true. Do not pay anyone to file your initial claim with the V.A. (Applause.)

SECRETARY MCDONOUGH: Working with V.A. or with the VSO like the incredible team here at VFW, it's free and it's easy to apply. So, please, stop by the claims clinic at this conference to meet with V.A. claim representatives who will file a PACT Act claim and answer any questions that you may have.

And between now and August 9th, please reach out to every vet you know. Reach out to your 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. Members of the first division in Saudi Arabia in August 1990.

Can I get an all the way from any 82nd Airborne paratroopers in the audience. That same division, that would be the last combat boots on the ground in Afghanistan over 30 years later. Reach out to each and every one of them or any of the brave men and women who have served in battle in the years in between operation Desert Storm and the summer of 2021.

Reach out to your brothers, your sisters, moms, dads, neighbors, sons, daughters, have every vet you know get a toxic exposure screening and file a toxic exposure claim. We need every single person in this room to help communicate with veterans and families to get this, the care that they need, and the benefits they deserve. We just can't rest until they do.

And with your help, we're going to keep our sacred promise to those who served and sacrificed, to serve all of you veterans as well as you have served us. So

God bless you all, God bless our nation's service members, our veterans, their families, their caregivers, and their survivors. Thank you very much.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, that was very informational. I just asked him one more question to clarify any questions that you might have out there. Two more weeks, we got an area out here that you can file your claims. You don't have to have proof today. Just get it started.

It's called a -- it's called a letter of intent. A letter of intent. If you go over there before this convention closes and just start your claim, you will be awarded retroactive pay back to August 10th of 2022, if you are found with any of those presumptive diseases from burn pits or toxic exposures.

And let me tell you, because I'm not ashamed, I am one of those victims from burn pits. My V.A. doctor is the one that asked me if I served in Iraq when I went in for an exam. And when I told him, yes -- believe it or not, you don't even have to be over the burn pit itself.

All you got to do is be in theater where the burn pits are, because there's toxic exposures in the air, believe me. And you will get sick.

So, please, if you have any thoughts of possibilities of qualifying on a presumptive diseases for the PACT Act, which is a \$270 billion bill, the largest ever passed in three decades, get your claims started today. Don't fool around.

But, as he said, if you do do your claim after August 9th, it's okay. You just won't get the retroactive check back to August 10th of 2022, but you will get awarded if you're found with one of the presumptive diseases.

So I hope I clarified that for all of you, and I hope some of you or most of you who think you might fall under this umbrella to go over there and just file a letter of intent to do a claim under the PACT Act.

So, thank you, Secretary McDonough, for that excellent, excellent information that you put out. Those three individuals that added to it. It was just awesome.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:

VFW DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD TO MODESTO DE LA O

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Moving along.

The VFW distinguished service award recognizes VFW members for exemplary and extraordinary service to our country through demonstrated actions that promote the spirit of the VFW. Our recipients continuously exhibit the spirit of a true VFW comrade through their volunteer actions in service, companionship, and activities to their local communities, their state, and the nation.

From volunteering and giving back to our military and veteran communities, to community service projects, and providing veteran-centric support, our next award winner demonstrates his passion and selfless generosity to ensure

no veteran is left behind and truly exemplifies that once a marine, always a marine.
I figured that would be louder.

Modesto De la O had spent nine years as commander of VFW Post 1370 in Pontiac, Michigan. He has led initiatives to provide Thanksgiving dinners for veterans and their families, hosted events to increase awareness and challenges veterans face, supported service-connected claims and provided phones, employment, food, and other resources to veterans in need.

Taking care of Army National Guardsmen of the 1775th Military Police Company based in Pontiac, Michigan, you can often find Modesto working one on one with these soldiers, even working to provide them with food and gifts for Christmas.

Working with service members to help ensure their transition home is as successful as possible, Modesto founded Foxhole, a nonprofit that uses martial arts training to provide camaraderie and support to veterans facing transitional changes as they reintegrate into civilian society.

Modesto and the work he accomplishes in support of Veteran's Day, day in and day out, exemplifies what it means to be a VFW member.

It is now my honor to proudly present the 2023 VFW Distinguished Service Award to VFW life member, Mr. Modesto De la O.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Service Award and Citation awarded to Modesto De la O, VFW Post 1370 commander, and lasting appreciation and spirited recognition of his outstanding leadership and extraordinary record of steadfast service to the veteran and military families of Michigan and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Through his aid and support of incarcerated veterans, continuous work supporting local Michigan Army National Guardsmen and the generosity and vital work his nonprofit Foxhole does daily truly exemplifies the mission and vision of the VFW, and further carries on our motto that no one does more for veterans.

His selfless generosity and dedication to ensuring no veteran is left behind makes a positive impact on the lives of many and has justly earned him the utmost respect and appreciation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of United States, this 25th day of July 2023. Approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed by Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.

All right, Marines, let's do it proper this time.

Ready?

(Shouting.)

MODESTO DE LA O: I got to tell you, it's incredibly humbling to be here today, but I'm going to be incredibly honest with you. When I got the call from Kissha, I did not believe it, not for a split second. The first thing I said was, which

one of my friends put you up to this?

Now, if you're a vet, you know what I'm talking about. Any one of them is capable of pulling a prank like this on me, making me believe something happened. One of them is sitting right there. Ski. Been my brother for over 20 years.

So I thought that's what was happening. So I said, Kissha, what kind of prank is this? I assure you it's not a prank.

Well, that's funny because even if that is your real name Kissha, what I got to say is, that's exactly what somebody would say if they were pulling off a prank.

So I'm going to call the trunk line to VFW headquarters and see if this is true or not. Go ahead. Go ahead and call. They're going to send you right to me. So I called. I called, and they rerouted me a few times and she answered the phone, and said, Mr. De la O, I told you that this is not a joke.

So I met her yesterday. It was a pleasure meeting her. I thank her, wherever she is, for being honest and not letting this be a joke.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank my family, my parents, and the rest of my family. Jose. I have to give a very special thanks to Amy and Liam for sacrificing our time so that I could help my fellow veterans.

And I especially have to thank my friend who made the trip to come out here today. Ski, as you all know, it's not easy having pals. You can't be on the street. You got to be handy with your steel.

That's for you, buddy.

Thank you to VFW, VFW 1370 in Pontiac, Michigan. After the Marine Corps it was the first place I found that had like-minded individuals and the feeling of camaraderie. I feel incredibly indebted to the VFW. It helped me find purpose again.

Make no doubt about it. I'm not here today and I'm not who I am today if wasn't for 1370, Huey-Campbell Post a/k/a the renegades.

For those here today, my speech is mainly a reminder to you, but it's actually meant for those vets who wonder if they should join the VFW, they wonder if they can make a difference. First, I want to tell you that your VFW can be whatever you want it to be.

It is a direct reflection of the leadership and the membership. If something is near and dear to your heart, visit your local VFW and see if those are objectives already in place. If they are not, go ahead and take action. Attend the next meeting, present your idea, tell them what you want to do and tell them the things that you need so you can be successful.

Let me be clear. There is no shortage of ideas and suggestions for those already helping others. Recall, I asked you to find your passion and your purpose. Don't hand this off to anybody else. And don't let anything or anyone stop you from reaching your objective.

If you run into trouble, you can give me a call. I'll help you sort it out. Any VFW would welcome any vet that wants to make a difference.

Second, my purpose was real to me, because of difficulties I face as a VFW

commander. We had four outstanding veterans commit suicide. Each one was center of attention. They were a colorful character, they're part of our family.

As the events weighed on me, I realized they must have felt so hopeless and overwhelmed that they made that tragic decision. As commander of the post, I felt I had to do something. I knew my first one was to first take veterans' suicide and to remove barriers that lead to despair.

In the beginning, I sought collaboration from organizations, and I began reaching out to them and had the full support of my post. We began to assist our local National Guard and the veterans' court. As a representative of the VFW, we have experiences and credibility as someone who has been there and done that.

This experience is an asset that tends to lead to favorable outcomes for those people we're trying to help.

We also began to work with Blue Star Service Dogs. Our K9 friends provide the type of unconditional love that can change your life. These veterans come in, they get paired with a dog. They train with the dog.

The veteran now has another living creature showing them love and providing them with purpose again. This is all free of cost to the veteran. Blue Star team, thank you for what you do and allowing me part of it. Yet, I still felt I could do more.

I considered what helped me, and that happened to be Brazilian jiu-jitsu. So I partnered with the We Defy Foundation. They're an organization that provides martial arts scholarships to combat veterans who are 80 percent disabled.

This type of mat therapy positively impacted my life outside the gym, and I knew this could be a tool for prevention.

However, there are a lot of vets that could benefit from Brazilian jiu-jitsu that are not disabled. I wanted to do more and to benefit all veterans. If you're anything like me, there's a voice in your head questioning if you're doing enough and ask you to improve.

With the help of my friends, I started Foxhole. We use martial arts as a way for veterans to unload some of that negative energy we carry. In too many instances, veterans make negative decisions that drastically impact their lives and those of their loved ones.

I have found firsthand and by observation that Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Muay Thai, Sambo Jiu, and MMA positively impacted and helped provide a healthy outlet to overcome the frustrations that come with transitioning into the civilian sector. This type of environment cultivates camaraderie and accountability to each other.

It is a team-like atmosphere where veterans begin to talk and share some of the challenges they face. Soon, they all find that they face some of the same challenges, and we can provide helpful information and support to overcome those challenges.

All those things I've said remind me of something I heard a long time ago. You see, you get three or four good pals, and then you got yourself a tribe, and there's nothing stronger than that. I truly believe my purpose is to take on veteran suicide, and the VFW has been critical in my path.

I meant everything I said at the beginning of my speech. Find your purpose, something that's important to you, and then act on your idea.

Lastly, don't let nothing and nobody stop you from reaching your objective. We all need support. And, frankly, I could use your help. Come talk to me after meeting. We'll see how we can best collaborate. It's because of people like you in this room that I get to say that nobody does more for veterans. Thank you, Veterans of Foreign Wars.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:
VFW DISTINGUISHED CITIZENSHIP AWARD TO ROBERT IRVINE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, ladies and gentlemen, and distinguished guests, what a wonderful opportunity we have to celebrate a remarkable individual who embodies the true spirit of citizenship and selfless service. It is with great honor and admiration that we present the 2023 VFW Distinguished Citizenship Award to Chef Robert Irvine.

The VFW Distinguished Citizenship Award stands as a testament to individuals who have dedicated their lives to exceptional charitable endeavors, benefitting our country and our local communities.

This prestigious accolade acknowledges the outstanding contributions made by the VFW members or citizens who have gone above and beyond in their commitment to philanthropy and service.

Robert Irvine, a name synonymous and with culinary excellence and television celebrity fame got his start like most of us in the U.S. military.

A native of England, Robert began his culinary training at the age of 15 upon entering the U.K. Royal Navy. Upon completing his 10-year tour of duty, Robert would go on to do consulting work at resorts across Southeast Asia before becoming an executive chef aboard numerous cruise ships and renowned establishments such as Trump's Taj Mahal.

He picked up a regular host at various shows and specials on Food Network. It was the hit show "Restaurant: Impossible," with 300 episodes and counting, that skyrocketed him to fame.

While he has delighted countless palates with his culinary creations published in his many books, featured at his restaurants, and stocked on grocery store shelves nationwide, his actions and unwavering support for service members, veterans, first responders and their families are what have truly set him apart.

Since becoming an -- since becoming an American citizen in 2004, Chef Irvine has embraced the duties and privileges bestowed upon him with unparalleled dedication and fervor. His commitment to our veterans, in particular, has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Through the Robert Irvine Foundation which he started in 2014, Chef Irvine has actively worked to improve the lives of those who have bravely served our nation, providing financial grants, support, programs and resources to help those

military and first responders in need.

A portion of the proceeds from the Robert's endeavors benefits the foundation. For his charitable work and service on numerous USO tours, Chef Irvine is a recipient of several civilian honors to include the Armed Service YMCA Angel of Honor Award, the U.S. Department of Army's Outstanding Civilian Service Award, the Department of Defense Spirit of Hope Award, and the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's Bob Hope Award for Excellence in Entertainment.

He has even been bestowed the title of honorary chef petty officer by the U.S. Navy.

Today, we honor Chef Irvine for his exceptional service and unwavering commitment to these causes which has left an indelible mark on our society.

Through his relentless pursuit of excellence, his boundless passion, and his steadfast commitment to uplifting others, he has become a true role model for all, reminding us of the responsibilities we all share as American citizens.

Please join me in welcoming and congratulating the 2023 Distinguished Citizenship Awardee, Chef Robert Irvine.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Citizenship Award in citation awarded to Chef Robert Irvine in special recognition of his outstanding charitable endeavors and unwavering dedication serving our nation's service members, military families, and veteran community, both in the United States and wherever they are around the world.

Long before becoming a U.S. citizen, Chef Irvine showed a remarkably deep commitment to honor those who have bravely defended freedom. He personally ventured on his own and as part of USO tours visiting U.S. troops serving stateside, abroad, deployed, and underway, serving hearty meals to thousands of service members and veterans to show his appreciation and support.

Through the Robert Irvine Foundation, he has touched countless lives by offering financial assistance to service members in need and life-changing mobility devices for wounded, aging, ill, and injured veterans and first responders.

Chef Irvine's extraordinary benevolence and relentless pursuit of making a positive impact on the lives of those who have served sets a stalwart example as an American citizen and has justly earned the utmost respect and appreciation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 25th day of July, 2023, approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed by Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.
(Applause.)

CHEF ROBERT IRVINE: So, how is everybody doing?
I can't hear you. All right.

First of all, I want to start by saying a huge thank you to all of you. I'm truly humbled to receive this award and to join the ranks such distinguished past

recipients.

To be mentioned in the same breath of Bob Hope, Lyndon B. Johnson, Ronald Reagan, that's an honor on its own.

The great honor to me and the principle I dedicated much of my life to is to serve our veterans, particular our Veterans of Foreign Wars. To be a veteran is to dedicate yourself to the service of your country, the commitment both physically and mentally to prepare to fight, and, if necessary, give your life.

It's what American veterans do really well. I want to talk about one veteran today who probably fits this bill the most. And you may know the name. A year ago this summer, we lost a man who I was lucky enough to know, but call my friend.

His name was Woody Williams.

And if you know Woody, you know he died at the ripe old age of 98 years old. He had been the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient who fought at the battle of Iwo Jima. You might not know, I scaled down a building opening a restaurant in Vegas with him at the bottom with a T-shirt gun. A little bit different than a flame thrower.

But a few years ago, I asked him if he would do me a favor and be interviewed by my digital magazine. And he obliged. In the article, he revealed that after his heroic actions in which he crawled behind enemy lines to clear out pillboxes to create a path for American tanks, he didn't live a happy life afterwards.

Well, not immediately anyway.

When he came home, he was haunted by everything that he had done, the sights, the sounds, and the smells of war that would keep him up at night and make him question his humanity. He took those doubts and fears -- the trauma that today we would call PTS -- though it didn't have a name and awareness back then -- to his local VFW hall where he said he could make them go away for a time if he drank enough beer.

But on some level, he knew that he was headed down a dark path. He lost his brother Gerald a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge a few years earlier after the war had ended. Shellshocked is how he referred to Gerald. He kept his -- he was kept in a mental hospital until the war ended, but then never regained the will to live and died shortly after.

Woody knew if he wanted to make a difference in somebody's life himself, he needed to get help. And he was lucky enough to have a wife who didn't quit on him. She got him to go to church. And, most importantly, she got him to sober up. With his new lease of life, he took on the new career.

After sobering up in 1962, he became a serving veteran counselor. An especially effective and empathetic one who didn't just talk the talk, but also walked the walk. He could directly relate to war veterans' particular problems. He called being a counselor a job that he held for 33 years, one of the most rewarding jobs that anyone could possibly have.

Woody may have earned the Medal of Honor for his actions during

combat, but he probably won an even greater victory in the terms of number of lives saved by lending an ear to the veterans that needed it most.

There's a powerful rouse of Woody's story. Because there is no shortage of veterans who need our help today. I believe it's incumbent upon each and every one of us to reach down and lend a hand. And as soon as that person finds their feet, to reach down and lend a hand to the next person who needs it.

One good act can save a life. The ripple effect, if each of us keep paying it forward, can change the world.

I started this quest many years ago.

You've heard all the stories. If all my fame went away tomorrow and I can take care of veterans 24 hours a day, seven days a week, that would be enough in itself. Our servicemen and women know the incredible costs before joining up. Even though they do so without any promise of fame or riches or acknowledgment or thanks, it's still fair and perfectly accurate to say that we have asked too much of our veterans.

For almost the entirety of the 21st Century, we have been a nation at war. And yet, the standard of living here at home has been high. Within our borders, we have enjoyed relative peace and comfort. That is due to entirely the fact of the burdens of war. The burdens I would define are so huge, they're unquantifiable.

And those burdens have been shouldered by our veterans and their families. I don't comment on matters of foreign policy, nor do I think it's my place to. But I've been designating myself as a servant of our veterans and active duty personnel.

I need to stay completely focused on my mission, which is to spend all my energy on easing their burdens in any way I can, whether it be providing life-changing mobility device, training service dogs for assisting comfort, reuniting veterans with the units they served with in combat, providing meals to certain members, military families and veterans across the globe, or granting financial assistance to those in need.

I've accepted that there is no end to this mission, just like all of you sitting here. With Woody as an example, the grim facts has only energized me every morning to get up and fight for veterans every day.

Further, it's my intention the Robert Irvine Foundation would continue this mission long after I'm gone. I'm getting old now. I'm 57. At least we got to wake them up, right?

So since this inception, 2015, we raised more and more money to be able put more and more programs to take care of more and more veterans. Our foundation increases revenue to put new programs on every year, whether it be housing, whether it be dogs, whatever the changing evolution of that is.

The ever-changing needs of our veterans has to be adapted to. And it's kind of interesting because you just heard the V.A. Secretary talk about change. We're changing every day. If I ever have a hope of myself doing this work, it was merely at the end of the day, people would say, Hey, Robert Irvine made a difference.

On my epitaph on my tombstone, I want somebody to say, you've made a difference. Today, this award by the VFW, whose folks -- your folks -- you folks who I care about very deeply means the most. I've emphatically told me that, yes, I am making a difference. And will continue to make that difference.

So allow me to do my closing remarks and just say, this acknowledgment has made all the difference to me. It means the world to me. Because every day when I wake up, until there is no breath in my lungs, I will continue to serve. 345 days a year, I travel the globe; 150 just with servicemen and women in the worst places possible.

I thank you for all of your service. I thank you for this honor, and I wish you God speed. Thank you very much.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Once again, comrades, I mentioned earlier in my acceptance speech, William Williams, a Medal of Honor recipient that we buried in West Virginia. And there you go. A near and dear touching heart to Robert Irvine when we lost him.

It's amazing how things all come together, regardless of how it comes together, but it comes together. And the things that we have done this year for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

So it was an honor to bury that wonderful, successful man that did Gold Star Family memorials all over the nation. So it was great to hear him, remember him. So that was awesome.

I just want to let you all know, I do have that check for the VOD scholarship program. It's \$8,736.28 to put the comrades back above the Auxiliary.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: So if you do want to see a pie in my face, which I doubt you do, you got to raise money and give it to the Auxiliary. It's a win/win. It's going to go to the kids' VOD scholarship program. And you only have until tonight at the patriotic rally is when this is going to happen.

So either I'm going to give a pie in poor old Jane Reape's face or she's going to give a pie in mine. So it's all up to you and it's up to the Auxiliary, but it's a win/win for the kids.

So I'm going to present this to Robert. Okay. As you were.

I'll present this to Quartermaster Garduno, so it's out of my hands and in his. It's been done.
(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS: NATIONAL HOME REPRESENTATIVES,
ANNABELLE FURGASON, BOARD PRESIDENT
MIKE WILSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LAYLA, 2023 BUDDY POPPY CHILD

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

Joining us this morning are three exceptional individuals. National Home Board President Annabelle Furgason; Executive Director, Mike Wilson; and, most importantly, our 2023 Buddy Poppy Child, Layla, who is going to give a little speech to you all.

Mike, if you may. Annabelle.

ANNABELLE FURGASON: Good morning.

Today, I stand up here representing the board of trustees for your VFW National Home. I am very honored to be able to introduce your next guest. A year and a half ago, we hired -- the board did -- Mike Wilson, and we are very happy today that we did. He is a man of God, country, and community.

He believes in the home, and he has a brighter future for it. So without anymore said, I would like to introduce to you retired Sergeant Major Mike Wilson.

SERGEANT MAJOR WILSON: All right.

Commander Borland, national leaders, comrades and patriots, on behalf of the veterans families and staff of the National Home, thank you so much for letting us come be with you this week.

You know, the National Home has a mission, and our mission is to assist military, veterans and their families with children by creating a foundation of services and support. We want them all to have the resources available to do so and to complete with success.

And we do that by everything we learn and all the knowledge we gain coming here and being with you all and networking, we take all this back with us to support the veterans of the National Home.

If I could ask, please watch this short video that will give you a little better idea from three different types of families that are at the home, how things are going for the National Home.

(The video was played.)

(Applause.)

SERGEANT MAJOR WILSON: So you may have all seen Brian in the past. We've shared footage of him before. Brian grew up at the National Home and became such a patriot that he joined the Army. He was severely injured in combat in Iraq, as you've seen overcome his injuries.

And he still calls the National Home home and every time he's out there, he feels like he's at home.

Lujan, his wife Michelle, they have three very energetic, motivated young children that I think takes up a ton of their time and they're working through things daily.

Lastly, Kristen, her dad was a Vietnam vet. She's here. She's at the

National Home because of you. Her daughter, a nice young lady who has honorably dubbed me "somebody's grandpa." And so I take that title very well. If you would like to know the whole story about how she came to that, I would be glad to tell you.

If you stop by our booth, I'll share that information with you. But that's one of my favorite new titles, "somebody's grandpa."

They all have one thing in common. They continue to grow and learn. They understand that they are a part of a community of like-minded people who will support them along their journey through life, not just the time they're at the National Home.

Their confidence grows almost daily. And they're becoming resilient. And that's all thanks to you. So let me share some things that are happening at the home currently.

We have 42 single-family houses at the home. Currently 36 are occupied.

We have three families in the pipeline nearing completion of their assessment, and we would assume at least one will be moving in the next week or so.

We have one house that's under construction. It's getting a whole new kitchen. It's getting expanded on to get a new kitchen. Thanks, Maryland. Where is Maryland? Thank you very much.

And the two houses are ready for other occupants to move in. It's my firm belief that before Thanksgiving, we'll have all the houses full. And that's what we want to do. We have to serve as many people as we can at the National Home. And it's not -- it's not without having 42 full houses.

We created a process to meet the goal of turning most houses around in just 30 days. So once the houses are full, as people get through their time there and they move out, we want to turn that house around as fast as possible and get the next family in there.

We've resolved our Internet issues. I think when I was here last, I shared with you we had a huge problem with Internet, and we are conveniently located in the middle of nowhere, and it was tough to get broadband services. But we solved that problem, and as of today, there's installers on campus installing fiber all over campus.

And by probably the next two weeks, we should be able to teleport people back up to the Starship Enterprise. We'll have great Internet.

We have some great programs. We have a Heroes to Hive program which is a beekeeper apprenticeship program. Our bees are on campus, and they seem very happy to be there too.

Guitars for Vets. We got three new guitarists out of the last class. We're getting ready to start the next class in the fall.

One of my favorite things, just two weeks ago, we were awarded from the Michigan Veteran Affairs Agency, Gold Level Veteran Friendly Employer Status. We're only one of 25 organizations in the 6- or 700 employers around the state who have qualified either bronze or gold, bronze or silver, one of only 25 that have

qualified for gold.

I say that because we now have 11 veterans working on our campus and employed by the National Home. We've increased benefits and programs to make their lives easier as they work through their veteran issues while they continue to be successful and great employees.

To wrap up, I would like to thank you all in all you do to support us, through financial donations, but, mostly, getting the word out, spreading the word about the National Home. I can tell you right now, on campus, we have families from Florida, Texas, Tennessee, Utah, Oregon, Kansas, North Carolina, and Missouri who all live on our campus. And that's because of you.

Thank you for sharing the word with them and letting them know that it's the National Home. It's not the Michigan home. It's the National Home. And we want everybody there that needs our services. Because as you serve, so do we. We prove daily, daily, that nobody does more for veterans than the VFW National Home.

(Applause.)

SERGEANT MAJOR WILSON: So now I rattled on long enough. I'd like to share that in March, we were blessed with several candidates that were presented to compete for this year's Buddy Poppy Child. And today, I am thrilled to present to you the bright, energetic, and highly competitive 2023/2024 Buddy Poppy Child, Layla.

LAYLA: Hello, everyone. My name is Layla and I'm 12 years old. I was an Illinois 2 house at the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan. My mom's name is Luisa. And I have four brothers.

Their names are Isaiah, who is 16; Noah, who is 9; Jaxon, who is 6; and Potato, our German Shepherd who is nine months old.

I just completed 6th grade and I'm looking forward to starting 7th grade in the fall. My favorite subject is math. And when I grow up, I want to be an entrepreneur so I can be my own boss.

My hobbies are playing video games, building things from cardboard, playing on the keyboard, and taking Potato out for walks.

However, the hobby that I love the most is playing the keyboard and learning new things with Ms. Rhonda, my piano instructor.

I love living at the National Home because we have a home that is safe and beautiful. The home also offers us so many fun things to do.

My brothers and I love playing basketball at the community center gym.

This past year, we also have a chance to go to Cedar Point, enjoy the State Days, see Santa on a fire truck for Cootie Christmas, and I raised and sold my pigs named Hammy and Porky for 4-H at the Eaton County Fair.

We wouldn't have had this opportunity if it wasn't for my mom and her military service. She served nine years in the world's finest Navy as an aviation ordnanceman.

(Applause.)

LAYLA: She deployed four times and loved serving her country. I am proud of my mom and of all the men and women who have given their lives, who have served, and who continue to fight to keep America safe. Thank you.
(Applause.)

SERGEANT MAJOR WILSON: Okay. The last thing we would like to do is we brought a gift for the Commander-in-Chief.

He says, Huh. Chief, could you join me.

So in the bag, there is a solid mahogany handmade box full of fun things -- we'll leave that at that -- made by a local veteran in your honor. He made it in your honor. But the thing I would like to share most is this picture.

Last year, after the chief became Commander-in-Chief, he took the time out of his schedule and he came and he visited the National Home during our October membership meeting.

That same day, we were cutting the ribbon on the veteran family resource center that is the bottom half of the health and education building. Down there, we house resources that support our veterans. We have employment resources, we have education resources, we have several different organizations that stop by and use that space to support our veterans, not only on campus, but those in the surrounding community.

And he was there that day to help us cut that ribbon. And in doing so, we're so glad to have you as the Commander-in-Chief and to take the time to come spend at the National Home. As a matter of fact, I think you got a couple of new life members for the National Home that day while he was there.

We've painted on the wall, the National Home at the entry, the exact logo you see on the front of this podium that every veteran counts. And on the National Home grounds, every single veteran counts, Chief.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Outstanding. It's a pin with her picture on it. It says, "VFW Buddy Poppy '22/'23 Child."
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I'm going to put this on my suit right now.

SERGEANT MAJOR WILSON: Please visit our booth. Come stop by and see us and see all the things going on at the National Home. We have more things out there. We would be glad to have you stop by for a visit. Thank you.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I guess I'm going to find out what's in that box later, but I will look at it. Thank you, Mike. Thank you, National Home. Thank you, Annabelle. Thank you, Layla.

In keeping with our great time-honored VFW tradition, our Buddy Poppy Child will now mingle among the generous VFW members present and pass the hat on behalf of the National Home.

So please give what you can to this ever-impactive organization. Your donation to such a worthy cause will further brighten Layla's day and definitely the National Home for the future of these kids and families to make them great Americans and hopefully serve our country one day.

While she's walking around passing the hat, we're going to continue with our program.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:
KELLY GAREY, VFW TEACHER OF THE YEAR
ELEMENTARY (GRADES K-5)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Teachers are a very foundation of a free and democratic society. And when teachers are committed to teaching patriotism and Americanism to their students, those students grow up to be civically responsible leaders.

In our efforts to celebrate the work these patriotic and dutiful teachers do every day in their classroom, it brings me great pleasure to introduce the 2023 national citizenship education teacher of the year representing grades K-5, Kelly Garey from Caldwell, Idaho.

Kelly whose careers in the Navy reserve and education have spanned more than 30 years uses her military experience to help her students and community understand why veterans serve. As a second grade teacher at Van Buren Elementary School, she has not only expanded STEM access beyond the classroom and spearheaded drug prevention programs, she has worked tirelessly to establish programs that connect students with military and veteran communities.

Kelly's continued efforts to serve local communities while organizing field trips, activities, and services to help her students learn about the recognition American veterans and their military service helps to ensure patriotism and a sense of service continue to have a place in her classroom.

Please join me in welcoming Kelly Garey, sponsored by VFW Post 3886 in Caldwell, Idaho.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Her plaque reads, "Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, Grade Level K through 5," presented to Kelly Garey, Van Buren Elementary School, 2022/2023. (Applause.)

KELLY GAREY: Good morning, fellow comrades and honored guests. I am excited to be here today.

First, I would like to tell you a little bit about myself.

I have taught for over 32 years. I am currently teaching second grade at Van Buren Elementary School in Caldwell, Idaho.

I also served for 30 years and recently retired as a chief petty officer with the United States Navy reserves.
(Applause.)

KELLY GAREY: Secondly, I want to tell you how I got here. My father was the oldest of nine boys who all served in the U.S. Navy. That was one reason I joined the Navy reserves. I was only four when my father was killed in a Navy plane crash. Three years later, my mom married the man who raised me.

My stepdad was ornery but had a strong work ethic. Every night we would sit at the family dinner table and have heated discussions. He did not really mean it, but would joke that teachers were too lazy to work and too stupid to steal.

He would also complain about weekend warriors being a waste of taxpayer money.

Again, he didn't believe any of what he said. He just wanted to get a rise out of me.

Years later, I was talking to him and said, You know how you used to complain about teachers and weekend warriors, and I became a teacher and a Navy reservist? He said, Yes. Well, I replied, It was a good thing you didn't complain about prostitution.

(Applause.)

KELLY GAREY: Sadly, he died in a motorcycle accident years ago, but I know he was proud of me.

And another reason I became a teacher was when I was in high school, my junior year, I was a teacher -- I did a class called teacher aide practicum, so I was allowed to be a kindergarten aide all afternoon for the entire year. And I absolutely loved it. And that's when I decided I wanted to be a teacher.

Fast-forward 15 years. I was walking into my Albertson's when I saw a VFW table and went to make a donation. That is when I met Troy Junior. There he is. And Troy told me about the teacher of the year program and put me in touch with Master Chief Denny Kroner, who is also back there, who not only helped me with my submission package, but recruited me into the Caldwell VFW Post.
(Applause.)

KELLY GAREY: And voluntold (sic) me into the service officer position. I am currently the Caldwell Post Junior Vice Commander.
(Applause.)

KELLY GAREY: That's okay because I recruited Denny into the Gem State Chief Petty Officer Association.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone for this award.

First, my husband, Michael Garey. I met him when he was a marine tanker and -- Semper Fi.

I met him when he was a marine tanker on the INI staff for Charlie

Company. We were in the same building. Navy on the left; Marines on the right.

He volunteered to come to my school and present the Navy and Marine Corps drug reduction program for red ribbon week, which I still continue to this day. We both wore our dress blues. We were married on the drill deck one year later to the day.

My husband just retired as a tank instructor for the Army National Guard with 32 years active duty combined service. He couldn't be here today because he now works for range control out of the Orchard Training Combat Training Center. And duty called. So I brought my friend and colleague Janet Goede who is in the front row.

Next, I'd like to thank my two sons, Grayson and Brennan, for always supporting both of my careers. Also, I have to thank my second grade team, including Janet, who had their classes make gifts and cards for veterans, along with my class, as well as put care packages together for deployed sailors and Marines.

I would also like to say, all of my former students who, as far as I know, grew up to be very successful. In fact, one joined the Navy reserves and was actually in my unit.

Last, I would like to thank all of my Idaho VFW comrades and the entire VFW family for putting me on this path and honoring me with this prestigious award.

The last Idaho teacher that was awarded this award, who incidentally was a reservist with me, ended her speech with "Go Navy, Beat Army." I won't do that. Instead, may I have all active or retired chiefs, senior chiefs, and master chiefs please stand.
(Applause.)

KELLY GAREY: Stay standing. We're not finished yet.
(Yelling.)

KELLY GAREY: That was my favorite thing to do.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All right, Army. Go Army, beat Navy.

Kelly, the national organization would like to present you with \$1,000 check for your charities of helping kids in 5th grade. I like that roar from the Army. I really did. So we got a lot of Army in here, no doubt. Love it. Love it.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:

SUSAN ALLGOOD, VFW TRACHER OF THE YEAR
MIDDLE SCHOOL (GRADES 6-8)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Next, I'm very pleased to introduce the 2023 national citizenship education teacher of the year, representing grades 6 through 8. Susan Allgood from Toccoa, Georgia. I'm a Yankee. Okay. With two sons on active duty, Susan understands firsthand how important connecting the

veteran and military communities with today's youth is.

Not only does she encourage every student in her school to participate in VFW Patriot's Pen essay contest, Susan introduces novels and biographies about veterans, the military, and our nation's history into her curriculum.

Along with examining the devastation and aftermath of 9/11, she has organized field trips to New York to help inspire and remind her students of the true cost of our freedom and what they do and the differences they can make matters.

Please join me in welcoming Susan Allgood, sponsored by VFW Post 4346 in Toccoa, Georgia.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Her award reads, "Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, Grade Level 6 through 8," presented to Susan Allgood, Stephens County Middle School, 2022/2023.

(Applause.)

SUSAN ALLGOOD: Good morning. It is such an honor and privilege to be here today. I would like to begin by thanking VFW Post 4347, Toccoa, Georgia, Georgia VFW Second District, Georgia State VFW, and the National VFW for their confidence on my career as an educator.

Receiving the prestigious award is the apex of my 27-year teaching career. I can't imagine anything that could surpass this honor because it represents the reverence of those who gave their lives for the freedoms we all enjoy every day.

For those of you here that have served or are serving or have family members currently serving in our nation's military, please accept my sincere appreciation.

I, as well, have two sons serving in the military. My oldest son in the Air Force flies the KC46 and is stationed in New Jersey.

(Applause.)

SUSAN ALLGOOD: My youngest son in the Army, is in the infantry.

(Applause.)

SUSAN ALLGOOD: And just a few short weeks ago, deployed. As a teacher and mother who has children serving in the military, I find myself listening carefully to the moments that define their lives as servicemen.

Having never served in the military myself, I can't say that I know what life was like for you, nor what it is really like for either one of my children.

I do know that there are many things that shape the lives of a soldier and what goes on behind the scenes is something that Hollywood tries desperately to accomplish but may never be able to capture in a multimillion dollar movie based on real life accounts of important men and women of valor in history.

Promoting civic responsibility, flag etiquette, and patriotism in my classroom is something that always came naturally to me. I also think that as an

educator, being dedicated to what our Constitution represents is one of the most honorable responsibilities.

(Applause)

SUSAN ALLGOOD: so how can educators today impact students who desire to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, and secure the blessings of liberty for themselves and their posterity?

I think that answer is found in our nation's educational curriculum, and that is why teaching middle schoolers the value of the ultimate price paid for our freedoms is essential to me. It is why honoring our veterans must continue.

As you know, better than I, the scars of a veteran can run deep, physically, emotionally, and mentally. I would like to see that our men and women in the Armed Forces, past and present, are treated with the respect and dignity that they deserve.

Personally, I think veterans and active-duty soldiers deserve the best healthcare, retirement, and pay our country can offer.

(Applause.)

SUSAN ALLGOOD: The ones who put their lives on hold and on the line for others should be paid accordingly. And that is just one roundtable discussion my students have had about soldiers and their needs. Our students today cannot lead us into the future believing the status quo is acceptable.

They must know their history on local, state, and national level in order to be able to carry on the legacy of so many.

One such moment in history, I'm certain you have all heard of, is Easy Company's journey from intense training at Camp Toccoa to airborne landings in Normandy. The famous Band of Brothers, a 2001 HBO miniseries depicts the lives of paratroopers in Easy Company which has -- which was part of the 2nd Battalion 506 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

In July of 1942, over 5,000 young men first arrived at the train station in Toccoa, Georgia, my hometown, and made the five-mile march to Camp Toccoa to begin training. Their three miles up and three miles down hike of Currahee Mountain was only one rigorous exercise they took to prepare for war.

Our Toccoa Historical Society states, One of their most famous physical tasks was a 115-mile march from Camp Toccoa to Atlanta, Georgia. They departed Toccoa in December of 1941, and arrived in Atlanta in March of 1942, where they were sent to Fort Benning.

Over the next few years, 17,000 soldiers from the 501st, 506th, 511th, and 517th Parachute Infantry Division, the 295th Ordnance Heavy Maintenance, and the 38 Signal Construction Battalion trained at Camp Toccoa in preparation to defend the free world from the German offenses that was World War II.

Today, the train depot has been revitalized as a military museum, and the

camp is undergoing restoration. My community is ensuring that those men's lives are revered for the prices they paid for our freedoms and the history of their moment in time will persevere for decades to come.

For students to know that this story is real life history of men and women within their community and not just a movie is more valuable. But there are thousands of others who have given their lives to our national cause whose stories are outside the boundaries of northeast Georgia.

For the past few years, my 8th grade students have been reading and studying about Louis Zamperini, an Olympic runner and World War II soldier who served as a bombardier in the Pacific on B24 Liberators. I'm sure you know his story. His plane crashed into the ocean where he spent 47 days in a desperate survival of his life.

How does a body not succumb to hunger, thirst, hallucinations, and staving off of sharks to then only be captured by the enemy and be tortured physically, mentally, and emotionally? My students are challenged to reflect on Louis' situation and how his story of survival gives them hope for their future because they can find confidence in the resilience of this hero's character.

My 7th graders have found the ease with which people are deceived and manipulated as they read Prisoner B-3087 and the Diary of Anne Frank, both from the perspective of children their own age who hid from the Nazi party during World War II. Yanek Gruener survived; Anne Frank, however, does not.

Additionally, without reading novels such as Ground Zero and discussing speeches and events surrounding 9/11, none of these students may see where American resolve can bring about the best in our citizens. I remember where I was on 9/11. I was teaching a 4th grade class when someone came to my door and stated that an airplane had crashed into the World Trade Center.

Just a few moments later, with my classroom TV on, my students watched as unexpectedly the second tower fell. None of us knew then that we were a part of history. I remember clearly watching the news that evening and seeing the replay of President Bush receiving the terrible news as he observed a reading demonstration in a classroom in Sarasota, Florida. There was no doubt he was disturbed by this news.

And the next day, he would make his famous bullhorn speech stating, I can hear you, the rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon. I remember thinking how hard that must have been knowing that he would send many of you into harm's way.

When I think my students aren't listening, it's the dissection of famous speeches, memoirs, and diaries such as these that remind me they haven't been exposed to the reality of tragedy such as this on a national basis. Therefore, I think these lessons, as tragic as they are, impart the spirit of the best in Americans.

And our students need to see this today more than ever. They need to see where we rally together rather than tear each other down, where we think about others, rather than ourselves, where our differences are set aside to work together. We need to make every day better than the day before.

Writing the VFW Patriot's Pen essay is just the place for students to discover where their own strengths lie, where their own desire to serve this great country is perhaps mounted, and where they find compassion for you and all veterans.

I'm proud to say that I have had several state winners in the Patriot's Pen essay contest, and those students were so excited to know that their words meant something to you as veterans.

Gathering here today in Phoenix, Arizona, is ironic. The Phoenix is a symbol of hope, rebirth, and transformation. Phoenix, Arizona, is considered, and I quote, industrious, enterprising, and imaginative. In 1867, a gentleman named Jack Swilling saw promise in the rich soil, but it was void of water.

His vision for this land came to fruition by the carving out of a canal to provide water from the Salt River. My point is that Swilling had a vision of transformation from a desolate land to one that would benefit the people who were searching for a better way of life.

As I reflected on this, I thought, do we today share this common thread as much as our ancestors?

Another quick look at history shows us that not only have Americans sought the laws bestowed through the Constitution, but we have also continued to disobey them.

Franklin D. Roosevelt in his inaugural address in 1936 stated, "There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations, much is given, while other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny."

28 years later, in 1964, Ronald Reagan stated closely aligned sentiments in a presidential election campaign for Republican nominee, Barry Goldwater. He said, "You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We will preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we will sentence them to take the first step into 1,000 years of darkness.

"If we fail, at least let our children and our children's children say of us that we justified our brief moment here. We did all that could be done."

I do believe that, once again, we have a rendezvous with destiny. And, perhaps, my friends, today, more than ever. So educators must ensure that students know what has been done so they can continue to enjoy the liberties they may take for granted. It is evident that our veterans continue to bear the burden of history, and I don't want my students to forget it.

That is one reason we join together and wear red on Fridays to remember those who are currently sacrificing time with their family for the democracy in which we share.

There is a framed quote on my classroom door that says, "The future of the world is in my classroom today." My students must embrace the title of the future as if looking on time from a DeLorean space travel machine. Because, as you and I all know, we blink and today is gone. We can't determine the future, but surely we can learn from past mistakes.

I want my students to carry a torch to see all the good there is in this country and to aspire to make their future a bright one. They must be able to carry the flame in honor of you and all of those who have served and perhaps gave their lives defending the enemies of freedom and for all Americans young and old.

I implore all educators to focus on history, not as a way to rewrite it but as a way to not repeat it. I entreat them to be role models our forefathers would be proud to meet if they stepped out of the pages of a history book. I urge them to demonstrate flag etiquette because many of our students don't understand the significance of it.

And I pray that as educators we can be a beacon of light to the children that are our future.

In conclusion, I would like to reflect on the famous words of Abraham Lincoln reminding us still today that we must remember our call is to the sense of a free country, that each of us has a duty to remember the plight of those who gave their lives for America and those who still serve her.

Lincoln said, "It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that call for which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

May we never forget that freedom is not free. May God bless each and every veteran here and those who encompass our communities. May He protect those still serving. And may God bless the United States of America. Thank you. (Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, Susan is also going to get \$1,000 check for what she's done with these kids.

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:
JAVIER MARTINEZ, VFW TEACHER OF THE YEAR
HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9-12)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Last, but not certainly least, I'm pleased to welcome the 2023 national citizenship education teacher of the year representing grades 9 through 12, Javier Martinez, of Maple Park, Illinois.

As a teacher of U.S. and World History, American Studies, Foundations of American Democracy and Armed Conflict of International Relations, Javier, 10 years of service in the Marine Corps, has provided valuable insight when teaching his students the fundamentals of democracy.

Whether he's coordinating travel projects to American military cemeteries in Europe and Civil War battlefields throughout the great nation or teaching his students this value of supporting their community through annual Toys for Tots

holiday toy drives, Javier brings patriotism, passion, and his love of country to our younger generation every day.

There's no doubt the impact he has on his students is one that will last lifetime, ensuring the stories of military service and sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Please join me in welcoming Javier Martinez, sponsored by VFW Post 5819 of Lemont, Illinois.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: This award brings Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year, grade level 9 through 12. Presented to Javier Martinez, Kaneland High School, 2022/2023.
(Applause.)

JAVIER MARTINEZ: Good morning. So I -- I apologize in advance. I do not have a prepared speech. And for those of you who are wondering, this is not written in crayon. I ate those earlier.

I want to start off by thanking fellow marine Vicki Cobbett. Vicki, are you in here somewhere? There she is. From VFW Post 5819 in Lemont, and also the commander and senior commander, Bob Rose, who can't be here and Joe Martin who is here with Vicki. Thank you for nominating me.

I don't know how you got away with it. And the things you wrote, I haven't seen yet. Hopefully, they're all true.

I would also like to acknowledge my mother, who obviously is not here because I am old. But, Mom, you thought I would get arrested when I told you I was going to go into teaching because you thought that my Marine Corps upbringing would not serve me well in the classroom, but here I am. Seems like it all worked out okay.

And, lastly, I want to acknowledge my lovely wife, Cathy, who about 42 years ago became a Marine Corps wife, followed me around the country and overseas with our two daughters. Talked me into leaving because we had a family, and I was good with that but then looked the other way when I joined the reserves.

And then watched as I went away for Desert Storm and then came back and was still there waiting for me which is a good thing.

And then watched me as I continued to get involved with more veterans' causes. So even though you don't wear the uniform, you can still serve, and she has supported me every step of the way.
(Applause.)

JAVIER MARTINEZ: Probably the biggest thing was when I decided to leave a six-figure career in the corporate world to go into teaching. I did not realize the pay cut would be so significant.

I'm always asked, what was more difficult, being a Marine Corps officer or being a high school history teacher? And the jury is still out on that. I'm not quite sure. It depends on the day and when you ask me. But I will tell you this: They

are equally rewarding.

Working with the kids is amazing every single day. And I say there are no bad kids. There are some parentally challenged kids, but no bad kids.

I want -- this is a message to all the representatives here from the posts across the country. Picking the teacher of the year for all three levels ought to be harder than woodpecker lips. If you did not nominate someone, you need to nominate a teacher from post -- from your post area.

There are amazing teachers out in this country. They get a bad rap sometimes because of that one bad apple. And we all know, all of us who served, there was always that one guy or girl in that unit who gave everybody else a bad name, but most of them were amazing people.

Same thing goes with teachers. They're out there. There ought to be thousands of teachers nominated next year. Every single post in this country has a good teacher in their community. Talk to the kids. They'll tell you who the good ones are. Go out, get to know them, nominate them.

It ought to be so difficult to pick the best because there are so many good teachers out there. They're just doing their job quietly like we all did when we were in the service.

Last thing I want to mention. The kids just need someone to act as an example. I'm going to give a public service announcement right now with your permission.

Eight years ago, I was blessed to go to a teacher professional development where one of the topics was, the Medal of Honor character development program.

That's all I had to hear. I sat in, and immediately afterwards said, How do I get involved? They said, Send me a resume. I sent it. It probably went in a circular file. I never heard back from them. Two years later on their newsletter, they were looking for trainers. I said, What the heck? I submitted it again. This time I got chosen.

So for the last eight years as a teacher, I've been blessed to travel the country teaching other teachers about what the Medal of Honor represents and providing them with resources to use the program with their students to teach their students about core values of character, about courage, commitment, citizenship, sacrifice, integrity, and patriotism.

None of those words should sound foreign to anyone in this room. That program is available to all of your teachers across this country for the great price of free.

I'll say it again. Free. No charge at all. The recipients that I work for want this program in front of every kid from the elementary level, kindergarten, all the way up to 12th grade. You can help us make that happen.

When you go back, tell your school board, tell your principals that there is an amazing program out there that's not a recruitment tool. It's a character education tool. And it's free. And I'll stick around here for a little bit afterwards if you want to come talk to me about it.

I am out here spreading the gospel for that program. I am blessed to be

up here because of Vicki and Joe and Lemont Post 5819, but I want to multiply that impact.

So help me do that. Thank you all so much.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Of course, we are also going to give Javier a \$1,000 check for what he does with his kids.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: And I have a question for Javier. I heard you're a Desert Storm veteran?

Are you a member of the VFW?

JAVIER MARTINEZ: I am not sir. I activated but did not deploy.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Oh, oh, okay. He just told me the magic word because I was just about ready to sign him up. He was in support of Desert Storm and never did deploy. So I cannot give him this application. That's a sad moment because I would have loved to do it. And y'all know that, don't you?
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JAVIER MARTINEZ: One last comment. I didn't -- it was not lost on me that the individuals from the VFW who are up here that seemed to be in some sort of honor guard are wearing Marine Corps summer service Charlie uniforms.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: So, Javier, do you have any relatives near you that have deployed overseas?

JAVIER MARTINEZ: Believe it or not, I'm the only person in my family who has served.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Well, Auxiliary, I tried.

JAVIER MARTINEZ: But I am a member of the Marine Corps League.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:

VFW DISTINGUISHED PATRIOTIC AWARD TO CONNOR NICOL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I thought I was going to get No. 13 since I've been here, but I guess I didn't. I actually got 12 in this convention center. All you got to do is walk up to vendors.

Vendors are veterans, too.

When our next guest was just 12 years old, seeing photos of service members killed in action during World War II who barely looked older than he was made him think about all the things those brave men wouldn't get a chance to do and the life they wouldn't get to experience.

Those photos made such an enormous impact on him that he wanted to do something to ensure their service and sacrifice would always be remembered.

Thus Connor Nicol created the We Will Remember memorial dog tag project. Created in 2020 and recognized as an official 501(c)(3) in 2021, Connor's

We Will Remember project makes dog tags stamped with the name, rank, military branch, and conflict for service members killed in action during our country's wars and gives them away free.

I'll represent that again. For free, to Americans with a simple ask to adopt the name of the service member on the dog tag to help ensure that their legacy will live on. To date, Connor has made more than 40,000 dog tags. Each carrying the name of a service member killed in action. With names from the Korean War complete, he continues to raise money to work through names from the Vietnam War,

and the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and World War II.

It is an honor and a privilege to present the 2023 VFW patriotic award to such an amazing and inspiring young man, Mr. Connor Nicol.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Patriotic Award and Citation awarded to Connor G. Nicol, in special recognition and sincere appreciation of his commitment and dedication to honoring and preserving the legacy of America's fallen service members through his We Will Remember dog tag project.

The selflessness, patriotism, and honor he extends to America's brave servicemen and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for our great country by connecting our nation's citizens with their names, helps to ensure their service is never forgotten, thus duly earning him the utmost respect and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 25th day of July 2023, approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, Dan West, Adjutant General.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, as I noted, he was 12 years old in 2020, which means he is only 14 years old and has handed out 40,000 dog tags.
(Applause.)

CONNOR NICOL: Thank you very much for inviting me here for this honor. As you have probably heard, my name is Connor Nicol. I'm a 14-year-old and I'm a rising freshman at Winnacunnet High School in Hampton, New Hampshire.

I founded We Will Remember in 2020, and have learned so much from all of the amazing people that I have gotten to work with. I got the idea for We Will Remember when I was 12. I was watching a movie about World War II. I believe it was Saving Private Ryan.

All of the service members that died just looked so young. This got me asking questions and looking for more information. It turns out that the real service

members were even younger than the actors in the movies. I have two brothers. The soldiers, sailors, and Marines really didn't look much older than us.

They left home to go protect our freedom. They didn't get to return. They didn't get to finish growing up, get married, and have children. My family is a military family. My dad is an active duty marine, and my mom, grandpa, and my great-grandpas all served.

We talk a lot about our family that served and their friends that didn't get to come home. But I wanted to know who are members of service members that didn't get to come home, have kids? Who remembers them once time passes and their parents, brothers, sisters, and friends pass away?

These service members give us an amazing gift. I thought that they deserved to be remembered for the individual and amazing person that they were. I think that these brave service members deserve to be more than just a name on a wall or only be representative of a group memorial.

Don't get me wrong. I think that these monuments and memorials are great, but I also think that each person's name deserves to be remembered, too. So I started We Will Remember. My dad wears dog tags when he deploys. My mom actually has a spare set that she keeps on her nightstand when he is gone. She says that sometimes she holds them when she prays at night for his safe return.

So I decided I wanted to make memorial dog tags for every person that didn't get to come home. I make a tag with each name, with their name, rank, and service and branch on it. I paid for the first 500 tags with my – I paid for the first 500 with money that I earned from doing chores and mowing lawns.

I get the information from the tags from the National Archives. And I attach each dog tag with informational sheet that gives a little more information, like the hometown and date that the service member died. I find a person who is willing to keep the tag.

Most people hang them somewhere where they see it daily, like the rearview mirror key chain. A lot of teens hang them from their backpacks. I hang mine next to my bed so I can keep them my prayers each night. I never sell the dog tags. They are free to the person who adopts them.

I just ask they say the service member's name to keep him in their thoughts and prayers. The motto of We Remember is the sacrifice made by those who chose to protect our freedom will not be forgotten. Every life matters, and every name will be remembered.

I think it's even more important for the teens my age. When people adopt a tag, they read the name, and I think this forms a personal connection. Many people do research and learn more about the service member. Some visit their grave site on Memorial Day to pay their respects.

I think that this personal connection creates increased awareness of the sacrifice made by the military. Providing for the gift of our freedom and a sense of patriotism that is more than flying a flag on holidays.

In 2021, We Remember became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. As the project grew, it formed a board of directors who have been amazing. Most of them are

active duty service members or veterans who have lost friends in our wars and believe in the mission of the project. I have now made over 50,000 dog tags.

I finished making over 36,000 tags from the Korean War and I'm working on the Vietnam War tags. After I finish the Vietnam War, I plan to move on to the tags for the Beirut bombing, Wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, Desert Storm, before starting World War II.

I work with VFW Post, American Legions, DER groups, church groups, school groups, Scout groups, and a lot of services groups that help sponsor and find homes for the tags.

I set up at businesses, events, festivals, and have been available in the -- they have been available for adoption at parades, scouting events, summer camps, golf tournaments, and air shows.

Since the tags are free to the person adopting them, this project would never be possible without the amazing people and groups that help sponsor the tags.

They are amazing and I want to thank them more than they could ever know. Thank you for having me here. This is a really great experience that I'll never forget.

If you're interested, I brought dog tags with me that are ready for adoption. I also have information about how you can share the We Remember dog tags in your own community. Please stop by the VFW program booth. Thank you. (Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Wow. Only 14 years old. Amazing. 40,000 dog tags, a 501(c)(3). I think he's going to be an entrepreneur, no doubt.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS:

JARED LYON, STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Our next guest served as a submariner and diver during his time with the United States Navy. Deploying multiple times throughout the world in support of the global war on terrorism.

Appointed as president and CEO of Student Veterans of America in 2016, Jared Lyon continues to help forge critical business relationships, like the one with our organization, to help ensure America's service members and veterans have the tools and support needed to achieve educational success.

SVA's vision is one we wholeheartedly support to ensure all veterans succeed in higher education, achieve their academic goals and gain meaningful employment. And we remain dedicated to advocating alongside them.

Now, please give me a warm welcome to an outstanding leader and veterans' advocate, VFW life member of Post 3308 in Tallahassee, Florida, Jared Lyon. (Applause.)

JARED LYON: Good morning, everyone.

That's fantastic. Could we try that -- that was motivational. Good morning, everyone.
(Good morning.)

JARED LYON: That's because the Navy said hoo-ya before, so everyone was feeling it. Right. No Navy love today.

So I was just telling -- it was good to see National Commander-in-Chief Borland. I think the last time we might have seen each other was at a breakfast at the White House. So it's fantastic to see you again.

The first thing I'd like to do this morning is just to thank each and every one of you for getting me out of Washington, D.C. for a couple of days. You could clap for that. That's allowed.

So I traded the humidity for a dry heat, from what I understand. But it's been really good to be here in Phoenix. So I'm humbled and honored to be here before all of you as the national president and chief executive officer of Student Veterans of America.

It was already mentioned, a vet of the world's finest Navy and a life member of the VFW.
(Applause.)

JARED LYON: So I stand here today with a heart that is truly filled with gratitude. I was earlier reminiscing about when I joined the VFW at Post 3308 back in 2010 when I was an undergraduate student veteran at a small state school in Tallahassee, Florida, called Florida State University.

Go Gators. No, you said it wrong. It's go Noles, at least for the upcoming football season. At least he didn't say Miami. So we're good there.

The VFW truly provided me with a sense of belonging and camaraderie that helped me to navigate the journey from truly a subpar sailor to a variety of postmilitary transitions, from community college to entrepreneurship, to a stint in the front office of the Washington Nationals Major League Baseball team, all before arriving in Tallahassee, Florida, to attend my dream school, Florida State University.

It was at FSU where I found my passion for advocating on behalf of our nation's veterans and our family members. FSU is where I proposed to my beautiful wife, Shayla, on the 50-yard line of Bobby Bowden field at Doak Campbell Stadium, home of the Florida State Seminoles.

My wife is the daughter of a United States Marine Corps veteran. Nothing for the Marine Corps. Come on, Marines. My father-in-law, Rick, served in the Marine Corps proudly in Vietnam. Today, I'm here before you as a student veteran.

Again, I'm proud to report to all of you that I just finished the course work in pursuit of my Ph.D. at Syracuse University. Upstate New York.
(Applause)

JARED LYON: I just showed Tim my Syracuse University Socks. So I',

currently studying the national security implications of an educated populace, which honestly still blows my mind. I grew up in a small town in Carver, Massachusetts. It's a great state.

But I'm the son of a master electrician and a daycare owner. And the idea that I would ever go on to college, let alone getting a Ph.D., wasn't possible without my service in the United States Navy, which earned me the GI bill.

Saying all of this, I can't help but feel humbled to be among all of you, my fellow veterans, at this momentous event. I was undergraduate student veteran when post commander of Post 3308 came to an SVA chapter meeting where our post commander then was Mark Alvarez, and he invited veterans on our campus to join him and his comrades in the VFW.

Because the post commander invited me, a post-9/11 veteran to join the VFW, I did. That one decision to join your ranks led me to be able to do what I did today.

Ryan Gallucci, who is now the executive director of VFW's Washington office, opened more doors for me for my continued service to our veterans' community. I traveled to Washington, D.C., to advocate for student veterans in 2011. And simply because I was a member of the VFW, Ryan took time to meet with me and to help me strategize on the idea of how we could make in-state tuition a permanent law of the land.

It was VFW legends like Ryan Gallucci and Bob Wallace that took me under their wings and showed me how to get things done in Washington, D.C. I would like to take a moment, particularly as a post-9/11 veteran, to share what it means that the VFW has Ryan Gallucci leading our Washington office.

He's a champion for all veterans. But it's just so empowering to see someone from my generation taking the helm and leading the charge on the Hill. Please, everybody, keep your eye on Ryan Gallucci. He's destined to continue to do great things for our sisters and brothers in arms.

Would you give it up for Ryan Gallucci who is sitting in the front row here. (Applause.)

JARED LYON: And I grew up in Massachusetts, but Ryan's from Rhode Island, so he's a fellow New Englander. The bond between the VFW and student Veterans of America isn't just symbolic. It's a testament to the power of unity, resilience, and the spirit of service that defines us as veterans.

Today's student veterans and members of SVA are more than just tomorrow's leaders. They are the solution to any challenges that America faces today or in our future.

We, as veterans, have faced adversity in training, in our deployments, in times of war, and in times of peace. And because of this, we carry that same determination and demonstrated resilience as well as courage into our pursuits of education and advocacy for veterans.

The VFW and SVA have a special relationship that goes beyond mere affiliation. It is a shared commitment to empower, support, and uplift our fellow

veterans no matter where they are in their journeys. And it is together with your steadfast support that we can create lasting change for the betterment of all veterans and our families.

One crucial program that exemplifies the strength of our partnership is the VFW SVA legislative fellowship. This program brings together exemplary student veterans from SVA and offers them the opportunity to make their voices heard on Capitol Hill and in their local communities.

It's a remarkable platform that allows these veterans to address issues that, no matter what their backgrounds are, matter most to our community. And they do this through federal policy solutions and community-based advocacy.

Now, in its 10th year, this highly competitive VFW SVA legislative fellowship aims to bring selective student veterans who are also VFW members to Washington, D.C., to meet face to face with their members of Congress where they're empowered to design their own form of advocacy about issues that are deeply personal to them, to help solve problems or improve circumstances in the veteran community writ large.

Our VFW SVA legislative fellows are changing each of our lives for the better as veterans each and every year. I want to urge you, my fellow VFW members, to rally behind this exceptional initiative, encourage eligible veterans to apply for this fellowship that has seen real change in veteran benefits over the years.

Support their efforts and let their voices resonate within the hallowed halls of Congress. Together we can champion the rights and benefits of military veterans and our family members.

Local involvement is equally essential in our shared mission to serve veterans. By actively participating in local SVA chapters and events, each of us as VFW members can contribute to fostering a sense of community and support for our nation's student veterans.

Your presence and guidance can make a world of difference in the lives of those who are striving to achieve their educational dreams, just like the VFW did that for me. As we stand united, the VFW and SVA, we can become an unstoppable force for positive change.

Our partnership transcends generations, ideologies, and backgrounds. It stands as a beacon of hope, reminding us of our collective commitment to service and advocacy because it knows no bounds.

I wanted to share a personal story regarding past national Commander-in-Chief, Brian Duffy. He made a statement from this convention stage back in 2017, a short time before turning over leadership as National Commander-in-Chief at VFW.

He announced that he was going to finally finish his bachelor's degree. Well, I'm proud to report to you that past National Commander Duffy is a man of his word, because he has been a student veteran since 2017, and this year, in the same year that he got his Medicare card, he will also finish with his bachelor's degree. (Applause.)

JARED LYON: I spoke to Brian a short time before the convention this year. And as of this semester, he's completed all his required courses for his bachelor's of science in aeronautics from Embry-Riddle University.

Brian has been a friend, a mentor, and an inspiration to me, and he has proved that once and for all, you can, in fact, teach an old dog new tricks. And you really are never too old to go back to school.

In conclusion, to each of you, my fellow veterans, I stand before you today to say that the future is bright because of you and because of student veterans.

As we face these challenges that lie ahead, remember that our strength lies in our unity and our power comes from the values instilled in each of us during our military service. Let us seize this moment to empower the next generation of leaders to stand together in solidarity and to continue to be building a better future for all veterans and our nation.

Together, we can come together and overcome any obstacle, achieve greatness and leave things better than we found them for generations to come.

Thank you, each of you, the members of the VFW and Auxiliary, for your unwavering dedication. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be part of this incredible journey with you as we celebrate the 15th anniversary of Student Veterans of America this year.

Let us move forward together united in our purpose and resolute in our commitment to serve our nation's veterans. Thank you all so very much. (Applause.)

CLOSING CEREMONIES

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Before we close, I have a few announcements that I would like to make.

First of all, commanders of 2022, 2023, we are not meeting in my room after the patriotic rally. I just figured it was just a little too late for that. Since we got a little downtime tomorrow, Commanders of 2022, 2023, in room 747 in the Hyatt, we are going to block that room off for two hours from 2 o'clock to 4 o'clock for a meet-and-greet with the commanders and their guests.

In addition, the patriotic rally will start forming at 5:15 behind us in halls 5 and 6. Please bring your patriotic gear. We really don't care what you wear. Have Fun.

Maybe I shouldn't have said that. It's okay. It's okay. You know, by the way, when I threw that little cheap shot at the Navy, just remember, veterans can pick on veterans.

Army, I love it.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please perform the closing ceremonies for today's business session.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrades, all rise. Comrade National Chaplain, Deborah Halter, would you lead us in our closing prayer?

(Salute to colors.)

DEBORAH HALTER: Lord, as we conclude this great day, we are honored to have seen those comrades that have respected our mission by award-winning work. Thank you, Lord, for each of them. May they each be blessed.

Thank you, Lord, for all the fine folks who have come today to honor us with their time and checks. We really appreciate them, Lord, and ask for special blessings on them.

Lastly, we ask blessings to our great patriotic rally that we will hold tonight.

We know it is through your blessing that we are fortunate to be Americans. May we return tomorrow ready to do more business for the good of the VFW. Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Salute to the flag. Comrades, Commander-in-Chief, that completes closing ceremonies of this adjournment.

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

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you, sir. We are now adjourned until 8 a.m. tomorrow morning.

(The proceedings adjourned at 11:59 a.m.)

BUSINESS SESSION
WEDNESDAY, JULY 26, 2023

(The Business Session of the 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the Phoenix Convention Center, Phoenix, Arizona, was called to order on Wednesday, July 26, 2023, at 8:00 a.m., with Commander-in-Chief Timothy Borland presiding.)

CALL TO ORDER
SALUTE TO COLORS
INVOCATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DEBORAH HALTER
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, please take your seats. I will now reconvene the 124th VFW National Convention.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will please conduct the opening ceremonies. (Salute to colors performed.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade National Chaplain, Deborah Halter, to lead us in our opening prayer.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Almighty God, we ask you to come and be with us today. Our business is important as we honor a few good people who have served the VFW well. We are blessed because of them.

We also ask that you be with us as we nominate our officers for the 2023/2024 year.

May they be the right people for the right jobs. We ask this for the greater good of all of our comrades. Amen. (Pledge of allegiance recited.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade, Commander-in-Chief, that completes opening ceremonies of the 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

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

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you, sir.

CONVENTION CREDENTIALS REPORT: BETTY GRIPP

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I would now like to call Betty Gripp for the report of our credentials. (Chanting.)

BETTY GRIPP: Thank you, Arizona. Aren't they great?

Good morning, Commander-in-Chief, Council Members and Delegates. As of close of business 3 p.m. yesterday, July 25th, 2023, the total delegates registering

their credentials are: 8,282. Department commanders, 43. Past Commander-in-Chief, 10. National officers, 48. Grand total, 8,383.

And Tuesday, we brought in attendance 1,746 members.

Thank you, sir. That's my report.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Before I proceed to go visit the Auxiliary this morning and then our Senior Vice Commander-in-chief will take the podium, Dan West will have some announcements.

I just want to do one thing because it was brought to my attention. I apologize for it, because every time I see a first-time attendee, I give you a coin.

I am out of coins. That's how many I saw.

So all first time attendees please stand and be recognized.

(Applause)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you for your attendance, and I hope you come back. Dan West.

ADJUTANT GENERAL: Morning, comrades. I have some announcements to make here.

First one, due to the overwhelming demand for Tuesday's post commander quartermaster responsibilities session, the post quartermaster's workshop at 2:30 p.m. today in 25AB will cover many of the same topics.

Two, the district commander responsibility session scheduled for today at 1 p.m. has been changed to room 131ABC to accommodate a larger crowd.

If you are making nominations later today, I will need you to come up to the stage approximately around 11 a.m. or as the sergeants come obtain you and escort you up here.

Past chiefs, if you would like to make your way up here, as you will be introduced later in the program, you may sit in the back here behind us. Just individually work your way up here.

That is all the announcements I have. I will not take questions at this time. Please welcome to the microphone our National Senior Vice and incoming Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento.

INTRODUCTION: VFW NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Ladies and gentlemen, standing behind me are the elites, our VFW National Sergeant-at-Arms. I want to express my appreciation for this group of individuals who are often the first to arrive and last to leave. Year after year, they do an outstanding job at ensuring the order of our national meetings and events.

It is now my privilege to introduce National Sergeant-at-Arms, Brian Willette. Brian has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms since 2016. He is a Gold Life Legacy Member of Post 3104 in South Hadley, Massachusetts. A five time All-American Post Commander, past All-American District Commander, and Past Department Judge Advocate.

He currently serves as the Department Sergeant-at-Arms. Brian is retired from the United States Army as a staff sergeant.
(Shouting.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I knew that goofy word would come out. Whatever it is you Army -- you silly Army people say.
(Shouting.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I lost my place.
(Laughter.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: He completed his basic infantry and airborne training in 1983, and served with both --
(Shouting.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: What the hell is wrong with you people?
Airborne --
(Shouting.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN CHIEF SARMIENTO: Can we get through this.
(Laughter.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: And the 3rd Armored Division. Do they have something?
(Shouting.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Brian deployed to Bosnia in 2001 with the 29th Infantry Division in support of Operation Joint Forge. In 2010, he deployed to Afghanistan with the 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. His awards include the Purple Heart and the Combat Action Badge.

I now call National Sergeant-at-Arms Brian Willette to introduce his team.

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Thank you very much, Chief.

Joy Ausman has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for an astounding 27 years and is a Gold Legacy Life Member of Gilbert, Minnesota, Post 4456. She is also a life member of the Cloquet, Minnesota, VFW Auxiliary Post 3979.

Joy is a past post and District Commander, Past District Quartermaster and Past Department Chief of Staff. She has served in both the Marine Corps and the Army earning her VFW eligibility in Desert Storm.

She recently returned from a Peace Corps volunteer service in Swaziland. She is currently a lecturer at the Good Shepherd College of Health Sciences in Swaziland through the virtual Peace Corps service.

(Applause.)

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Next is Jim Galen who has been a member of the sergeants for 22 years and is a life member of Post 6802 in Richmond, Michigan. He is a past All-State Post Commander and past All-State Post Quartermaster. He served as Post Quartermaster for 19 years and is a Past District 5 Commander.

Jim retired after 30 years of service from General Motors.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Keith MacDonald has been a member of the Sergeants for another astounding 29 years as a member of Post 5867 in Lakeside, California. He retired from the United States Navy with more than 23 years as a Senior Chief Petty Officer. Keith is a past All-American Post Commander and All-American District Commander, and is currently serving as Quartermaster of Post 5867.

Keith recently retired as a government contractor supporting the DDG-51 class new construction program at the Naval Information Warfare Systems command in San Diego, California.
(Applause)

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: George Lott has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for almost 14 years. He is a Gold Legacy Life Member of past commander of the Lieutenant Robert A. Madden Post 10152 in Ogdensburg, New Jersey, as a Past New Jersey District 21 Commander.

He is a United States Army combat veteran and was a drill sergeant who taught basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, upon returning from Vietnam. George recently retired after 33 years as the department of New Jersey's State Sergeant-at-Arms.

He was employed as a police officer in his hometown of Ogdensburg for 34 years and retired in 2008 as chief of police.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Next is Lora Land. Lora is a Gold Legacy Life Member of the Benjamin O. Davis Post 9191 in Killeen, Texas. She has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms since November 2016 and is a past All-State and All-American Post Commander.

In 2015, Lora was named the top commander of the State of Texas and was the first woman veteran to serve as the District 14 Commander where she achieved All-State and All-American honors. She served as the Veterans Women's chair for the Department of Texas from 2016 through 2018 and served as National Aide-De-Camp from 2017 to 2018.

In 2022, Lora was appointed to oversee the stand-up and operations of the first VFW Post on the largest installation in the United States, Command Sergeant Major A.C. Cotton VFW Post 12209 on Fort Cavazos formerly Fort Hood, Texas, which is the first VFW Post allowed to be open in the State of Texas on an active-duty military installation.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Sherrod Nathan Conyers is a native of Marietta, Georgia, and is a Gold Legacy Life Member of the Rainbow Post 2681. He has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for eight years.

Sherrod's military career began after becoming a Direct Commissioned Second Lieutenant from Tuskegee University's ROTC program into the United States Army. Sherrod earned his VFW eligibility with deployments to Jordan and Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom, and to Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

During his four years of active duty in the military, he was promoted to the rank of captain. Sherrod is a life member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., a member of the 200 Corinthians Masonic Lodge, and was commissioned an Honorable Kentucky Colonel.

He currently serves as an associate at Boston Consulting Group and serves as a full-time spouse and father.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Rene Fuertes has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms since 2021. He is a life member of Post 3104 in South Hadley, Massachusetts, and a three-time past Commander of Post 3389 in Randolph, Massachusetts.

He has received appointments as the Assistant Inspector General, Special Aide-De-Camp, and was named the Massachusetts Member of the Year for both 2018 and 2021. He currently serves as a member of State Honor Guard and Department Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms. Rene completed boot camp in 1986 at the Naval Training Center in San Diego and earned his VFW eligibility in Operation Uphold Democracy in 1994 and later deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

He received three Navy achievement medals, two Coast Guard achievement medals, and the Coast Guard Meritorious Unit Commendation with Operational distinguished device. Rene retired from the United States Navy as a Petty Officer Second Class.

He has been employed by the State of Massachusetts for 33 years as an investigator.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS WILLETTE: Todd Hokanson has been a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms for two years. He is a Gold Legacy Life Member

of the Lucius-Penick Medal of Honor VFW Post 430 in Canyon, Texas. He earned his VFW eligibility in Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Todd is a two-time All-State Captain Post Commander, a two-time All-American Post Commander, a Past District 4 Commander, and a Past Department of Kansas Junior Vice Commander. He currently lives in Amarillo, Texas, where he took a promotion and transfer with the TSA.

Todd retired from the United States Army as a first sergeant with over 24 years of service. He was a field artilleryman for six years and a military policeman for 18.

He was deployed to Desert Storm, Desert Shield, Bosnia, Operation Joint Guard, Korea, and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq from 2003 to 2004, and again from 2006 to 2008.

He was awarded several awards during his career including the legion of merit, two bronze stars, and the Navy and Marine Corps achievement medal. He received several leadership awards including the Major General Aubrey "Red" Newman Leadership Award.

Todd is accompanied by his service dog, Zepper, who as of last night has been officially deputized as a member of the team.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The men and women with me here on the stage work tirelessly behind the scenes, and we depend on them so much.

Sometimes, we forget to express our gratitude. So at this time, I want to publicly say, thank you to each and every one of you.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All of them consistently represent our organization well, and I am proud of the professional way in which you conduct yourselves. I am honored to have this opportunity to serve with you. On behalf of the entire organization, once again, thank you.

INTRODUCTON: PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEFS

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I would like to introduce the past Commander-in-Chiefs that are attending this convention.

From 1988 to 1989, from Louisiana, Larry W. Rivers.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I know it's you. I just saw you.

1991, 1992, a fellow Garden Stater, Robert E. Wallace.
1(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 1995 to 1996 from Massachusetts, Paul A. Spera.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 1996 to 1997, from Texas, James E. Nier.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I see you, Chief.
1997 to 1998, from Ohio, John E. Moon.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: All right.
From 1999 to 2000, John W. Smart.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 2010 to 2011, Richard L. Eubank, from California.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: And I do apologize.
Steve Smart, you are from the great state of New Hampshire. I don't know how you transferred. However that works. You were from New Hampshire when you were chief.
2012 to 2013, from Florida, John E Hamilton.
(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 2013 to 2014, from Indiana, William A. Thien.
(Applause)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 2014 to 2015, from Nevada, John W. Stroud.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 2017 to 2018, from Ohio, Keith E. Harman.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I like the energy. I truly do.
2018 to 2019, from New Mexico, Vincent "BJ" Lawrence.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: 2019 to 2020, from New York, William "Doc" Schmitz.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: And 2020 to 2021, from Virginia, Harold "Hal" Roesch.
(Applause.)

NOMINATIONS FOR NATIONAL HOME BOARD OF TRUSTEES

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: There are four nominations for District 9 for the 2023 to 2029 term representing Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Let me back up a page. I was ahead of you. You guys probably want to know what the hell he's talking about. Well, now you're going to know. Let me back up a page.

Since 1925, the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, Michigan, has remained a prominent representation of the absolute best of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary has to offer.

There is no better example of how our organizations work together to support America's military families than by the services offered by the VFW National Home.

The VFW National Home is governed by a board of trustees. I will now read the nominations for the National Home board of trustees for the record. Now it makes sense.

There are four nominations for District 9 for the 2023 to 2029 term, representing Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Glynis Collier has been a VFW National Home Life Member since August 2017. She is endorsed by the VFW Department of South Dakota.

Vicki Ross has been a VFW National Home life member since March 2008. She is endorsed by the VFW Department of South Dakota Auxiliary.

Wendy Dannenfelzer has been a VFW National Home Life Member since August 2014. She is endorsed by the VFW Department of North Dakota Auxiliary.

Danny Kramer has been a VFW National Home Life Member since December 2016. He is endorsed by the VFW Department of Nebraska.

There are three nominations for District 12 for the 2023 to 2029 term, representing California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. Now, I had to say Oregon. I always say Oregon and I get yelled at by people in Oregon. So Oregon. I really had to concentrate on that fellows and ladies.

Mary Anne Kreutz has been a VFW National Home Life Member since 2015. She is endorsed by the VFW Department of California Auxiliary.

Nikki Benjamin has been a VFW National Home Life Member since January

1998. She is endorsed by the Department of Washington Auxiliary.

Ron Lockwood has been a VFW National Home Life Member since August of 2017. He is endorsed by the VFW Department of Hawaii.

ANNOUNCEMENT: NATIONAL BUDDY POPPY CONTEST WINNERS:

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Now, to announce the 2023 National Buddy Poppy contest winners is Lynn Rolf, Director of VFW Programs. (Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Morning comrades. Hopefully, everyone had a blast last night. I'm sorry. I'm a little hoarse from screaming over the music.

Without a question, one of the most recognizable symbols around the world is your VFW Buddy Poppy. To the VFW and its Auxiliary members, it signifies the remembrance and commemoration of our fallen brothers and sisters, and it reminds us of our duty and responsibility to our nation's living veterans. For decades, VFW members and its Auxiliary have distributed the revered Buddy Poppy to millions of our community members.

Today, we're taking a few minutes to honor and recognize those whose passion and creativity have taken the Buddy Poppy to another level.

These are individuals of posts who have used our Buddy Poppies in the creation of exceptional and inspiring works of art and displays, and hopefully you've taken the time to visit and walk through all of those incredible works of art.

This year's entries were judged by the National VFW Programs Committee Chairman John Archuleta, accompanied by the committee members Craig De Old, Teresa Donahue, Don Pettyjohn, Ginger Graham, Duane Hermanson, Amy Mackenzie, Rodger Meier, David Wilson, Cathey Farley, the 2022/2023 Auxiliary Buddy Poppy/VFW National Home Advisor.

And, in addition, the 2023 to 2024 Auxiliary Buddy Poppy National Home Ambassador Designate Lisa Jackson.

The displays were judged on effectiveness, clarity of theme, suitability, originality, beauty, and the number of poppies used. Category one should be popping up on the screen. Honorable mention goes to the VFW Auxiliary to the Superstition Mountain Post 9399 in Apache Junction, Arizona. (Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Third place award goes to the VFW United Post 2975 in its VFW Auxiliary in Beresford, South Dakota.

Second place award goes to the VFW Auxiliary to the Lexington VFW Post 8738 in Lexington, South Carolina. (Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: And the first place winner in category one, the VFW Auxiliary

Post 3615 in Ruston, Louisiana.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Next up, category two for memorial and inspirational display. Honorable mention goes to the VFW Auxiliary to the Virgil Wilson VFW Post 4961 in Seaford, Delaware.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Third place award goes to the Robert B. Lindsay VFW Post 141 and its VFW Auxiliary in Bethel, Alaska.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Second place goes to Hometown-Murray VFW Post 9773 and its VFW Auxiliary in Hometown, Illinois.

The first place winner in category two, VFW Auxiliary and Alfred Pepin VFW Post 798 in Newport, Vermont.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Category 3, for artistic and decorative use of the Buddy Poppy.

Honorable mention goes to the VFW Auxiliary to the Brigadier General Clifford Shuey VFW Post 6306, Golden Shores, Arizona.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Third place award goes to the VFW Auxiliary to the Raymond L. Green VFW Post 6917 in Albuquerque, New Mexico.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Second place winner is the VFW Auxiliary to the Private Allen J. Beck, Jr., VFW Post 5265 in Spring Grove, Pennsylvania.

(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: There was no first place awarded. I disqualified them due to listing their post number.

And last but not least, the director's award given to the Buddy Poppy display that in my opinion most creatively and effectively represents the intent of the Buddy Poppy program.

I'm pleased to announce that this year's recipient of the director's award is Fort Morgan VFW Post 2551 in Morgan, Colorado, and its VFW Auxiliary to the Ralph Frank Janousek Post 2788, Penrose, Colorado.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: That post and the Department of Colorado are raffling that

saddle off in their hospitality room if you want a shot at it. See the Department of Colorado. Okay.

For this year's silent auction, 52 departments have donated items. Many reflective of their home states and commonwealths. For more than two decades, this auction has raised money for the issues that are close to the hearts of our VFW and its Auxiliary.

Everyone knows I bleed the VFW programs daily. So today, nothing makes me more proud than to announce that all of the funds raised go to our incredible VMS programs.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Thanks to you comrades and Auxiliary, we raised a grand total of \$6,145. Salute to you all. 10
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: And I would be remiss, please pay today, otherwise the quartermaster general is going to find you.

Okay. Another big supporter of our VFW veterans and military support programs is our Howard E. Vander Clute Motorcycle Ride. We had over 86 riders show up Saturday morning. 112 degrees, 9 a.m., and they braved it. It was a dry heat.

Of course, I gave them a chance.

You know, they can just pass the money off and come back to convention or go back to their room, but they all sucked it up, embraced the suck, and did the ride for the true reason that Howard did the ride was camaraderie, talking about our programs and expanding our membership.

So with that, Senior Vice Commander-In-Chief, Duane Sarmiento, I want to present a check on behalf of our Howard E. Vander Clute participants, Posts and Auxiliaries across the world, a check for \$25,200.81.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Mark said he would cash that. Okay. Now, some more exciting news. I cannot thank everyone that participated on inaugural cornhole tournament. What did y'all think?
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: It's only going to get bigger and better. But we need your help. Talk to those posts. Talk to anyone that's coming to convention. Tell them to get out to Louisville, throw some bags, raise some great money for our PACT Act initiatives on our NVS program.

We need your help. We're going to blow this thing up even bigger next year. And I just want to recognize some of our place finishers. Some of our comrades actually ran into some ringers that came in Arizona. We have the two

veteran teams that came in that were actual pro ACL players, all veterans, and their team name was "The Shiz."

The second team was the Dominant Force, and third place on day 1 was Team Widley. Okay. I had it written down wrong. Sorry.

Day 2, The Shiz won again. The Dominant team won again, and my own personal team out of VFW programs got third place. Day 3, the Louisiana crew won first place.
(Applause.)

LYNN ROLF: Second place, T-squared. Third place, Team Widley. Sorry. My hearing aids can't hear you. Please, help us spread the word. I am proud to announce that due to your hard work and your support, we raised \$31,000 for our NVS program. Thank you, comrades. God bless.

PRESENTATION: FRED C. HALL OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT AWARD
TO VFW POST 2894-VIRGINIA

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Now we have the Fred C. Hall Outstanding Community Service Project Award. The VFW has a rich tradition of community service as evidenced by more than five million hours our members volunteer each year.

Those hours are spent in a variety of ways, from food and clothing drives for those in need, to Veteran's Day ceremonies and service projects that provide emergency disaster relief in desperate times. Our work instills a sense of patriotism and pride in our communities.

Today, it is with great pleasure and honor that we recognize and celebrate the outstanding contributions of VFW Post 2894, located in the vibrant city of Chesapeake, Virginia.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: That's right. You can hoot and holler. Be loud and proud.

The Post's unwavering commitment to community service shall serve as an inspiration to us all.

The VFW Fred C. Hall Outstanding Community Service Award stands as a testament to the exceptional dedication and selfless displayed by the members of Post 2894 and their tireless efforts to uplift their community.

Founded on the principles of camaraderie, service, and deep reverence for the sacrifices made by our brave men and women in uniform, this post continuously goes above and beyond to ensure that its commitment extends far beyond its walls.

When the post members discovered U.S. Navy petty officer Victoria Bullard and her husband, Christopher, also on active duty in the Navy, had been duped and taken advantage of when purchasing a home in the area, they sprang into action to ensure the house went from being practically uninhabitable to a home they were

expecting.

Post 2894 worked with the community and local groups like Home Depot, I Sell 757, and Habitat for Humanity, to repair a large hole in the kitchen floor and replace flooring throughout the home while also renovating the kitchen and repairing the backyard deck.

Post members didn't stop working until the Bullards' house offered a safe home.

Please join me in giving a big round of applause to the 2023 Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project award winner, Staff Sergeant Jonathan Kilian Dozier Memorial Post 2894.

Accepting the award on behalf of the post is the Post Commander Jose Vazquez.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: The award reads, Fred C. Hall Memorial Award, 2022, 2023, presented to Staff Sergeant, Jonathan K. Dozier, Post 2894, for their project Post Repairs Local Veteran's Home.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: So I was just notified that after 27 years, the Chesapeake post has finally got a post home. I think that's outstanding. Great job.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION: "56 CONSECUTIVE YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP"
TO VFW DEPARTMENT OF ARIZONA

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: For those of you who regularly attend National Convention, the next presentation will certainly come as no surprise.

For 56 consecutive years, the members of the Department of Arizona have come together as a team to increase VFW membership throughout the Grand Canyon State.

What this department has accomplished is truly remarkable. I commend every member of the Department of Arizona for their years of devotion and tireless efforts that have gone into reaching this momentous achievement, yet again.

Now, in honor of their hard work and dedication, I would like to call on Michael Kemery, Immediate Past Department Commander of Arizona, to accept this consecutive years of membership growth citation. Congratulations to all the Department of Arizona.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Certificate of Commendation, awarded to the Department of Arizona in recognition of their remarkable achievement of 56

consecutive years of membership sustained by the Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 26th day of July 2023. Signed by Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, Dan West, Adjutant General.
(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Great job, Department of Arizona. Tim said he will autograph the picture so you can hang it up.

It is now my privilege to introduce a gentleman who represents a company with decades of experience in empowering those who deliver care to advance health and well-being.

Retired Army Major general -- excuse me -- Retired Army Major General, Patrick D. Sargent served as senior vice president and -- You got to let me know these things.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: I just found out. I told you we were going to mess it up. It's my fault.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS:

LISA BARONIO, DIRECTOR, VFW FOUNDATION
MIKE DEROSA, CHAIRMAN, VFW FOUNDATION

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Well, you're a general. Whenever you get here. It's okay with me. All right.

For more than 25 years, the VFW Foundation has worked alongside the VFW to provide our programs the financial support needed to help ensure the service members, veterans, and families we serve every day continue to receive the assistance and support they have come to expect from the VFW.

Lisa Baronio was announced as the new executive director of the VFW Foundation in August of 2022, and is responsible for overseeing the Philip -- dang -- you got to let me know the big words, man. Like, this is a big one.

My Jersey education only brings me so far. I'm just going to skip it.

I'll tell you what, it's like philanthropic. I don't know. How do you say it?
(Shouting.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Look, man. I'm from Jersey. I don't think we use that word.

But, anyway, that word, fundraising goals and objectives of the VFW Foundation.

She has held high-level positions in fundraising and donor relations in universities in Texas, Iowa, and Missouri, bringing nearly 30 years of experience to the foundation.

Please join me in welcoming to the stage VFW Foundation Executive

Director, Lisa Baronio.
(Applause.)

LISA BARONIO: Don't worry, by the end of the year you're going to know the words philanthropy and philanthropic many times over.

Good morning. I recently watched the movie Air on Netflix. The movie is about Nike and how it was completely transformed by signing Michael Jordan to a contract. While some might like to debate who the GOAT is, according to the official NBA website, it states, "By acclamation, Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball player of all time."

He played 15 seasons in the NBA, winning six NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls. He is a two-time Olympic gold medalist, once in 1984 and the second with the Dream Team in 1992.

In 1984, when Jordan signed an agreement with Nike, he was 21 years old. He hadn't yet come close to reaching his full potential. Michael Jordan's mother, Delores, was a shrewd businesswoman. During negotiations with Nike, she pointed out that the proposed shoe was just a shoe until her son put his foot in it. And she was right.

Due to this contract, Jordan earned more than \$1.7 billion from Nike. To put things into perspective, Michael Jordan was paid a total of \$90 million during his entire NBA career. Keep this story in mind as I shift gears to the VFW Foundation.

The mission of the VFW Foundation is to serve military veterans, service members, and their families by securing resources for programs that facilitate enhance life outcomes now and for generations to come. We are a small foundation that primarily focuses on securing contributions from corporations and foundations in support of VFW priority programs.

We are a -- some of these programs include National Veterans Service, Unmet Needs, Help a Hero, Voice of Democracy.

Thank you all so much for your donations last night. And Patriots Pen.

Back to Air. Remember how Delores Jordan stated, It is just a shoe until my son put his foot in it? The VFW is the shoe -- the VFW Foundation is the shoe, or in this case, the combat boot. It is your feet that stepped into our boots that make us recognizable.

You stepped away from your family to serve your country. You left your family and friends to stand for freedom. You fight for earned benefits for all veterans. You continue to serve your community.

The VFW is the Michael Jordan of the VFW Foundation. Without you, we would simply be any pair of old shoes. We've got a short video to share with you about the VFW Foundation. Following the video, please join me in welcoming to the hall, Chairman of the VFW Foundation, Michael, not Jordan, Michael DeRosa, or how he's better known as Mike.

Mike is a retired Burger King franchisee who worked his way from Burger King management trainee to owning 18 Burger Kings in the West-Central Wisconsin

area.

Mike has received several VFW awards, including the Gold Medal of Merit, the James E. Van Zandt Citizenship Award, and the Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2007, Mike utilized his network of Burger King franchisee owners across the country to coordinate an annual fundraising effort for the VFW Unmet Needs program.

Burger King has raised more than \$7.56 million for the program, and more than 700,000 this fiscal year.
(Applause.)

LISA BARONIO: Mike has made it clear, it is only through the hard work and dedication of the Burger King franchisees and their restaurant teams that these gifts have been made possible. Mike DeRosa is a true friend of the VFW and the VFW Foundation.

We appreciate the time and the energy he devotes to the success of the VFW Foundation and the VFW programs.

Now, please turn your attention to the screen for the video.
(The video was played.)
(Applause.)

MIKE DEROSA: Good morning, VFW. It's a pleasure to be here, an honor to be here.

And I'm really glad that Lisa took the time when she gave me that nice introduction to explain to you that I'm really not that Mike, even though I'm wearing his shoes.

And I'm wearing them for a reason.

Direct your eyes up to the charts on the screens. Let's have those charts up there. What I did is I took your goals, the projects that the VFW is working on from your VFW magazine of a few months back. And I looked at that, and I realized all the stuff that you guys do.

And the VFW Foundation has to help with that, so I knew we had to make sure that we were as energetic as possible.

So I figured what the heck, I'll see if Michael's shoes could help me a little bit and be as energetic as possible. So thus, the shoes. It's not a fashion statement. I don't want anybody to worry about that. It's not a fashion statement.

But what we have to do now is we look at those things that you have to do, and the things that connects them all is real simple. What you need to do at all is money. It's the one thing that the foundation is supposed to do.

We are supposed to be the organization that goes out and raises that money for you.

You can't fight a battle with – without ammunition, and you can't do your projects without money. So that's what we're there for. So I'm here today to ask for your help.

I'm not going to ask you for money, so don't worry about that. I don't want to put my hands in your pockets. But I do want you -- by the way, if you do

have extra money, we'd take it, but I'm not going to ask you for it.

So what we're going to do is we're going to say, how can you help us?
And it's really pretty simple.

The VFW and the Auxiliary together, you have almost 1.5 million members. And those 1.5 million members -- that's a lot. Okay. A lot. But everybody -- almost everybody has a spouse, you have kids, you have grandkids, you have brothers and sisters and cousins and on and on and on.

And what we create with that is we have to look at the membership at the VFW and the Auxiliary as a force multiplier. Because you represent not just you, but you represent a force of veterans that the foundation can take advantage of when we go out into the field and we talk to corporations and we say, we would like to be able to have you come and help the VFW Foundation and raise money.

And the money that we're going to raise from these companies, it's not one time. We don't want one time because your projects aren't one-time projects. You don't do a project on your list and then it goes away. It stays. They have to be sustaining.

And knowing the incoming Commander-in-Chief, I'll bet you any money that he puts a few more projects on that list. Okay. They will always grow.

So we need that money and we need to make sure that you're the force multiplier for that money.

Now, I'm going to ask you couple of -- three questions. And you can raise your hands. I would like to see a little activity out there. Raise your hands. Because I'm going to show you how easy it is to help your foundation.

How many of you wear shoes or boots every day? Raise your hand. I'm going to check to make sure if there's somebody here not putting their hand up. Okay.

How about people, you get a haircut, yeah, maybe what, every four or five weeks? How many do that? Okay. Now, some of us not as often, and I know our quartermaster general, not so much. You know, not so much. Where is he? There he is.

And then how about this. How many of you eat every day? Okay. All right. So three out of three. I always say two out of three, so Mark can feel that he's part of the group. Okay. Plus, he's the secretary/treasurer of the foundation and we love him.

But the idea is, the three questions you just answered, those are three of the major people, the companies that help the VFW Foundation. That's the Twisted X shoes, that's Sports Clips, and it's Burger King franchisees.

So all of a sudden, without knowing it, you have already helped the foundation, because we could go to those people and say, We need to be -- to do this, we need to do that. And they'll say, Fine, because they know that there are people behind us, you guys who fill in those boots that will help us help them in their efforts to raise their sales and do all the good things that they need to do.

Because think of this. You go home -- think of this. You go home from this convention, and everybody goes out and buys one pair of Twisted X boots or

shoes. Just one pair. A million five. You think that would be noticed?

You go to Sports Clips and get your hair cut. You think that will be noticed? Sure it will.

I talked to a young lady at the booth the other day, and I was talking about Sports Clips and she goes, Well, I go to a salon. Her hair looked a little nicer than mine. And she said, But I bring my grandson to Sports Clips. That's a force multiplier right there. That's what we want to be able to see. Okay.

And so it would be really nice to be able to do that.

And then, how about Burger King? And I always tell people -- because you remember I used to be a Burger King franchisee -- if a million five people go to Burger King, just don't pick the same one at the same time. That's -- either that or call ahead so they can drop fries. All right.

So that makes a big difference in the life of the corporations. And when we go out to talk to other corporations, we could use that as an example. So our strength comes from you when we are doing that. Your foot is in that boot and we are going to be able to use that.

Now, don't get me wrong. The companies that we're dealing with, they're not doing it just for money. Not even close. If you could remember the presentation that the gentleman from Twisted X, if you were here Monday, that was an emotional presentation.

He didn't do -- he isn't helping the foundation because he expects to make lots more money. He does it from his heart.

And Sports Clips is owned and operated by a veteran, an Air Force veteran, Gordon Logan. And after my presentation in a few minutes, you're going to meet another Burger King franchisee who is an Iraqi war vet that we're going to honor here today for what he has done in his Burger Kings in the Phoenix area.

So we have -- of the three corporations I mentioned, we have two veteran-owned and operated, and there's a lot more out there. And those are the ones that we want to be able to go out and grab.

Okay.

So besides the money part of it, one of the things I want to impress on you, it's just the way we say thank you to those corporations. And saying thank you really makes a big difference, doesn't it? Everybody wants to be thanked.

Because, in actuality, these corporations are actually volunteers.

Nobody's holding a gun to their head that they have to do it. They're volunteering for this. And volunteers, after a while, you know -- you guys are all volunteers, right? And you're going to volunteer for your post and it's exciting, and the first couple of years go by and you're excited, and the third year you're excited, and the fourth year, why doesn't somebody else come and do this? You know. It sort of goes down a little bit.

So let me share a personal story with you about the power of saying thank you to somebody.

Now, you remember, 2007, I started my relationship with the foundation. Brought all kinds of Burger Kings with me. I flew around the country about 5, 6, 10

times a year talking to groups like this of franchisees to get their restaurants.

And it was really great. And I'm proud that we have raised that \$7.5 million. I never thought it would be that – would do that. We started out with 100,000 the first year, and now we're up to, you know, 7. -- almost \$6 million. That's just -- it's amazing. I'm honored that that happened.

But while I was doing that, I was getting tired. So it's about five, six years into -- into the thing and I'm sort of tired. You know, it's just part of my job now. And I find myself at one of my Burger Kings and I'm having lunch. I just finished. I'm sitting there, and I'm reading the paper.

And you know how if you're sitting someplace and all of a sudden you feel that somebody is real close to you.

Well, I had that feeling. And I look up from my newspaper and this big guy is looking down at me. And he says, Are you the owner of this Burger King?

Now, I'll tell you, when you own a fast food restaurant and somebody says that in the middle of the day in the middle of the dining room, the first thing I thought about, I wonder if the French fries were cold, you know. Should I say yes to this? He's bigger than I am.

But I said yes. And he stuck out his hand and he shook my hand and he said, I just wanted to thank you for what you do for veterans. And that really moved me. Small thing. He turns and he walks away. And, you know, I was almost, believe it or not, almost at a loss for words.

But as he's walking away, I look, and he's wearing a jacket. And the back of the jacket is the VFW logo, and it says, VFW Post 305, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He was one of my guys, okay, in my town.

And he was a customer. It was a trifecta. He was a veteran, he lived in my town, and he was a customer.

And I got to tell you, that that really reminded me of why I was doing what I was doing. I was helping veterans, which is the whole reason I started this thing in the first place.

And, to me, that's the power of the thank you. And every one of you are capable of doing that, whether it's in your purchases of products or service, or whether it's just going and seeing somebody, like this veteran did for me, and saying thank you.

Now, we will keep the -- you updated on who we're working with, et cetera, so that you could help them out. But what I want to do is, I want to finish this way for you folks. I want to thank you for your service to your country, to your VFW, and to your foundation. Thank you.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, I had an announcement come to me I need to make. The walk-in V.A. health clinic will be closing at noon today. So if you haven't been there or if you have an appointment, make sure you get over there before noon today. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Well, good morning, comrades. I just had an excellent, excellent visit with the Auxiliary next door. They're so motivated, it's not even funny.

Something about a pie. I don't get it. That was a great event last night.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS:

ARMY MAJOR GENERAL (RET) PATRICK SARGENT,
SR. VICE PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, ORACLE HEALTH

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: It is now my privilege to introduce a gentleman who represents a company with decades of experience in empowering those who deliver care to advance health and well-being.

Retired Army Major General Patrick D. Sargent serves as a senior vice president and general manager of Oracle Health Government Services.

Pat is a VFW Life Member from the great state of Virginia. He was a dust-off pilot and oversaw multiple medical commands during his 35 years of army service.

(Shouting)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Which included assignments as commanding general of the Army Medical Center of Excellence and Commander of the 421st Medical Evaluation Battalion.

Patrick joined Cerner Corporation in April of 2022. Oracle's acquisition of Cerner in June 2022 merged with the worlds of information technology and healthcare, positioning the company as the largest health IT organization in the world.

Oracle continues to modernize the electronic health record at V.A., DOD, and U.S. Coast Guard, the Military Officers Association of America, and others, allowing easier access to high-quality healthcare for veterans, service members, and their beneficiaries, bringing us closer than ever before to realizing our goal of providing us all with a lifetime of seamless, high-quality care.

Please welcome our esteemed guest, retired Army Major General, Pat Sargent.

(Applause.)

MAJOR GENERAL SARGENT: Hey, good morning, everyone.
(Good morning.)

MAJOR GENERAL SARGENT: Good morning, everyone.
(Good morning.)

MAJOR GENERAL SARGENT: All right. I can tell you that as I've found my way out to Arizona last night and I get off the airplane, I felt like I was back in Baghdad with all the heat. But, fortunately, I'm in a suit and not all the battle rattle that we wear when we were all deployed.

I can tell you that being in this position and being in front of you is definitely an honor. And I don't take this lightly. I think for me, a person who spent 35 years of their adult life serving our nation, having deployed as a company commander in Desert Storm of Enforce Medical Company.

I went back at the beginning of OIS as a evacuation battalion commander. And then I went back as a brigade commander, running all the medical resources in Iraq for 15 months working for Lloyd Austin, people like Petraeus, and (inaudible).

But I can tell you that that all started for me as a kid in Panama City, Florida. And I was a Junior ROTC, and I can tell you that your organization, our organization, because I am a member, that we are all about giving back to the community.

And I received some financial assistance as a cadet from the local VFW. And so for me, you guys have been instrumental in my life and in the life of those young folk that is out there in our respective communities. Not to mention, all the Christmas parades that I see you guys, that we participate in in showing people that patriotism matters.

I think it was Mark Twain who said, your life -- that the two most important days in your life is the day you were born and then the day that you figure out why. And, for me, it really hit me when I got that -- had to take that oath. You know, to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

When I took that oath, I was like, Hey, I'm serving something that's much higher than myself. And in many ways, as I've retired, and it's been three years that I've retired, and I say to people, I got more time in combat than I do retired.

And so when I look at the folks that are here and the conversations that I've already had in the hotel, it's really refreshing and rejuvenating to be amongst like-minded individuals. And so I understand why you gather. I understand why you have the street decor that you have. And it's very much appreciated and I'm grateful for it.

Ryan, when he asked me to come out, I readily accepted the invitation. Tim, I really appreciate this opportunity to share with your team.

As you know, and was stated, I'm the SVP, and general manager for Oracle Health Government Services. I believe I have the best job in the company. Because when I was recruited to come to the company, we were Cerner at the time, and we were having significant challenges with trying to figure out how to make our deployment go well within the V.A.

And, quite frankly, we had some technology challenges. And as we were bought by Oracle, as I was telling Bob Wallace, who has been a huge mentor and counsel for me in how to negotiate some of the challenges that I've experienced with the Congress, the V.A., and a host of other people, and I really appreciate his mentorship in that process.

But as I negotiate this space, I find myself being reminded of the -- of the Teddy Roosevelt. And I think most people might be familiar with the man in the arena. Okay. It's not the person who is the cynic. It's not the person who is aloof.

It's the person who's actually in the arena, getting beaten, being pulverized, with the desire to be successful, but if not successful, you know that you've given your best.

And as an evacuation pilot -- and I know we have some Vietnam vets in the room. Where are you? Where are you?

I was brought into the Army med department in fascination with the dust-off pilots from your era. And I met Novosel, Medal of Honor winner, and when he talks about, when I have your wounded, that's kind of how I feel about this particular program.

While we're having some challenges, we will be successful. And I will describe some of that as we -- as I go through the presentation here. But just know that the DOD, every medical facility in the Department of Defense is operating on the Oracle database and HR.

I can tell you that we went live at Walter Reed and Fort Belvoir. As a beneficiary, I receive my care at Fort Belvoir and Walter Reed. Most recently, I had a three-level fusion in my lower back, and I'm currently going through some eye treatment because I have a -- some more floating in the back of my eye so I can barely see right now, to be candid with you.

But I can tell you that before we went live with the system and then after -- clearly, there were some challenges. But one thing that is sure -- and I can tell you that the military brings up something, it's called leadership. And I think everybody in this room understands that leadership is a combat multiplier.

And I will tell you that for me, I have had to wait a little longer at the pharmacy on certain days, but when I got to the front of the line, guess what? My medication was free because of my service to our nation.

And, to me, we have to keep things in perspective. And I will tell you that those ladies and those men and women who are in the military medical department, they are using the system exceedingly well. We are live at five locations across the V.A.

And we are also live with the U.S. Coast Guard, with the NOAA, and we are also in discussions with a couple of the facilities -- federal services as well. I can tell you unequivocally that Ryan in your national leadership have been instrumental in helping us understand what your members need and want out of this system. So I can tell you that through me and my team, what you guys are getting is advocates within the Oracle center infrastructure.

And we are delivering on the contractual requirements, not because they are legally binding, not because of the financial implications associated with it, but we all see this as a moral imperative. This is something that we have to get right.

Tim talked about that longitudinal, integrated, interoperable, seamless record. That's what we need. And that's what we're delivering to members who have served our nation. Having retired in 2020, I had to go out to the facilities that I had been treating in and gather my records and take them to the V.A. so I could get

a rating.

I don't know how many people went through that. Raise your hand if you went through that. Exactly. Those days in my mind are over when we are successful with this particular process. I have colleagues who are getting care at San Antonio Medical Center.

They go to the V.A. in San Antonio, and their lab work doesn't come over. It's, like, give me a break. We're in the 21st Century. We all know that there are 132 different instances of this stuff. And they don't talk to each other. Last time I checked, you guys are all veterans, and you travel.

So my belief would be we need to have an enterprise system that delivers and provides you care where you are.
(Applause.)

MAJOR GENERAL SARGENT: I am advocating that we work through all of our differences as it relates to how we move about the system, but we got to be – we got to be fundamentally rooted in the fact that it's the veteran who has got to be at the front and center of this discussion.

And I can tell you that as I watched the PACT Act unfold, there was a whole bunch of people not approving and not voting for that particular document, that legislation. It was you who stood and I'm a -- I'm in D.C. I live in Virginia and I work out of Reston.

And the dudes at night -- and I'm watching this play out on TV. And I'm saying to myself, thank God we have people in the VFW and other veterans' support organizations advocating for us.

You guys changed the nature and the characteristics of how the Congress views this organization, but, more importantly, the benefits that we received.

Being in Desert Storm, I was there when all the oil fields are ablaze, and it's 12 o'clock in the day, but it was like midnight because of the oil fires across Kuwait.

I don't think many of those people who voted against that legislation understood that or experienced that.

And I do have some complications associated with that.

So don't take your power, don't take your advocacy for granted. To that end, we -- we have -- we -- we've gotten some additional service-level agreements because the challenges that we were having was with operational readiness of the system. And it was unacceptable.

Period. Full stop. We were not living up to our contractual obligations.

That said, June, we have a requirement to submit documentation to Congress to kind of describe how the system is performing.

And I'm pleased to report that for outage-free time, incident-free time, and this thing called P90, which gives us the ability to determine about the end user impact, we met all of those standards.

(Applause.)

MAJOR GENERAL SARGENT: As it relates to ticket management, we did

not meet the standard. And we are working hard and aggressive to get that. Neil Evans, who is the EHRM program director, he and I meet every two weeks. We put -- we put forth a remediation plan because I think everybody in this room understands that this transformation is more about people, processes, and technology. It's not just the technology.

And so we're working together, jointly, to kind of make sure that we have the right processes, but, more importantly, the governance in place to get this done.

While I'm going to be able to only speak at the high level in this forum, I'm going to encourage everyone in this room to join us this afternoon as we hold a fireside chat, and we'll get to much more specifics and specificity with regards to the program.

But there's a key -- key points I want to make.

I already told you about the federal HER is in all of the DOD facilities. When we went live at Walter Reed and Fort Belvoir, there was zero patient safety instance in that particular deployment. Yes. Absolutely. (Applause.)

MAJOR GENERAL SARGENT: And I think everybody knows that Walter Reed is the most complex facility in the Department of Defense and likely the V.A. as well.

We know that our members of Congress and the President of the United States receive their care there. And they're getting their care documented inside of the EHR that we are -- are unfolding.

The V.A. is on a reset. Reset, meaning that over the past five years, there have been different stages of the implementation, and we had challenges along the way with people, processes, and the technology, which we own.

That said, they are currently working through the question of how do we optimize the system to make sure it works for the five sites that it is presently in? And in many ways, the V.A. is having to come back and say, maybe we put too many work flows and we made too many controls in the system.

And so they are re- -- they're re- -- they're re- -- they're now doing a reassessment of that to try to make sure that the processes aren't complicating the delivery of the healthcare for the providers in the system.

We're also looking at how do we continue to take the -- the inputs from this five sites and make it go systemwide once we resume go-live activities.

And then, lastly, we are going live and we are presently engaged in deployment activities at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in North Chicago. I spent two weeks -- I've been there twice with members of the V.A., the DOD, because it's a joint facility, Navy and V.A.

And I can tell you that the VISN director, the VINCI director are very excited and they're looking forward to bringing this system live in March of next year. And we can talk more about that this afternoon.

On the contractual agreements, I just told you about what we've done to

try to increase the predictability with that. This interoperability and the seamless delivery of care, we made tremendous process improvement to ensure that our patient populations receive care no matter where they are.

And our goal is to be able to put the soul back into medicine, such that when you're talking to your provider, you're not being -- the technology doesn't get between you two. Being in the medical care for 20-plus years, I understand this thing called the therapeutic alliance.

You got to have a relationship with your provider. Current tools make it transactional. And you can't get that level of alliance with your patients. But, more importantly, we want to be able to have some predictability. Our system has many safeguards inside of it.

We talk about opioid abuse. Our system has caught over 1,500 instances where if the medication was provided, it could have caused some level of bad outcome. Predictable analytics inside of our tool to make decisions.

I will tell you that I want to thank you for your time and attention. I want to tell you that may God continue to bless the VFW and, more importantly, may God continue to bless our men and women who are standing on freedom frontier on behalf of us in defense of our nation.

My name is Sargent, and I'm a soldier for life. Thank you. 6
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: That was a very inspirational speech, and I'm glad he already told us that he was a member, because I was prepared, of course, because I heard he had that qualification.

Comrades, I just wanted to let you know, give you an update on the V.A. clinic. After the Secretary of Veterans Administration talked, and I added a little bit more about August 9th deadline -- and I'll remind you all now because some of you might not have been here yesterday.

But the PACT Act claims, you have until August 9th to do an intent to file. Just an intent to file. We have a V.A. clinic right here in the hall. If you haven't done it, I was told that over 100 did it yesterday.

Over 100. So congratulations on that.

Because when you get home, you'll have a chance to finish that intent to file, and you could, if awarded, be back paid up to August 10th of 2022. So for those of you that weren't here yesterday, the August 9th deadline doesn't mean that after August 9th, you can't file.

What that means is, if you don't file at least an intent to file, in other words, starting the actual claim -- you don't have to have evidence now, just start it, get it recorded -- you can get retroactive pay all the way back to August 10th is when the PACT Act was signed into law.

But after August 9th, you can still file. It's just that it's not going to be backdated to August 10th of 2022. It will only be dated to the date that you actually made that intent to file after August 9th. Am I clear on that?

So if you haven't done it yet, please go to the V.A. clinic and get it done

because it will behoove you to get that retroactive pay back that you deserve.

One other thing, for those of you that weren't at the patriotic rally, because some of you might not have come. We did an awesome fundraiser. And on the floor, besides the money that Jane Reape and I, our national president of the Auxiliary, have raised throughout the year for the Voice of Democracy scholarship program, we raised an additional \$19,000 on the floor just last night.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: For a grand total of \$63,000 for Voice of Democracy scholarships.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: So thank you, comrades, for your donations. I did note who donated to the Auxiliary. I did note. But I know it was all fun.

When I went next door, boy, they were cheering and cheering. And I got this gift, and I go, That's not a pie, is it? They giggled.

But thank you so much for your donations. It's a win/win. Those kids right there, just sitting down, they're going to be high school students eventually, and they're going to write some essays and they will be beneficiaries of what we just did as a group. So thank you so much.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:

VFW DISTINGUISHED HISTORICAL AWARD TO ROBERT J. WELCH

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: The VFW Historic Award recognizes VFW members or citizens for their contribution for a better understanding of our American way of life, history, and institutions. The nominees perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, educate about the importance of American history and why the history is important to our institutions, above and beyond what others would do.

With that said, it is a great honor and privilege to introduce the recipient of the 2023 VFW Distinguished Historical Award.

Robert J. Welch contributes immensely to a better understanding of our American way of life and its great history through its commitment to honoring and educating, whether through his appointed position as a state historian at the VFW Department of Illinois, a position he filled for the first time in more than a half a century, his many speaking engagements on American military history, or his published writings and vast collection of military memorabilia -- sorry.

I do stumble on some words. We all do.

That only continues to grow. Robert's work helps to ensure military history, its heroes and their significance are forefront in our hearts and minds.

Thanks to Robert's efforts at the department, he has not only created a comprehensive database of all past department commanders, he also developed a space solely for the Department of Illinois history to include archiving post histories and charters.

Robert's ongoing work and membership within numerous patriotic societies, civic groups and veterans' service organizations has led to ensure the final resting place of our fallen during American Civil War remain cared for and that their memories and service are not forgotten.

His unwavering allegiance and devotion to America's history has made him an ideal recipient for this award. And it brings me great pleasure to present the VFW's distinguished historical award to Robert J. Welch.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Historical Award and Citation awarded to Robert J. Welch in special recognition and sincere appreciation of his tremendous commitment and dedication to honoring, educating, and preserving America's military history and ensuring that our fallen are never forgotten.

His patriotism and efforts to propel knowledge of American history help to make certain the next generation and those that follow will never forget our great nation's rich and storied history. For this, he has justly earned the utmost respect and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have, hereunto, set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 26th day of July 2023. Approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed, Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, Dan West, Adjutant General.
(Applause.)

ROBERT WELCH: Thank you. Good morning, comrades.
(Good morning.)

ROBERT WELCH: Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope. Good morning, comrades.
(Good morning.)

ROBERT WELCH: Now, I feel better.

Wow. I am truly humbled to receive this award. I never expected in all my years that I would get this kind of recognition for doing things that I consider to be hobbies. All right. I don't go out of my way to do this. I do this because I enjoy it and it's fun.

And I need to thank the past Commander-in-Chief for the submission. I really thought that after him listening to me ramble about the Civil War, Illinois' role in it, and how this nation's true veterans' service organization, The Grand Army of the Republic was founded in Decatur, Illinois, on April 6th, 1866.

And even after I drug him to Petersburg, Illinois, to visit the gravesite of its founder, Dr. Benjamin F. Stephenson, that he would have written me off as

annoying rather than written me up for an award.

And just a note about the GAR and their relationship with the VFW.

In 1919, the VFW National Council of Administration voted to make every member of the Grand Army of the Republic an honorary member of the VFW. And, for the record, the membership of the GAR at their 1919 encampment was over 110,000 members.

So in a single vote, 110,000 members of the GAR were made honorary members of the VFW. That's just to show how much of an impact that organization had on ours.

Cathy, thank you for putting up with my hobbies. Your support and willingness to drive hours out into God's country in search of a random cemetery that may only have a set of GPS coordinates or be identified by a rusty old dilapidated sign at the end of a long-forgotten dirt road, just so I could catalog a veteran's headstone means the world to me.

To the great state of Illinois...

(Applause.)

ROBERT WELCH: Thank you. Thank you for letting me be your state historian. Not that I gave you much choice. The willingness of the comrades in Illinois to step up and help me with the last Union veteran project is truly humbling. For those that don't know, the last Union veteran project was started in 2003 by the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Its goal is to identify the last Union veteran to be buried in each county across this country and place a commemorative marker at their gravesite.

The SUVCW in Illinois is small and was unable to cover the 102 counties in the state, and the project had ground to a halt. After putting an article in the Illinois VFW News asking for help from local posts, my e-mail blew up.

With the help of comrades from across the state, we now only have 35 counties left to identify the last Union veteran buried there. So thank you, Illinois. (Applause.)

ROBERT WELCH: Now, I don't want anybody to think that my focus is on the Civil War. Al's not up here, but he can attest that he did get to see me dressed up as a color sergeant for the 39th Illinois Infantry at our last VOD. It's not. My focus is definitely not on all on the Civil War.

My focus is on the study of the fraternal veterans' organizations that rose and formed after the individual conflicts and wars that America participated in, and preserving the history of those veterans, who started them and, obviously, that means on the VFW itself.

Now, that topic could lead me into a three-hour seminar.

So, in closing, I want to encourage all departments to appoint a state historian, someone with a passion for researching the people and the events that are specific to your state, and how they built your department into what it is today.

I also urge the national organization -- I'm looking at you -- to do the same.

Our fraternal history is just as relevant now as it was in 1899. And only a passionate caretaker of the past can be a true custodian of our rich history.

Commander-in-Chief Borland, Comrades of the VFW, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for this award.

(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS:
TERRY MOULTON, SR. ADVISOR TO THE CEO
TRIWEST HEALTHCARE ALLIANCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Founded in 1996, TriWest Healthcare Alliance is the only company of its kind with one sole purpose that continues today, serving the healthcare needs of the nation's military and veterans' communities.

For 17 years, TriWest administered the Department of Defense TRICARE program, and in 2013, TriWest was selected to provide community care support to the Department of Veterans Affairs. Since 2014, they have supported the healthcare needs of our nation's veterans through the V.A.'s Community Care Network in Regions 4 and 5.

In December of 2022, the DOD awarded TriWest the next generation TRICARE program contract for its new 26-state West Region.

TriWest's motto, "whatever it takes," is a clear and resounding mission. And they have demonstrated time and again how dedicated they are to serving our military and our veterans' communities, ensuring they receive access to quality healthcare they have earned and deserve.

With such dedication to our nation's service members and their families, it isn't surprising that helping lead its work is someone like our next guest, TriWest senior advisor to the president and CEO of TRICARE program officer, U.S. Navy veteran, Terry Moulton.

Terry joined TriWest in 2020 after a successful Navy career, culminating in his service as a Deputy Surgeon General and Deputy Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery in Washington, D.C.

In those roles, he led an organization of more than 63,000 military and civilian staff in readiness preparedness of healthcare benefit delivery. He also served on the Military Health System Senior Advisory Council.

Terry has held numerous command leadership assignments, including as Commander, Navy Medicine East, overseeing 19 commands throughout the East Coast and Europe. He served as a Commander, U.S. Naval Hospital, Okinawa, Japan, the Navy's largest overseas hospital.

He has also served as an executive director for TRICARE, Region 11, coordinating care between the direct care system and the managed care support contractor.

He had significant Pentagon assignments under the Secretary of the Navy, Chief of Naval Operations and in the Surgeon General's Office.

Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm welcome to TriWest

Healthcare's senior advisor to the President and CEO, TRICARE program officer and Navy veteran, Terry Moulton.
(Applause.)

TERRY MOULTON: Well, good morning. I heard a lot of hooyah when Brian Sargent was up here a few minutes ago and I heard there's some Navy in the house as well.

Do I hear a hooyah I like it. I like it. Glad to hear it.

I will tell you that Brian Sargent and I were in D.C. at the same time and we both worked on the military health system executive council driving care for those veterans and the beneficiaries that we serve and it was really an honor to work alongside him.

And I see that we both have chosen wisely in our post career assignments or post career opportunities in continuing to serve those that we have served for so long. So I'm really happy to be here on behalf of TriWest Healthcare Alliance.

So we welcome all of you to -- to the Phoenix area. And I hope that this week has been good for you, and if you've been able to get out and about and you've enjoyed the climate here in Phoenix. And have you heard -- you probably have heard -- it's a dry heat? So you don't need to worry too much about that.

My hometown is Nashville, Tennessee, and it's a little bit muggy. I think I prefer the dry heat.

So welcome. It really is an honor and a privilege to be here today to represent our president and CEO, Dave McIntyre, and our organization as a longtime corporate sponsor of this VFW National Convention.

And I know if Dave were here, he would make a point to giving a shout-out to the VFW Department of Arizona. And I think they're right out here. Can I get a shout-out?

(Applause.)

TERRY MOULTON: Thank you. And especially to our outgoing national Commander-in-Chief, Mr. Tim Borland, who also hails from the great state of Arizona.

Thanks -- thank you for all of you for what you do as a state and states in the overall mission, and congratulations on hosting the 124th National Convention. What a great event.

If I could, I would like to tell you a little bit about my military journey. You heard a little bit about that. But I was born in San Antonio, Texas, at Lackland Air Force Base, and I spent the first 14 years of my life as an Air Force brat, moving around the States and living in Japan.

My father was in the Strategic Air Command and worked on the Hound Dog missile on the B-52 bomber. When my father retired, we moved back to his home state of Nashville -- Nashville, Tennessee.

And as I grew older, I spoke to him and told him, I will never join the service. You won't catch me in. But, you know, after high school and college, I

missed the lifestyle. I missed moving around the country, going to the base, visiting the base Exchange, going to the movie theater for 25 cents, and the people that I met along the way.

So I joined the Navy with a three-year commitment and I stayed 37 years, working mainly in the military health system. During that time, I moved across the country with my family 13, 14, 15 times, which included four tours in Washington, D.C., and two tours overseas. I deployed to Operation Desert Storm on the USS Nimitz in support of the Global War on Terrorism, which is how I recently qualified to become one of your newest VFW members.

I served in Guantanamo Bay. I support –

I served in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in support of Operation Sea Signal, which was the -- we called it the Haitian vacation and the Cuban migration. 55,000 migrants on a base population of 5,000.

And then later, in support of the detainee operations for Iraqi Freedom. I was also working at the Pentagon on September 11th and assisted with the casualties from the attack, and I commanded the Naval hospital in Okinawa in support of the evacuation of Americans from mainland Japan after the impact of the earthquake and tidal wave to the Fukushima Nuclear Reactor.

I finished my career, as you heard, in Washington, D.C. in 2020 as the Deputy Surgeon General. And I'm very thankful for making that decision to join the service and, like you, to join the Armed Services. I can't think of a better way to have spent my life than in service to our country.

And it's with that same reason that I'm proud to have joined TriWest serving our nation's veterans by partnering and supporting the V.A. in our role with the V.A. Community Care Network.

TriWest is honored to be responsible for building and maintaining the network of community care providers and facilities in 14 states, including Alaska and Hawaii, and three U.S. territories in the Pacific that make up the Community Care Network for the V.A. in Regions 4 and 5.

And since the start of our work, alongside the V.A., TriWest network has delivered more than 56 million appointments with veterans. TriWest has processed over 58 million claims for community providers with 98 percent of clean claims paid within 10 days. And we appreciate the feedback that you all have provided at our exhibit booth here this week. Thank you.

Our goal is to ensure that the V.A. has the elasticity it needs to support our veterans when the V.A. cannot provide that care themselves.

In our connection with the VFW over the years and the interaction with VFW members and leadership has ensured we remain focused on the need to the veterans we serve through the partnership with the V.A.

To that end, and as a part of the TriWest support of the VFW, we would like to acknowledge the service of VFW's past and current executive directors, Mr. Bob Wallace and Mr. Ryan Gallucci, through a contribution made by TriWest to VFW's Unmet Needs program and the national service commission.

Thank you on behalf of our organization for your continued commitment to ensuring that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great nation.

May our work at TriWest always honor those that we are privileged to serve.

Thank you.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:
VFW DISTINGUISHED EDUCATIONAL AWARD TO DAVID HARMER

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: For more than 75 years, the VFW and Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge has been connected through VFW's Voice of Democracy program.

The VFW's commitment to educating young Americans on the importance of patriotism and freedom clearly and proudly aligns with the Freedoms Foundation's mission to educate our nation's youth and educators on the rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Every June, the top 53 VFW department winners from across the 50 U.S. states and foreign overseas areas in Europe and the Pacific come together at Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge to participate in the Spirit of America Youth Leadership Program.

A transformative four-day program that immerses and engages high school students with the first principles of freedom. The VFW Distinguished Educational Award is designed to recognize citizens of VFW members for their exceptional contribution to education and intrinsic values of American's freedom and citizenship.

As you see, our next guest has gone beyond that in his years as an attorney and teacher. Since 2018, David Harmer has served as president and CEO of the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge.

David has appealed, published, and spoken in defense of personal and economic freedoms recognized by the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. He has served as counsel to a subcommittee of the Senate judiciary committee.

While working at Pacific Legal Organization, he worked tirelessly to defend the freedoms recognized by the First and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution.

So today, we recognize David for his passion and dedication in defending the Constitution, and his admirable work in educating the youth of America, teaching, and inspiring them to preserve American freedoms and to show civic responsibility.

It is now my honor and privilege to present the 2023 Distinguished Educational Award to Mr. David Harmer.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Educational Award and Citation awarded to David Harmer. In special recognition and sincere appreciation of his exceptional commitment to educating young Americans of the intrinsic values of American freedom and our rights and responsibilities as citizens.

His extraordinary commitment and dedication to making a positive impact on students through his teachings clearly aligns with the VFW's mission to educate our nation's youth in effort to strengthen and bolster our democracy for future generations to come.

For this, he has justly earned the highest degree of admiration and respect from the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States this 26th day of July 2023. Approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed, Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, Dan West, Adjutant General. (Applause.)

DAVID HARMER: Commander-in-Chief Borland, Adjutant General West, Director of Programs Lynn Rolf, leaders of the VFW at the national department and post levels, and to each of you veterans whose service in foreign wars has preserved the independence and freedom of the United States of America, on behalf of the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, I'm honored and humbled to accept this award.

It recognizes not my personal efforts so much as the longstanding collaboration between the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge.

Commander Borland has invited me to take just a moment to give you a bit of history and explain why our two organizations have collaborated and what we can do for you for your posts and your departments and your efforts to assure that the rising generation appreciate the freedoms that have been bequeathed to them through your service and those of your colleagues who were not able to return.

Roll the clock back with me 74 years, will you, to 1949. Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower has returned from Europe. He's not yet thrown his hat in the ring for the presidency, so he's between gigs.

Now, even then, Ike was concerned that Americans were clear about what they were against, Nazism, fascism, but not so clear about what they were for. What was it about the American way of life that was worth preserving, worth fighting to preserve, worth, if necessary, dying to preserve?

So Ike and some other concerned citizens that you may have heard of, people like E.F. Hutton, decided to establish Freedoms Foundation to create and build an understanding of the spirit and philosophy of America's founding ideals as reflected in her founding documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Now, it probably would have made sense to put this foundation in New York or Los Angeles or Washington, D.C., but Ike insisted that it be located in Valley

Forge, the crucible of the American Revolution, because he said it was there at Valley Forge that the American experiment had come closest to extinction.

And it was Ike's determination that never again would it come so close. And he promised in speaking at Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, that the American experiment, with worthy disciples, he said, would endure.

That is our collective mission as the VFW and Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, to create those worthy disciples, to ensure that among the rising generation, all too often, whose education disregards or even disparages the ideals of the American founding, that they understand what a privilege it is to be a citizen of the United States of America and an heir of the American experiment.

So how do we do that? Well, Ike and his colleagues acquired a magnificent 75-acre property bordering what is now Valley Forge National Historical Park and put up some handsome colonial-style buildings, a boys' dorm, a girls' dorm, classrooms, a nondenominational chapel.

Throughout the year, we bring high school students from around the country to Valley Forge for four- to six-day immersive, intensive, experiential, educational programs in the history and ideals and continuing relevance of the American founding.

Of all the groups, I will tell you, the most remarkable students are those the VFW sends every year. The winners of the Voice of Democracy contest, if you could be there with them, and I hope many of you will be over the years to come, your faith in the future of this nation and in the ability of the rising generation to preserve what you have fought for would be reinforced and strengthened. You would be reassured and gladdened.

Now, I'm here to make a brief announcement. For decades, VFW has shared with us the Voice of Democracy students. We are now opening that opportunity to all students that any post or department wishes to sponsor.

Take a moment to stop by the programs' booth at the exhibit hall. Director of Programs Lynn Rolf and I will be there. We'll be glad to answer any questions you might have. But we invite you to ensure that more students have the opportunity of coming to Valley Forge and understanding the sacrifices made by their forebearers for their freedom.

Ike expressed his conviction that the American experiment would never again come so close to extinction as it did in Valley Forge during that terrible winter of 1777 to '78, when the long-suffering soldiers of the Continental Army, having fought honorably well, but lost, were at what looked like the tail end of a long, ignominious retreat from the Battles of Brandywine and Germantown.

The initial optimism of 1776 had given way to grave concern about the ability of the then colonies to prevail against the mightiest military on the face of the planet.

It is reported that Washington was found at one point kneeling in the snow in Valley Forge in prayer, drawing on the powers of heaven, calling upon divine providence to preserve his long-suffering troops through that winter. Washington marched into Valley Forge December 19th, 1777, with about 11,000 soldiers.

Exactly six months later, June 19th, 1778, he led about 8,000 soldiers out. Now, there were a few enlistments and a few replenishments, but that was basically a wash.

What happened to the missing 3,000? How did his Army dwindle from 11,000 to 8,000? There was no battle there, at least no military battle. The only battles were against disease, exposure, hunger.

The specter of famine haunted the camp. Corruption and ineptitude of the quartermaster and commissary departments meant very little of the land's wealth made it to the soldiers who were fighting to gain America's independence.

In that bleak hour, Washington sought the inner position of what he referred to as divine providence. And it came, but as so often it comes, it came not in the first -- not in the form of a heavenly miracle. It came in the form of individuals who did their part, who struggled and fought.

And Washington, even as he faced insubordination in his ranks, hostility from Congress, the difficulties of feeding and motivating his troops, Washington somehow managed to hold them all together through that bleak winter and never, never again would they come so close to dissolution.

Now, to General Washington, our nation's founding father, and General Eisenhower, our foundation's founding father, we feel that we owe a great debt of gratitude. And the way that we do that is redoubling our efforts to ensure that what they stood for, what they fought for, what they advocated and what they secured will be preserved. With your help, we'll ensure that the republic will endure.

Again, to each of you, to your leadership, and to all of those who labored with you and weren't able to return to homes and families, we express our intergenerational debt of gratitude and our determination to ensure that none of those sacrifices shall have been in vain. Thank you.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION/REMARKS:

VFW DISTINGUISHED FRATERNAL AWARD TO WALTER R. GROTH

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: The VFW Distinguished Fraternal Award is designed to recognize VFW members or citizens who have furthered the aims or ideals of VFW camaraderie.

Nominees display consistent and proven efforts to preserve and strengthen a spirit of good friendship and loyalty among VFW members, assisting surviving spouses and dependents of deceased members, while providing assistance to vulnerable and at-risk comrades above and beyond what others would or have done.

And for more than 53 years, our next guest has done just that. After his time in the Army, and his deployment to Vietnam, Walter Groth joined the VFW in 1970.

For the last 45 consecutive years, he served as the Post Commander for

VFW Post 1465 in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. Try saying that.

Also headed up the Post's Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen efforts for more than 30 years. He worked closely with teachers and students to promote our patriotic essay contest, encouraging participation and even helping the school district to establish a \$1,000 music scholarship for Wauwatosa East and West High Schools.

He can often be found spending time volunteering and supporting local veterans at the V.A., whether it's planning a fun bowling night or the annual picnic. Walter spent nearly 40 years as a claim examiner at the V.A., helping process 250,000 claims and ensuring Michigan veterans received the benefits and services they earned.

Whether it's his dedication to our youth programs, spreading the message and meaning beyond the iconic Buddy Poppy, or finding ways to give back to his local fellow veterans, the work Walter does every single day exemplifies what it means to be a true VFW member and the genuine spirit behind our mission.

The Commander-in-Chief is honored to present the 2023 VFW Distinguished Fraternal Award to VFW Life Member, and Post 1465 Commander, Mr. Walter Groth.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Distinguished Fraternal Award and Citation awarded to Walter R. Groth in lasting appreciation and spirited recognition of his more than 50 years of exceptional intrepid service to his country, the Veterans of Wisconsin and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

His exemplary achievements in support of the veterans' service mission and programs of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and his ongoing dedication and commitment to his brothers and sisters in arms are held in the highest regard and have justly earned him the highest level of admiration and gratitude of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands in the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 26th day of July 2023. Approved by the National Council of Administration. Signed, Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General.
(Applause.)

WALTER GROTH: I want to thank the National Veterans of Foreign Wars for this honor.

I've devoted my life to helping veterans and I appreciate receiving this recognition.

I want to thank all the members of the VFW for -- for their service. For without our full body of veterans, our organization would not function.

Again, thank you very much for this honor. Thank you.
(Applause.)

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS:
MICHAEL LAIRD, BURGER KING FRANCHISE HONOREE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: A second-generation Burger King franchise owner, our next guest makes giving back to military and veteran families a priority because of -- he understands firsthand the sacrifices they make.

Michael Laird is a United States Army veteran who served two terms in Iraq with the 101st Airborne, first in the 187th Infantry Regiment. His father, Mitchell, founded Burger King franchise Laird Management over 20 years ago, and with the 30 restaurants located – employing more than 600, theirs is one of the largest Burger King franchise in Arizona.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: You could do better than that.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All right. That's good. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. We simply would not be able to do what we do for our Unmet Needs program without the generous support of Burger King franchises.

More than 1,360 Burger King franchise restaurants participated in this year's

May campaign, and since 2007, Burger King franchisees have raised an astounding \$7.2 million in support of the Unmet Needs.

Michael and his locations continue to lead by example with Laird Management being instrumental in the success of these fundraisers, generously contributing more than \$100,000 to help military and veteran families in need.

We're extremely fortunate to have an ally in Michael and are truly grateful for his support and generosity to the Unmet Needs program.

Please welcome with a warm applause for Michael C. Laird, President and CEO of Laird Management, LLC. 3
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Certificate of Appreciation presented to Michael C. Laird, President and CEO, Laird Management, LLC.

In sincere recognition and appreciation of his unwavering support to our nation's veterans and military families through the Burger King VFW Unmet Needs fundraising campaign.

Through his exceptional leadership efforts, his Laird Management team and their loyal patrons, Michael's Burger King franchises located in central, southern, and northern Arizona have contributed over \$100,000 in assisting military families with unexpected expenses related to rent, mortgage, medical expenses, utilities, and other basic needs due to unforeseen issues, such as extended military deployments or a gap in government-provided assistance.

Michael enlisted in the United States Army serving with the 101st Airborne Division with his brother Mark. He is a combat veteran who served two tours in Iraq with the 101st Airborne, one of the 187th Infantry Regiment, and was honorably discharged from the military in December 2006.

He has utilized his business to advocate for the work of the VFW, and, most importantly, the necessity of programs such as VFW's Unmet Needs. Through his position as president of the Southwest Franchisee Association, his efforts have been instrumental in recruiting other Burger King franchise owners to support our much-needed programs for veterans, service members, and their families.

Michael's unrelenting efforts exemplify the spirit of the mission and values of the VFW and have justly earned him the utmost respect and admiration of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and the official seal of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, this 26th day of July 2023. Signed, Timothy M. Borland, Commander-in-Chief, and Dan West, Adjutant General. (Applause.)

MICHAEL LAIRD: Wow. Thank you. That's very humbling. I wanted to thank Commander-in-Chief Borland and Adjutant General West and all the VFW members and service members here today.

So where's my 101st Airborne folks at?
(Shouting.)

MICHAEL LAIRD: Do I have any Rakkasans? 3rd Brigade, that's right. Wow. I wanted to also just thank my wife, Lisa, and family, my parents, for being here, my fellow Burger King franchisees that we work alongside to support the VFW Unmet Needs program.

One of the things I love about the Unmet Needs program is the stories that you hear and it truly is about life transformation. It's about coming alongside our fellow veterans and service members and families in times of great need and being able to come alongside them and be support, to have their back the same way that we had their back in the service.

And so really special to be a part of that. Thank you, Burger King and franchisees. You know, my father started Laird Management several decades ago. And one of the principles that he instilled in his business was if you want to have good people, if you want to have good people in your organization, you must first be good to people.

And that's how he ran his --
(Applause)

MICHAEL LAIRD: - business.
(Applause.)

MICHAEL LAIRD: And so at Laird Management, we have a phrase that is --

Laird Management, our motto is "being good to people." That's vendors, that's customers, that's team members. That's everybody. And that's his legacy.

And one of the things I love so much about Unmet Needs in the VFW and that program is that it is an extension of that motto. VFW Unmet Needs truly is about being good to people, being good to veterans and families in times of need, and we're so grateful to partner, humbled to partner with them in that endeavor.

The last thing I would like to say is thank you to our restaurant leaders, our general managers, our team members that are each and every day implementing this program, that are asking our guests to partner with them in supporting this great need that this country has. And so appreciative of that.

And then I want to also just throw out, for five consecutive years running, we've had a general manager in Payson, Arizona, named Liz Tipton who has led our company in fundraising every single year for five years consecutive.

And so I'm up here on behalf of her and the other general managers and team members who have done an incredible job of running this program. Thank you. Great job, Liz.

God bless you all. Have a great conference.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION: LEGION OF HONOR BRONZE MEDAL TO
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TIMOTHY BORLAND

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: At this time, we will have a presentation by Past National Chaplain Peter Hook to the Commander-in-Chief Tim Borland.

PETER HOOK: I am here on behalf of the Chapel of Four Chaplains in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And the Chapel of Four Chaplains is pleased to present the Legion of Honor Bronze Medallion Award to our Commander-in-Chief Timothy M. Borland.

This is presented in recognition, Chief, of your exceptional lifetime of service to all peoples, especially veterans.

This award is given in honor of the Four Chaplains and their selfless heroic acts aboard the USAT Dorchester, on February 3rd, 1943, where they linked arms and together, although different faiths and different branches, they took care of those comrades aboard the Dorchester.

Chief Borland, your leadership and your numerous acts of volunteerism and selfless service, they have been a model to those of us in this great organization. And I'm pleased to present this award to you. And congratulations for being among the elite to receive this award.
(Applause.)

PRESENTATION: 2022-2023 DEPARTMENT COMMANDERS GIFT TO
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TIMOTHY BORLAND

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, the 2022 and 2023 department

commanders are now gathering here on the stage for a special presentation. Past Department Commander of Rhode Island, Tiger Patrick, and past Department Commander of Texas, Lynn Toomer, will be the representatives, so get ready to have your ears blown off by the "Hell, yeah."

TIGER PATRICK: Hi, my name is Tiger Patrick. I am the Past State Commander of Rhode Island, and I'm very excited and honored to stand before you today as a proud member of Borland's Brigade. That's the name we gave ourselves two years ago during COVID when we met monthly for our Zoom sessions.

So before we kick off the awards and the gift, I would like to personally thank for all my class, Dan West and his staff, Marc Garduno, his staff, Kissha -- I could go on for an hour and a half. But every day, they are awesome.

My personal favorite is Quentin, because we had so many issues in my little old state that I had to reach out to him a lot.

Thank you all so much for putting up with me and my class. You helped me immensely. Thank you.

First off, Chief, what a year, right.

And we wanted to present you with our class game ball because this has been a trench fight all year. Signed by all of us in our class. My past state commander Jay Boxwell from New Jersey.

JAY BOXWELL: Our team ball, given to our MVP. It is a Brady ball in case you have small hands.

TIGER PATRICK: And we're off.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you.

TIGER PATRICK: Thank you. So there are 37 of us on stage. There are 48 of us who made All-American, achieved that honor this year. And it all started with you and your leadership and your mentorship. I want to say thank you very much for that.

Your drive and your initiative from the get-go brought us to a point where I think almost all of us recruited somebody in the airport coming back from our senior vice commander training last year.

And so it was a great ride, and I wouldn't change anything at all. And I'm so proud of our family here. We put together a little video of our year together. And I hope we can see it on there because a lot of the class hasn't seen it yet.

But we love you, Chief. And after the video is over, then the award will be presented by our class president, Lynn Toomer.

Go ahead and start the video.

(The video was played.)

(Applause.)

LYNN TOOMER: Chief, morning, VFW.
(Good morning.)

LYNN TOOMER: How we doing this morning? All right. I got to brag a

little bit about our chief.

This journey started three years ago when we stepped up as Junior Vices. Chief made us aware, completely aware that his goal was going to be 102 percent.

At first, we got a little kickback. Oh, we can't do that. We can't do that.

Thank God for the chief holding to that 102 percent. And incoming chiefs, thank you for continuing to do that.

The 102 percent makes us viable. 100 plus 1 does not replace the 65,000 veterans we lose every year. 100 plus 1 does not do that. We have to continue that.

And because of your goal, Chief, the Department of Texas is now the biggest department in the world.
(Applause.)

LYNN TOOMER: And as you see behind me, you have the largest 100 percent class ever in history of the VFW. 48 All-American VFW Posts at 102 percent.
(Applause.)

LYNN TOOMER: So at this time, Chief, we would like to present you with a gift from the class. This is an engraved Henry rifle with a display case. We put his name on it so he didn't lose it.
(Applause.)

LYNN TOOMER: Borland's Brigade. Present, salute.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, I'm not going to kid you when I say this. I am very emotional. My hairs are standing on my arms. I got goose bumps.

This class was wonderful. So close, so tight, always contacting each other. Just worked together and helped each other succeed.

I am so proud, not only to be your Commander-in-Chief, but their Commander-in-Chief. With their leadership, we got this organization 101.60 percent this year, the second Commander-in-Chief in over 41 years that exceeded 100 percent.

I want to hear a huge, huge, huge applause for my class of '22/'23, Borland's Brigade.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: As we give them a moment to clear the stage, I truly am going to miss this. I truly am. But I'll tell you right now, our next Commander-in-Chief is going to be carrying the torch as I pass it. There's no doubt in my mind, Duane Sarmiento is going to kill it. No doubt.

ANNOUNCEMENT:
RYAN GALLUCCI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
VFW WASHINGTON D.C. OFFICE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Our next speaker is going to be our executive director from the D.C. office, again, Ryan Gallucci. Please give him a round of applause. (Applause.)

RYAN GALLUCCI: Thank you, Comrade Commander-in-Chief. Someone cutting onions in here?

That video was –

Hey, before we head into the main event, I wanted to take a few minutes here to talk about a new partner with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Barstool Sports.

So those of you who were at the Washington conference may have seen some folks from their blog Zero Blog Thirty kicking around, talking about all the great work that the VFW is doing on Capitol Hill.

But I'll tell you, Barstool Sports has come back and reinvested in the VFW. Those of you -- you may have seen it on our social media accounts. They've been selling this great T-shirt. All right.

Some of you, if you haven't bought it, go on Barstool Sports and buy it. It says, "America Undefeated Since 1776."

So it's sold out right now. I think more are coming. So if you didn't get it, you can't take mine. But also, I want to ask -- I'm going to put an image up on the screen here. There it is.

So what Barstool Sports is doing in partnership with New Amsterdam vodka is they're raising funds to renovate a VFW Post. So if you go to <https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/EMLqCADoMPCNx2RYu80Nk7?domain=barstoolsports.com>, you can learn about this program.

So what I'm going to ask our comrades here today and those of you watching live online is visit [https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/EMLqCADoMPCNx2RYu80Nk7? domain=barstoolsports.com](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/EMLqCADoMPCNx2RYu80Nk7?domain=barstoolsports.com), donate if you can.

But, more importantly, for your post, apply for this grant. This is a new relationship. We're very excited about what Barstool Sports has brought to the table. I want to thank El Pres, I want to thank Chaps, Cons, and Kate for their support of the VFW and really excited about this relationship.

Again, this is the shirt. Love the shirt. But, yeah, there it is. All right. Again, thank you, Comrade Commander-in-Chief. Thank you to Barstool Sports. Now, let's get on to the main event. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Before we go into the nominations of officers, is there any further business? Any further business? Any further

business?

Seeing none, I'm going to call our Adjutant General with any announcements.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Good morning, comrades, several announcements. Some I made earlier. Is due to the overwhelming demand for Tuesday's Post Commander Quartermasters' responsibility session, the Post Quartermasters' workshop today at 2:30 in room 125A will cover many of the same topics.

If you were unable to get in because the fire marshal showed up and kicked most of us out of a room that could only hold 50 people. We have a bigger room. Second announcement. The District Commander responsibility sessions scheduled for Wednesday, today, at 1 p.m., has been changed to room 131 to accommodate for a larger crowd.

If you are going to be making nominations here in the next several minutes, please make your way to the stage at this time. Past chiefs, you are invited to sit on the stage tomorrow for the installation of officers.

A reminder, the walk-in health clinic, so far, in this session, we don't have final count, but have served over 100 veterans here that have been able to see V.A. claims processors. And our exhibit hall will close at noon.

And with that, Commander-in-Chief, I am done with our announcements.

NOMINATIONS: 2023/2024 NATIONAL OFFICERS
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I am now going to proceed into the nominations of officers for 2023/2024.

Is there a nomination for Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars?

I recognize Paul Spera.

PAUL SPERA: Thank you, Comrade Commander. Paul Spera, Past Commander-in-Chief, a delegate to this convention, and still a very proud member of Post 144 in Boston.

You have all been involved in several days of shaping the future of this organization. That's why you're here. Nothing happens without your permission. Resolutions, bylaws, training to the various things that you are going to be doing. All of that has been provided to you over the last several days.

And now you have one more very important responsibility. To elect the leadership who will follow the dictates, the mandates that you have passed here at this convention.

I am honored to come to this podium to present on behalf of the Eastern States Conference and the great Department of New Jersey, a candidate for Commander-in-Chief.

An individual who will lead this organization. I would like to be able to come here and say that the candidate is quiet, mild-mannered, level-headed, but I

can't.

(Applause.)

PAUL SPERA: Because you all know, that wouldn't be true. What I am presenting to you today is a leader. A leader with passion, passion for this organization, passion for all that we do for veterans every single day. A leader with ability.

Ability to move people and ability to want to get people to want to do the work, to make the sacrifices, to go day by day, knowing that every little bit that you do better the life of a veteran or a dependent and protects this great nation.

He knows that. He lives that. He is that. That's his way of life. It has been all along. And you'll get the hooyah. You'll get all the rest of that. You'll get that infectious laugh. But when you elect this individual, you will get something that you need. You will get a leader.

And so with that, I am honored and privileged to place into nomination the name of Duane Sarmiento from the great state of New Jersey for the office of Commander-in-Chief for the ensuing year. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there a second nomination for Commander-in-Chief.

GABRIELLE RODZOS: Good morning. Could I get an hoorah. Sorry. I'm a little nervous.

Good morning, Commander-in-Chief, fellow comrades of the VFW, I am Duane's daughter, Gabrielle Rodzos, delegate of VFW Post 5579, Gibbstown, New Jersey.

I am honored and exceptionally proud to stand before all of you to be the second nominator of my father, Duane Sarmiento, to become our Veterans of Foreign Wars 2023 to 2024 Commander-in-Chief.

I can say with full sincerity that without my father, I wouldn't be in this uniform. I wouldn't have ever joined the military, and I wouldn't be able to stand before all of you to nominate him.

Without the discipline, and I mean the discipline, values, and morals that he has instilled in me, I truly would have never considered the military, let alone joining the best branch, hands down.

(Shouting.)

GABRIELLE RODZOS: And I would not have had the opportunities that led me to become part of this organization.

The slogan of "No one does more for veterans" is truly the epitome of my father. I have quite literally grown up in the VFW. Every single event, after every softball game, we somehow managed to end up there. And if you see a little two-year-old running around, that is my son, and I now get to pass that on to him.

We don't have much of the typical legacy of big companies, big money,

deep pockets to pass down, but this is so much more, this is so much better. And the fact that I get to be the first child of the Commander-in-Chief to be the nominator is truly something I will treasure and be able to share with my son.

I can fully attest that I have never seen my father work harder than he has for our nation's veterans. The care and passion that he has is why this organization is going to consistently move forward.

The word proud does not do justice as I watched my father become our next Commander-in-Chief. From his humble beginnings, somewhat humble, at Post 5579, to being our New Jersey State Commander, and now to be nominated as our Commander-in-Chief, I'm nothing short of eager to watch him lead all of us and to see what he's going to accomplish, especially hitting that 102 percent.

This is truly earned, Dad. I love you.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Duane Sarmiento, do you accept the nomination for Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars '23/'24.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I do.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other nominations for Commander-in-Chief? Any other nominations for Commander-in-Chief? Any other nominations for Commander-in-Chief?

Seeing none, nominations will remain open until our business session tomorrow morning.

NOMINATION: SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: TIMOTHY BORLAND: Is there any nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? I have Jeff Carroll and Charles Tony Dobbins that will make the nominations and seconds.

CHARLES DOBBINS: Good morning. Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. I rise to nominate Alfred "Al" Lipphardt as Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief for 2023/2024.

Al's eligibility comes from his deployment in Vietnam where he learned his first fate of leadership as an infantry platoon leader. He continued learning leadership as a businessperson and rose through the ranks of the – of the rotary to become a district governor.

In a VFW, Al has been an All-American Post, District, and Department Commander, becoming the second Triple Crown winner for the Department of Georgia. You might know that Al is not a fan of we've done it that way.

And as he has gone through your departments and visited you, he's been listening to how things have worked in your department and he has listened to your suggestions on how to make our organization better.

Al is a true leader and he has demonstrated that by listening to your voice. Al has been on the legislative committee. He has been a vice chair of that committee. So he has learned how our Washington Congressional folks work or

not work.

Al is one of those leaders at that – let me put it to you this way because I've watched him work. I've watched him come and someone of our Congressional leaders say, we don't have the money for that.

I've watched the hairs on Comrade Al's neck rise, and respond, well, when it asked me to deploy to Vietnam or deploy for some of you to the Gulf, or deploy to numerous places in the world, you didn't ask how much it was going to cost then.

Then don't ask me how much it's going to cost to take care of me now, and our veterans.

(Applause.)

CHARLES DOBBINS: This is our leader. You know, I can talk a lot about our Junior Vice Commander-In-Chief, Al Lipphardt.

But I'm not going to take a lot of your time this morning because he has demonstrated to you already. I've kind of -- I've been watching as you walked down how people gravitate to Al, to get his advice.

There is no better candidate that we have right now to help the older and our younger veterans come together in this organization than the nominee and candidate Al Lipphardt for Senior Vice Commander-In-Chief of our organization.

And I ask you to please vote for Al Lipphardt as our next Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. And thank you.

(Applause.)

JEFF CARROLL: Commander-in-Chief Borland, comrades, I'm Jeff Carroll, Post 2267, Newnan, Georgia, delegate.

I joined in 2004, the VFW. And unlike anyone else in the VFW, shortly thereafter, I was elected to Post Commander. I went to my first meeting at the state level, and I knew not many people other than the people in my post.

And I sat down at a table and I started talking to a guy, and he listened, and he made me feel welcome at the department level. He introduced me to the bigger VFW. That man was Al Lipphardt.

Now, I came with questions. What does a Junior Vice Commander do? Why do I have to submit this form three different ways to three different people? Al didn't always give me the answer.

Sometimes he encouraged me to go out and help develop the answer, but he was a leader then, he's a leader now. Most of you have met him through his steps to the chairs, you know that Al Lipphardt is not only a leader, he's a 21st Century leader. He is someone that's going to help bring the VFW into the new world along with an amazing historic leadership team.

I rise to second the nomination of Al Lipphardt for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief for the ensuing year.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Al Lipphardt, do you accept the nomination for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

AL LIPPHARDT: Yes.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Got to like that.

Is there any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Any other nominations for the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

Seeing none, nominations will remain open until our business session tomorrow morning.

NOMINATION: JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now proceed for the nominations of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Is there any nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

WILLIAM THIEN: Bill Thien, from the great state of Indiana. It is my honor to introduce you to a candidate who exemplifies what the VFW stands for.

Carol Whitmore spent 36 years in the U.S. Army, active duty and reserves. She retired as a first sergeant or an E-8, for you that didn't know.

Carol earned her eligibility for deployments to Iraq. Carol maintains her Gold Legacy Life Membership with VFW Post 9127 in Des Moines, Iowa. Carol was elected Department Commander in 2018. She and her department achieved All-American status.

Carol served on National Legislative Committee for three years. Carol currently serves as Iowa's National Council Member. In recognition of her military service, she received the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star Medal, four Good Conduct Medals, Global War on Terrorism Medal, Combat Action Badge, among others.

Carol is a retired nurse. Carol and her husband, Brad, also a Life Member of the VFW, reside in Des Moines, Iowa. It is not only a privilege, but it's an honor for me to nominate Carol Whitmore from the great state of Iowa for the high office of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Thank you.

(Applause.)

GUNDEL METZ: Gundel Metz, National Council Member for Wisconsin.

I stand before you to speak of a comrade who is a born leader. I had the pleasure to travel with Carol throughout the Big 10 supporting her campaign.

Carol has never met a stranger, especially if they are a veteran or a family member. She will give you her undivided attention. Carol and I served together at State Commanders and now four years on the National Council.

It is my honor to second the nomination for the high office of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, my sister from another mister, Carol Whitmore.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Carol Whitmore, do you accept the nomination for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

CAROL WHITMORE: I do.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Any other nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Any other nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

Seeing none, nominations will remain open until business session tomorrow morning.

NOMINATION: QUARTERMASTER GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF TIMOTHY BORLAND: Is there any nominations for Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars?

RUSSELL HALL: Comrades, Russell Hall, Department of Delaware, VFW Post 8801, Clayton.

I'm proud to stand here today in front of you to talk about a man who I call a friend. A man that whenever, no matter what time, what day, what else was going on, if I called him, he answered.

When I was a boy, my father once said, Russ, life's about people. And then he whispered, It's about people with passion. People that you can count on. I know a man like that. His name is Marc Garduno.

Many years ago, when I was a District Commander, I was looking out there for somebody to help me, help me make some change in that district. And I saw this young man, and I said, That's it. That's it. Quickly became friends. And then we've shared what I believe to be a very highly successful VFW career in Delaware.

And we've made great change in Delaware. Marc earned his eligibility for the VFW in the Army. He is a retired human resources officer, four MSMs, if I remember correctly. He retired, moved to Delaware outside of Dover Air Force Base where he became a human resources officer.

If raising a family, working a full-time job, being an active member of multiple organizations, to include the VFW and MOAA, and a few others, Marc also went and finished his bachelor's degree in organizational management. That wasn't enough. He decided to take it to the next level.

He's the only person I know that has a master's of science degree in nonprofit management. Marc did everything that he could in the Department of Delaware. He is a proud Triple Crown winner. When he was a Post Commander, he led his post to be the community service post of the year in our department.

He led all the Cooties in the Department of Delaware with style, which he always does. If you get a chance, check out his socks.

So, whether we talk about military experience, whether we talk about education, whether we talk about what people have done, stepped up and done in

the VFW, I submit that there is hardly anyone that has ever been more qualified to be the Quartermaster General of this Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America than Marc Garduno.

(Applause.)

RUSS HALL: Comrade Commander, I submit for nominations for the Quartermaster General Marc Garduno from the great state of Delaware.

(Applause.)

WILLIAM SCHMITZ: Well, you don't really know what I'm going to say, do you? Put your cell phones down and pay attention.

I'd like to thank the Veterans of Foreign Wars. For the first time in how many years, you gave me an active duty jar head to protect my derriere, and I got a big one, damn it. Why did I -- why did I sign on to do this thing? You know -- how many Cooties we got out here?

(Shouting.)

WILLIAM SCHMITZ: Oh, dear. We got a problem. How in the heck -- and I cleaned that up, Chaplain.

How in the heck do you compliment someone when they're a Cootie? Now, this young man was one of my commanders when I was chief, and he did a darn good year. I was going to say damn, but that would be inappropriate.

Yeah, he's a Cootie. And Cooties do weird things. They act strange. They say things strange. They write things strange. Well, I guess this is a positive: He reads, writes, and speaks three languages.

The English is a little tough, but he's doing all right. I wouldn't be up here endorsing anybody if I didn't believe in them. The guy's got integrity. He's got brains, which is kind of scary. He takes care of business. He's personable. He has character. He's a damn good guy, in my opinion.

He would have fit in real well with my patrols and jar heads. Of course, he was in the Army. We would have to clean him up a little bit. That got you going. Yeah.

I would urge you, based on his record -- and I've seen it, okay. He's been taking care of business with our money and any money he can get his hands on. They have successfully trimmed the budget without compromising a darn thing in National Headquarters, except improving things.

Now, how the heck they managed that, I have no clue, but that's above my pay grade. I would encourage you, and I have the great honor to do the second for Marc Garduno for Quartermaster General of the best organization on the face of the earth.

God bless you all.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Marc Garduno, do you accept the

nomination for Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

MARC GARDUNO: I do.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other nomination for Quartermaster General? Any other nominations for Quartermaster General? Any other nominations for Quartermaster General?

Seeing none, nominations will remain open until business session tomorrow morning.

NOMINATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any nominations for National Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars?

KENNETH BABCOCK: Thank you, Commander-in-Chief. Kenneth J. Babcock, Delegate, Post 7137, Arco, Idaho, Department of Idaho.

Comrades, it is a great day in Arizona. I share greetings from all of the members from the Gem State. Today, it is my honor to introduce our very own state chaplain. A Gulf War veteran of the United States Army, 32-year Life Member of the VFW, recipient of Idaho's community service award in 2023, and now a three-time All-American Post Commander.

He is a true gem of a person. One who embraces our values of compassion and concern for all veterans.

Comrades, I nominate Idaho's own David Frei for Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. And may God bless him. Thank you. (Applause.)

JOSEPH REINER: Good morning, comrades. It is still morning. Okay. Just a second.

So we've heard a litany today of oorahs and hooahs and I would like my Air Force brethren to join me in a per diem. (Applause.)

JOSEPH REINER: Just checking. Commander Babcock gave you some of the accolades of Chaplain Frei, and there are many others. But in a chaplain, there's so much more. There is morals, values, ethics, faith, and a fierce conviction to defend all of us when we're in our time of need.

Chaplain Frei is exactly that person.

More so, he's my neighbor down the hill from about a mile. I've known Dave my whole life. He is the absolute shoo-in fit for Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, 2023/2024.

It is my honor as Senior Vice Commander, Department of Idaho, Delegate Post 4902, to second the nomination of David Timothy Frei, your chaplain. (Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: David Frei, do you accept the

nomination for National Chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

DAVID FREI: I do.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other nominations for National Chaplain? Any other nominations for National Chaplain?

Seeing none, nominations will remain open for the next business session tomorrow morning.

We will now move into the nominations for National Surgeon.

NOMINATION: NATIONAL SURGEON GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any nominations for National Surgeon?

PAST COMMANDERCHIEF RIVERS: Good morning, my fellow veterans.

I'm honored this morning to have the opportunity to stand before you and nominate Dr. Curtis O. Bohlman for the Office of Surgeon General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

Dr. Bohlman received his doctorate of medicine degree from the University of Oklahoma School of Medicine in 1965 and earned Naval Flight Surgeon Wings from the Naval Aerospace Medical Institute in 1967. Dr. Bohlman practiced general medicine for over 38 and a half years before retiring in 2004.

Dr. Bohlman joined the United States Navy reserve in 1966, and later volunteered for duty with the United States Marine Corps. He served in Vietnam as a flight surgeon for VMO2, a Huey Gunship Squadron of the 1st Marine Air Wing stationed at Marble Mountain near Danang in 1967 and '68.

In recognition for his service, he received the Air Medal, the Presidential Unit Citation, the National Defense Service Ribbon, the Vietnam Service Medal with Fleet Marine Force Combat Operations insignia, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

He has been an active VFW member and leader since joining the VFW in 1975 in Enid, Oklahoma, and later transferred his membership to VFW Post 1335 in Woodward, Oklahoma, where he remains a member today.

He achieved All-American Post Commander status and is a Gold Legacy Life Member. Dr. Bohlman has served as vice chairman of the National Use Development Scholarship and Recognition Committee, the National Committee on General Resolutions, the National Veterans Service Committee, and has served on the board of the VFW National Home for Children.

Dr. Bohlman is a Life Member of the VFW National Home, and USMC Combat Helicopter Association. Dr. Bohlman and his wife, Juanita, who is a former VFW Auxiliary Soloist, continue to reside in Woodward, Oklahoma.

My fellow comrades, I am honored to have the opportunity to nominate a uniquely qualified individual for this office, and I'm also honored to tell you that he has held this office eight times prior to this nomination.

I'm honored to stand before you on behalf of my fellow members of the

VFW Southern Conference and nominate Dr. Curtis O. Bohlman, a medical doctor from Woodward, Oklahoma, for the Office of Surgeon General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. Thank you.

CURT WATTS: Comrades, my name is Curt Watts. I'm from the Department of Oklahoma, Post 2027.

Now that Chief Rivers has talked about Doc Bohlman's credentials, I would like to give you a little bit about his – on more of a personal note.

It's been a few years back -- and this is when I was a snotty-nosed freshman in high school is when Doc Bohlman and I's lives first crossed. And in one of those 38 years that he was practicing medicine, my mother took me in to have my leg set and Doc set it and put a cast on it.

I will tell you that he did a good job because my -- my leg's working fine. I would just like to say that one of the things that I've noticed throughout my career in the military is that leaders come in all different shapes and sizes and positions.

And even though Doc Bohlman has – might have never served in a lot of the commander positions and, you know, state commander or other positions like that, he is -- he has always been a leader and he's always been a mentor to me. In fact, when I got active in the VFW, we -- we reconnected, and he's been one of my - my mentors ever since.

Comrades, Doc Bohlman is a fine gentleman. There was a -- a political humorist by the name of Will Rogers, Native American son to the State of Oklahoma that once said, I never met a man I didn't like.

Well, Doc Bohlman is one of those guys that he's enough gentleman that if there is someone he doesn't like, he usually is not going to say -- no, he's not going to say anything about that. So I consider him a gentleman, and I consider him a great fellow comrade.

So comrades and delegates of the 124th Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention, it is my great privilege and honor to second the name of Dr. Curtis O. Bohlman, M.D., the Southern Conference Nominee for Surgeon General. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Curtis Doc Bohlman, do you accept the nomination for National Surgeon General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars

DR. CURTIS BOHLMAN: I do.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other nominations for surgeon general? Any other nominations for surgeon general? Any other nominations for surgeon general?

Seeing none, nominations will remain open until business session tomorrow morning.

NOMINATION: NATIONAL JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any nominations for National Judge Advocate General?

CHRIS BEATTY: Commander-in-Chief, members of the VFW, my name is Chris Beatty. I'm the Department of Nebraska Commander, Post 9675, which Doug Whitaker is a member of my post. I'm here to nominate him for the position of National Judge Advocate.

Doug is the Past Post Commander, Department Commander, and a Past Judge Advocate for this great organization. He has over 15 years experience with the VFW, and he's served on bylaws' committees, study groups, general resolutions' committees, and the OIF, OEF committee.

He's endorsed by the Big 10 Conference, as well as the Eastern, Southern and Western Conference.

It is my pleasure to nominate Doug Whitaker as Judge Advocate for the great VFW. Thank you.

JOE SMITH: Commander-in-Chief, my name is Joe Smith. I'm a Past Department Commander for the State of Nebraska. I'm a delegate from VFW Post 2280 in Bellevue, Nebraska.

I second the nomination of Doug Whitaker for the position of National Judge Advocate. Doug earned his VFW eligibility three times. First in Desert Storm as an MP, and twice in Iraqi Freedom as an Army Judge Advocate Officer.

He retired from the Army National Guard as a Colonel in October of 2020, after serving more than 32 years. He went to college and law school on the GI bill and has been an attorney for 23 years. His service as an Army JAG, prior National Judge Advocate, and as a civilian attorney makes him highly qualified for this position.

Thank you, comrades.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Douglas Whitaker, do you accept the nomination for National Judge Advocate.

DOUGLAS WHITAKER: I do.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Is there any other nomination for Judge Advocate General? Any other nominations for National Judge Advocate? Any other nominations?

Seeing none, nominations will remain open until tomorrow's business session.

CLOSING CEREMONY

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Sergeant-at-Arms salute to colors.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: You will now perform the closing ceremonies.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander-in-Chief, sir.
Comrade National Chaplain Deborah Halter, would you lead us in our closing prayer?

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Lord, keep us safe as we draw ever closer to the beginning of a new VFW year. In these final evenings of convention, may we enjoy food and drink and a good time together. May we always find ways to keep in touch with our new friends and contacts.

May those that leave the convention today safely go back to their homes renewed and ready to do the work of our organization. Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrades, final salute to our colors.
(Salute to colors.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that completes closing ceremonies and this adjournment of the 124th Convention.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We are now adjourned until 8 a.m. tomorrow morning.
(The proceedings adjourned at 11:19 a.m.)

BUSINESS SESSION
THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2023

(The Business Session of the 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in the Phoenix Convention Center, Phoenix, Arizona, was called to order at 8:00 a.m. with Commander-in-Chief Timothy Borland presiding)

CALL TO ORDER
SALUTE TO COLORS
INVOCATION: NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DEDORAH HALTER
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now reconvene the 124th VFW National Convention.

Sergeant-at-Arms, if you would please conduct the opening ceremony.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes, sir, Comrade Commander in Chief, sir.

(Opening ceremonies conducted.)

(Salute to colors.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade National Chaplain, would you lead us in our opening prayer.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Almighty God, today we formally complete our past year.

Thank you for your assistance along the way. We ask special blessings on each veteran and family member we were in contact with over the past year.

As we start a new year of leadership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars, bless each person who takes on the responsibility of leadership at all levels. All jobs in the VFW are important to the smooth running of the clockwork that makes up the VFW.

Help us to see and respond to the needs of our fellow veterans by giving us strength to keep ourselves motivated, alert, and consistently working.

As we come to our new jobs, we recognize we are blessed by our families, our friends, and fellow comrades who have supported us along the way.

Today, we honor them. We ask that you watch over them and bless them as they too sacrifice for us the service of the mission of the VFW.

We ask for your help as we go forward working for the greater good of all of our comrades. We would like to take a special moment of silence, for the State of Minnesota has lost a mentor that they think dearly of, Mr. Mike Pearce. Please keep the State of Minnesota and his family in prayers. Amen.

(The pledge of allegiance was recited.)

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

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you, sir.

CONVENTION CREDENTIALS REPORT: BETTY GRIPP:

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Please take your seats.
I would now like to call on Betty Gripp for the final report on the
credentials committee.
(Chanting.)

BETTY GRIPP: Last day, guys.

At the close of business 12 p.m. yesterday, July 26th, 2023, the total
delegates registering their credentials are 8,337. Department Commanders: 43.
Past Commander-in-Chief: 10. National Officers: 48. Grand total of: 8,438. Total
registered for the 124th Convention was: 1,750.

Commander-in-Chief, this is my final credentials report.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Thank you, Betty.

INTRODUCTION/REMARKS:

VFW NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT JANE REAPE

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I am extremely pleased that here to
visit our convention today is a woman with whom I have been proud to serve with
over the past year.

Jane Reape has worked tirelessly on behalf of the VFW Auxiliary and has
certainly left an incredible legacy for others to follow.

I admire her deeply. She is a true friend and an outstanding leader.
Please welcome a wonderful woman from Carthage, New York, Jane Reape,
National President of the VFW Auxiliary.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT REAPE: Can you see me now?

Commander-in-Chief Tim Borland, National VFW officers, and VFW
members, it is a privilege to be here with you this morning representing the VFW
Auxiliary as National President for the last time.

I could not be more pleased with how the year has gone. My only regret
is that it seems to have passed too quickly. I will carry these fond memories and
new friendships with me always.

To the members of my department, New York, I would like to extend my
appreciation for your support throughout this journey from department to national,
and especially this year.

To Dionne-Rumble Post 7227, who served as my installing team, I am
eternally grateful. You made my installation so very special. To William Doc Schmitz,
thank you for serving as my installing officer. I will be forever grateful. The Miracle
Grow did not work.

I joined the Auxiliary under the eligibility of my late husband, James, who

served in the Air Force from 1961 to 1983. Jim was a Vietnam veteran, serving in country from 1965 to 1967. Since I joined in 1989, I have formed so many friendships and have never looked back.

Military service continues in my family through my son Raymond, a Navy veteran of the Iraq War; my youngest son, Robert, a 22-year Air Force veteran, and two of my -- that's right. Yay, Air Force.

And my -- I lost my place.

Two of my grandchildren. Sarah is currently serving in the Air Force while her brother Daniel is serving in the Army.

(Shouting.)

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT REAPE: We're not quite sure what happened to him. We think somebody dropped him on his head.

(Laughter.)

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT REAPE: I'm sorry. I am so proud of them. I am also especially proud of the accomplishments of the VFW and Auxiliary this year. We worked together to achieve our missions. No one does more for veterans, and we all offer our unwavering support for uncommon heroes.

We are truly one family, with hands that serve and hearts that care, and we know that every veteran counts. As brothers and sisters, we have helped innumerable veterans and their family members this year through our many programs, including scholarships, the National Home, legislative, and Buddy Poppy, which allow our two organizations to work most closely together.

Helping veterans, their families, and communities is a lifelong commitment that I will continue long after I leave office. Thank you all for helping to make it such a joy.

I am proud and honored to be part of the VFW Auxiliary. Our members went above and beyond this year, exceeding our goals in membership, embracing each of our 12 programs, and going out into their communities to better the world around them.

My profound thanks to the VFW Posts that included their Auxiliaries in community activities for the second annual VFW day of service. I was thrilled to be welcomed so warmly by both Post and Auxiliary members during my department travels.

The hospitality and kindness I was shown in each and every state touched my heart. Thank you to the department commanders, not only for the camaraderie you have shown me, but for all that you showed to your department presidents this year.

To every veteran present today and everyone who has served our country, there are not enough words to truly give you the thanks you deserve. You put your lives on the line for this country and the ideals we hold dear, fighting for a better future.

There is no way to pay you back, but through our Auxiliary service, we strive to honor each and every one of you. You are the reason we exist.

To Shannon Borland, I enjoyed getting to know you better on our travels this year. I will never forget our time in Washington, D.C. and Hawaii. I hope we have many more years together as our friendship continues to grow.

And, finally, to my Commander-in-Chief, Tim, thank you for everything. It felt so wonderful to be included in VFW presentations, like the laying of the wreaths at Arlington National Cemetery, the Vietnam Wall, and Pearl Harbor.

I had too much fun dressed as Sister Jane singing to you during your homecoming. We even enjoyed golfing in the tournament, even though you used that money raised against me for the challenge. And presenting the Voice of Democracy winners with their scholarship awards by your side in Washington, D.C.

As many members know, we agreed at the start of our year to commit raising funds for the Voice of Democracy, with the one who raised the most to be declared winner, while the one who came in second would be hit in the face with a pie.

Well, we all know how that came out.

(Laughter.)

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT REAPE: I want you to know, I did get a pie in the face, and I did it for the handful of people that donated to Tim.

(Laughter.)

(Applause.)

NATIONAL AUXILIARY PRESIDENT REAPE: I did not join the VFW Auxiliary with the hope that I might be national president some day. My goal was to make a positive difference for the Auxiliary, for our veterans, and for our country. I hope I have done just that. I truly did my best.

May God bless each of you, every veteran who has served this great nation, and all of those we've lost through the years.

May God bless those currently serving and may God continue to bless the United States of America. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: For those of you who were at the patriotic rally, thank you very much for those donations. Again, we raised \$63,000 for the kids.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Other than the nomination, election, and installation of officers, is there any other business to come before this convention? Any other business to come before this convention? Any other business?

Hearing none, it is now my pleasure to dismiss the members of our various

committees. To our chairmen and the good members of the respective committees, thank you for your diligence and hard work.

And my thanks to all the chairmen, vice chairmen, and to all the members to each committee for your time and your dedicated efforts.

I will now call on the Adjutant General for any announcements he may have.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Morning, comrades. Several announcements.

If your post did not receive a recruiting banner, please stop by the national headquarters office in the exhibit hall. They will make sure that you get one.

Later this afternoon, the chief and president's reception will start at 3 p.m. at the Sheraton, Phoenix Ballroom.

It is a ticketed event. You may acquire your ticket from one of the national sergeants as you leave the hall today. One ticket is good for one couple. Use your beer math to figure that out.

(Laughter.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Immediately following the close of the convention, the council will meet in room 301A.

The Commander-in-Chief, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief will maintain the traditional parade following the presentation and placement of their caps and badges.

The Quartermaster General, the chaplain, the judge advocate general, and the surgeon general will share in one collective ceremonial parade at the conclusion of the presentation and placement of their cap and badge of the surgeon general and his remarks.

At this time, I would ask the Quartermaster General to join me up here.

Commander-in-Chief Borland, the Quartermaster General and I take great pleasure in presenting to you VFW tie tack with diamond as presented from the national staff of the national headquarters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: That concludes my announcements.

NOMINATION/ACCEPTANCE OF ELECTED NATIONAL OFFICERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL, NATIONAL CHAPLAIN, JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL,
SURGEON GENERAL

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: In accordance with our convention rules of Robert's Rule of Order, Newly Revised, if only one person is nominated after ensuring that, in fact, no members present wish to make further nominations,

I, acting as chair, will simply declare the nomination -- nominee is elected, thus affecting the election by unanimous consent and acclimation.

We will now proceed with the nomination and election of the 2023 national officers. I will now reopen the nomination of office for Commander-in-Chief.

Are there any other additional nominations for Commander-in-Chief? Are there any other nominations for Commander-in-Chief? Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Commander-in-Chief closed.

Seeing no further nominations, I declare Duane Sarmiento Elected Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of 2023/2024 year.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT SARMIENTO: Comrades, I'm going to be brief. I do have an acceptance speech. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to let me lead this great organization of 1.5 million members, including the Auxiliary. I am humbled beyond words.

I look forward to working with the council administration as we lead this organization this coming year. Thank you so much. God bless all of you. Thank you.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We will now proceed with the capping and the badge for our newly elected Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Are there any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

Oh, yeah. That's right. Sorry. We're going to do the parade, ceremony parade for the Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Maestro, strike up the Navy song.
(Music playing.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now reopen the nominations for office of Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

Are there any other additional nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Are there any other nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief? I declare nominations for Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief closed.

Seeing no further nominations, I declare Al Lipphardt elected Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for the year '23/'24.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Comrades, I present you Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Al Lipphardt.

(Applause.)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LIPPHARDT: Thank you very much. Again, I am truly humbled to be standing before you as your newly elected Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

Three years ago when we came to this stage, I said division was, for me, is commitment, credibility, and courage.

What a year you had last year as commitment. You demonstrated your commitment to this nation and to this organization by all the things that you achieved.

This coming year, for me, it is to support the Commander-in-Chief with credibility; that is, integrity, that is doing what we said we would do. We are the nation's combat veterans. Our word is our bond.

Thank you, again. I am proud to serve with you and proud to be a member of this great organization. God bless you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: He will now be presented his hat and badge by his wife, Carol Whitmore (sic), and then they're going to do the ceremony parade.

Okay. They got divorced. Well, at least we're having fun. Carol Lipphardt.

(Applause.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Maestro, strike up the Army song.

(Music playing.)

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now reopen the nominations of office for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief. Are there any additional nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief? Are there any other nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief?

Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief closed. Seeing no further nominations, I declare Carol Whitmore elected Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for '23/'24.

Comrades, present to you the Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief-elect for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Carol Whitmore. Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now escort the Junior Vice to the podium.

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WHITMORE: Comrades, please sit.

To say that I am humbled and grateful to be standing in front of you is truly an understatement. I have so many people to thank for this opportunity. My husband, for supporting me; my state, Big 10 Conference. Thank you so much for your support.
(Applause.)

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WHITMORE: And, literally, everyone in this room has embraced me, and I thank you for that. I will follow Duane Sarmiento and Al Lipphardt's policies and I will support them and I will advocate fiercely for every veteran here. Thank you.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Carol will now be badged by her husband, Brad Whitmore, and they will do the ceremony parade.
(Applause.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Maestro, strike up the Army song.
(Applause.)
(Music playing.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Are there any other nominations for Quartermaster General? Are there any other nominations for Quartermaster General?

Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Quartermaster General closed. Seeing no further nominations, I declare Marc Garduno elected Quartermaster General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars for '23/'24 year.
(Applause.)

QUARTERMASTER GENERAL GARDUNO: Buenos dias, familia. Wow. I'll tell you, this continues to be a very surreal experience for me, having the opportunity to serve as the VFW Quartermaster General. Thanks to everyone for the trust and confidence you placed in me by electing me to this position again.

Thank you to VFW Post 3238 who is at home probably watching streaming video. Thank you to the Department of Delaware. My family, for your support throughout the years. Thanks to my wife, my boys. Hun-Ju, I love you.

To the Council of Administration, the entire organization, I serve you. I see a lot of great people getting ready to take the helm on the Council of Administration. I welcome you and I am eager to serve you. The entire organization, I am accessible, easily accessible.

I will strive to do my best, to be the best steward of the organization's resources as I can be. We have some great staff members serving in the office of the Quartermaster General and we work hard every day on behalf of this organization.

God bless you. God bless the VFW, and most of all, God bless America.

Thank you.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: He will now be capped and badged by his wife, Hun-Ju.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now open the nominations for the office of chaplain. Are there any additional nominations for chaplain? Are there any other nominations for chaplain?

Hearing none, I declare nominations for chaplain closed. Seeing no further nominations, I declare David Frei elected chaplain of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for '23/'24 year. Comrades, David Frei.
(Applause.)

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN FREI: First, I would like to thank my wife, for her support, the great State of Idaho, and the Western Conference. I couldn't have done it without you.

I thank you for your support and trust in my ability to serve as your National Chaplain. I will embrace the sacred duty of uplifting our comrades and ensuring that their spiritual needs are met with dignity and respect.

Thank you so much.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: He will now be capped by his wife and badged.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now reopen the nominations for the Office of Judge Advocate General. Are there any other additional nominations for Judge Advocate General? Are there any nominations for Judge Advocate General?

Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Judge Advocate General closed. Seeing no further nominations, I declare J. Douglas Whitaker elected Judge Advocate General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of United States for the '23/'24 year.

Comrades, you have elected J. Douglas Whitaker as Judge Advocate General.
(Applause.)

JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL WHITAKER: Thank you, comrades. Thank you to the Department of Nebraska for always supporting me through these years. I'm humbled and honored to be selected as your national judge advocate. Thank you to the Big 10 Conference for your endorsement and all the other conferences

for your endorsement.

I promise to provide the council, the convention, and the Commander-in-Chief sage legal advice and counsel as we move forward over this next year. Thank you and may God bless this organization.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: He will be hat and badged by Jeff Baker.

(Laughter.)

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Yes, I was waiting for that moment.

(Laughter)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now reopen the nominations for the Office of Surgeon General. Are there any other additional nominations for Surgeon General? Any other nominations for Surgeon General?

Hearing none, I declare the nominations for Surgeon General closed.

Seeing no further nominations, I declare

Curtis O. "Doc" Bohlman, M.D., elected Surgeon General of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States for '23/'24 year.

Comrades, you have elected Curtis O. "Doc" Bohlman.

(Applause.)

SURGEON GENERAL BOHLMAN: I'll get this thing straight here.

Comrades, I want to thank my comrades from the Southern Conference and from the Department of Oklahoma for the confidence they have, once again, shown in me. But it is both humbling and an honor to serve again as Surgeon General.

I was first elected Surgeon General in 1991 when Bob Wallace came in as Commander-in-Chief. Over the ensuing 30-plus years, we have seen many changes in this organization. Just as the Vietnam Veterans took over from the World War II Veterans, now the veterans of Desert Wars are taking over the leadership of this organization.

It is the normal progression of things.

As we make needed changes in this organization, getting rid of outdated processes and replacing them with more efficient ones, we need to do so with discernment and not make changes just for the sake of change.

We need to be sure we don't throw out the baby with the bath water.

What binds us together is patriotism, the love of our country, and no other veterans' organization loves her more than the VFW.

Once again, comrades, I'm honored to serve. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: He will be capped and badged by his wife, Juanita.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We will now have a collective ceremonial parade for the Quartermaster General, Chaplain, Judge Advocate General, Surgeon General.

You will now be escorted by the Sergeant-at-Arms.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Maestro, strike up the armed forces melody.
(Music playing.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I will now call upon the Adjutant General to announce the newly elected National Council members of administration.

NEWLY ELECTED NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATION MEMBERS

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: At this time, I would ask that all newly elected council members please rise. The Commander-in-Chief-Elect Duane Sarmiento will now present caps and badges to the newly elected council members.

They are: Matthew C. Claussen, Department of Illinois.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Johnny R. Capps, Department of Indiana.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Michael Braman, Department of Iowa.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Kevin A. Conklin, Michigan.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Dale Hoogeveen, Department of Minnesota.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Eric D. Sullivan, Department of Missouri.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Joseph Smith, Department of Nebraska.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Chris Haynes, Department of Ohio.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Barbara McKean, Department of South Dakota.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Cory L. Geisler, Department of Wisconsin.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Let me please call the Commander-in-Chief – you can sit down.

Let me please call the Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento for his announcements of appointed officers for the ensuing year.

(Applause.)

ANNOUNCEMENT/REMARKS: NATIONAL APPOINTED OFFICERS
ADJUTANT GENERAL
CHIEF OF STAFF
INSPECTOR GENERAL
NATIONAL SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT SARMIENTO: My appointments for the term for which I am elected are: As Adjutant General, Dan West, of Texas.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: New to the block here. I would first like to thank Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento for the confidence he has placed in me to serve on his staff as the Adjutant General. I assure you, Chief, as I assure my fellow comrades in arms, that I will continue to provide a work ethic dedicated to the VFW that will make all of you proud as you have my sincere pledge of fidelity.

My fellow comrades in arms of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, it is, indeed, a great honor to serve as the Adjutant General for the 2023/2024, meet the challenge year, and I can assure you that the national headquarters stand ready to help you be as successful as you want to be as each of you have my sincere pledge of duty.

To my loving and beautiful wife, your support and understanding of the dedication I have to the VFW, which saved my life and brought me to you, is without reproach. I promise you that the sacrifices of time and distance apart is highly respected by the comrades and patriots of the VFW and Auxiliary. You have always had and will continue to have my sincere pledge of love and faithfulness.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ELECT SARMIENTO: You will now have the presentation of cap and badge.

(Laughter.)
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Chief of Staff, Carey Pritchett of New Jersey.
(Applause.)

CHIEF OF STAFF PRITCHETT: Just a few quick words.
Duane and I started traveling together over 10 years ago. So this brings us -- we've got a lot of conversations back and forth. I know what's in his head -- sometimes. He 's always full of energy.

Sometimes you got to pull him back up a bit, keep him straight. But we've had a great relationship.

So I ask you all to ride with Duane to Louisville on the 102 train and we'll all get there together. We'll have a successful year.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We will have the cap and badge by his wife, Twila.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Inspector General, Peter J. Mascetti of the Department of Europe.
(Applause.)

INSPECTOR GENERAL MASCETTI: I would like to thank Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento for this appointment. I would like to thank my wife of 46 years for supporting me. Sometimes begrudgingly.

You know, I thought my hard work and dedication for 30-plus years in the VFW, it got me here and I deserved it.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Department of Europe, please stand. For over 90 years, the Department of Europe has been busting their butt like everybody else in here to support the VFW. This would not have been possible without the thousands of veterans in Europe who are performing and are actively doing it now. And for Europe, I thank you for that support. I really do.

Moving forward, you heard what the Commander-in-Chief said. Meet the challenge. So this year, 102 percent is our goal. We need to accomplish it. We need to challenge. I thank you for what you've done. I thank you for what you're doing, and I thank you for what you're going to be doing in the future. Thank you.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Presentation of his cap and badge will be done by his wife, Margita.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Sergeant-at-Arms, Brian Willette of Massachusetts.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Man of few words.
Being capped will be his fellow national -- or assistant national sergeants.
Vietnam Veteran.
(Applause.)

INSTALLATION: NATIONAL OFFICERS

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We will now proceed with the installation of officers. National Sergeant-at-Arms, you will escort the installing officer to this position on my right.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, it is my honor to present to you Past Commander-in-Chief Bob Wallace, a duly appointed installing officer for the 124th National Convention, sir.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: Department Commander-in-Chief, the term for which you and your subordinate officers were elected or appointed has now expired. It is my duty to ascertain the following: Have the officers for the ensuing year been duly elected?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: They have.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: Have the books of the Adjutant General and Quartermaster General been examined and approved by the National Council of Administration?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: They have.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: Does the Adjutant General have on file proof of eligibility for all officers to be installed during this installation?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: He does.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: Are the funds in the hands of the Quartermaster General and ready to be turned over to his successor when duly installed?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: They are.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: Have you the charter in your possession?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: I do.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: You will now surrender the gavel to me.

Commander-in-Chief, Timothy Borland, you have now been relieved of your duties as Commander-in-Chief of this organization.

It is proper to remind you that in assuming the chair of Past Commander-in-Chief, it will be your duty and privilege to counsel and otherwise assist your successor through the experiences you have gained during your term of office. You

will now station yourself to my right.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now present the officers elect at the altar as the assistant Adjutant General reads the list of officers to be installed.

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL WALKER: Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento.

Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Al Lipphardt.

Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Carol Whitmore.

Adjutant General, Dan West.

Quartermaster General, Marc Garduno.

Chaplain, Dave Frei.

Judge Advocate General, J. Douglas Whitaker.

Surgeon General, Curtis O. "Doc" Bohlman, M.D.

Chief of Staff, Carey Pritchett.

Inspector General, Peter J. Mascetti.

Sergeant-at-Arms, Brian Willette.

New council members: Matthew C. Claussen, Illinois.

Johnny R. Capps, Indiana.

Michael Braman, Iowa.

Kevin A. Conklin, Michigan.

Dale Hoogeveen, Minnesota.

Eric D. Sullivan, Missouri.

Joseph Smith, Nebraska.

Chris Haynes, Ohio.

Barbara McKean, South Dakota.

Cory L. Geisler, Wisconsin.

Past Commander-in-Chief, Timothy Borland.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade Installing Officer, the officers-elect have been rather properly assembled for the purpose of installation.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: The National Officers-Elect of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I'll administer to you the officers' obligation.

You will raise your right hand, touch the flag of our country with your left hand or the shoulder of the comrade in front of you and repeat after me. I do hereby solemnly promise that I will faithfully discharge, to the best of my ability, the duties of the office to which I have been elected or appointed according to the bylaws and ritual of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

I solemnly promise that at the close of the term to which I have been elected or appointed, or sooner if so ordered by proper authority, I will surrender immediately, to only the duly authorized person or persons all records, money, or other properties of this organization in my possession or under my control.

All this I freely promise upon my honor as a loyal citizen of our great republic, so help me God.

As you were. Parade rest.

National Chaplain Deborah.

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Almighty God, our guide and divine protector, give your blessings on these our comrades who now become fellow officers. We ask you, Lord, who are ever-present among us, grant wisdom unto them so that in their deliberations they continue to favor you, our glorious country, and to better our organization.

May your strength sustain them. May your power preserve them. May your hand protect them in the faithful and fruitful performance of their duties. Amen.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: As you were.

National Sergeant-at-Arms, you will now escort the officers to their respective stations. I ask that they remain standing. Everyone else may be seated. National Officers of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, you now occupy the position of honor to which your comrades have elected you. Learn well, the responsibilities entrusted to you so that you may intelligently discharge the duties you are to undertake.

The bylaws and ritual of this organization prescribed in detail the duties of your respective offices. By virtue of the confidence placed in you through your election or appointment, we assume that you will acquaint yourselves thoroughly with your duties. You may be seated.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will escort the Commander-in-Chief-Elect to the rostrum. Comrade Commander-in-Chief-Elect Duane Sarmiento, before administering your obligation, it is proper to remind you of certain duties.

You will be held personally responsible for the charter of this great organization. And at the end of your term of office, you will deliver it to the officer appointed to install your successor.

It is your duty to see that all national officers perform their duties to the best of their ability. You shall keep yourself informed of all proposed legislation which may affect the welfare of potential and actual comrades of this great organization.

Strive for adoption of only those measures which will be beneficial.

You'll be required to devote all of your time to the many duties of your office. You are expected to make a special study of Congressional charter, bylaws, and ritual of this organization so that you may render firm, impartial decisions on important questions referred to you.

As Commander-in-Chief, you will be regarded by your comrades and by the general public of typifying wise and vigorous leadership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

May all of your efforts and accomplishments bring credit to your administration and to our great organization.

Comrade Duane Sarmiento, are you willing and ready to assume your solemn obligation?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I am.

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: You will raise your right hand,

touch the flag of our country with your left hand, give your name as I touch your hand, and repeat after me.

In the presence of Almighty God, and the officers and delegates of this order here assembled, I, Duane Sarmiento, do hereby solemnly promise, that I will faithfully discharge to the best of my ability the duties of the office of Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States to which I have been elected.

In accordance with the bylaws and ritual of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I solemnly promise that at the close of the term to which I have been elected, or sooner if so ordered by proper authority, I will surrender immediately to only the duly authorized person or persons, the national charter, all records, money, and other properties of this organization in my possession or under my control.

I do further solemnly promise that I will be fair and impartial in my actions toward all comrades, and I will always strive to promote the best interests of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, so help me God.
(Applause.)

PAST COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF WALLACE: Comrade Commander-in-Chief, I now place in your possession our charter. Also, I present you with this gavel, which is an emblem of your authority. Use it firmly, but with discretion.

All national officers, and all members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, I would ask that you stretch forth your right hand and repeat after me.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento, to you I pledge my sincere allegiance.

As you were.

Comrade Commander-in-Chief, officers and delegates of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I now proclaim the national officers duly installed and this organization in working order for the ensuing year.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Comrades, please be seated.

Before I even get -- right. I want to thank -- before I even get into my acceptance speech, just a few things I want to mention.

Chief Borland, it's been wonderful serving with you up until you became a chief. We've learned a lot. We've come a long way. I look forward to the new team.

And I keep calling you -- I'm still calling you Al Borland. Al Lipphardt and Carol Whitmore. Carol, welcome to the team, and all the officers and all the council.

So if you've been here before, or this is your first time, this is remedial (inaudible). How many World War II veterans do we have in the audience? If you can stand or wave your flag or raise your hand. I don't see any. Raise a World War

II and Korean Veteran, retiring as a U.S. Navy Senior Chief. Ray is my lucky charm, man.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Ray, I want to thank you for being here again. What, you're, 9- -- a young 95. Right?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: In October, I will be 96.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: October 20th, he turns 96. Still puts away a glass of whiskey a night.

Ray, thank you. And feel free. We got some other business to do, but you can stay right there. Ray, people love you and that's the smile.

I now call Commander-in-Chief Borland to conduct the ceremonial presentation of lapel pins.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: Will the Junior and Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief-Elect please step forward.

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: At this time, National Senior Vice President vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt will present to the Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore the official lapel pin of the office of Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: At this time, National Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento, will present to Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, Al Lipphardt, the Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief lapel pin.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: At this time, past Commander-in-Chief, Tim Borland, will present to Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento, the Commander-in-Chief lapel pin.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: At this time, I would ask past Commander-in-Chief, BJ Lawrence, to come forward.

At this time, I would also ask all past National Commanders-in-Chief to assemble behind the rostrum here as past Commander-in-Chief, BJ Lawrence, presents to past Commander-in-Chief, Tim Borland, his official past chief's pin.

Give them all a big round of applause.

(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: At this time, I would ask Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento, to come forward for his remarks.

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH: DUANE SARMIENTO, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, and comrades. It is an honor to stand before you today as your Commander-in-Chief in this beautiful City of Phoenix, Arizona. It's a dry heat, right? It's a dry heat.

We're here for the 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. I want to express my deepest gratitude for the trust you have placed in me to lead this great organization. And I stand here today as a proud American from the great state of New Jersey and as a Navy veteran who served his country with pride.

(Shouting.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We don't have one of them sayings, I don't think, in the Navy like the Army has. I don't know what they do. I don't think we got one of them.

(Shouting.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I would like to thank God for His divine providence and direction in my life and pray for His continued guidance.

To the past Commander-in-Chiefs, especially past Commander-in-Chief Lisicki, Wallace, Spera, Schmidt, Lawrence, and Roesch who have mentored and guided me through this process, thank you. As this journey continues, my ears will continue to be open for words of wisdom and mentoring.

Thank you to the great Eastern Conference for having faith and trust by granting me this opportunity to lead our great organization.

Thank you to the Department of New Jersey, particularly VFW District 13, and a huge thank you to my post, the Anthony T. Calista, VFW Post 5579, for your confidence and support. You have never waned or failed in supporting me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: To all the comrades, department officers, both past and present, and to all the members in the respective departments who have offered me support and advice as I traveled around these last two years, thank you. But, more importantly, thank you for your friendship.

I look forward to continuing these productive conversations with all of you and renewing our friendships again when we see each other this coming year. Comrades, while there are going to be some challenges we will face as an organization from the national level all the way down to the post level, I look forward to the opportunity to tackle these things together. With your help, we are going to lead this organization forward for another 124 years. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I would like to thank my family from the bottom of my heart. Without all of your support, I wouldn't have been able to do anything in the VFW. Please allow me a moment to introduce my family.

My oldest daughter Alexis.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: It was her dream since she was a little girl to become a nurse. She has fulfilled that dream and has been a registered nurse for the past nine years. I love you and I'm so proud of you.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: To my middle child Gabrielle. I call her my "Lil Motivator." She spent five years on active duty with the United States Marine Corps and continues to serve in the Marine Corps Reserve.

She is a proud Life Member of VFW Post 5579 in Gibbstown, New Jersey, earning her eligibility having served overseas in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. I love you, Gabrielle.

My son-in-law Brett, also a Marine Corps veteran and Life Member of Post 5579 earning his eligibility while serving in Afghanistan.

Our grandson Jack Jack, he is the twinkle in all our eyes.

My son Michael, who is currently serving in the U.S. Navy. He is a Navy Corpsman serving with Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines. He just returned recently from a seven-month deployment to the Western Pacific. No, he wasn't eligible. He just did a regular old West-Pac for the sailors which is probably usually better.

I want to thank my whole family for understanding all of those times in my career that I may have missed something while you were growing up. I truly – I mean, I truly mean that. To my wife, Ellen. Hello? For 31 years of our marriage, you have been my rock and my soulmate. Without you, none of this would have been possible. I love you so much.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Two people that aren't here are my mom and dad.

Both of them passed. My father signed me up. He was a 50-year VFW member. Signed me up in my hometown post in Gibbstown in 1990 while I was serving in Operation Desert Shield. I know they are looking down on me and I hope I've made them proud.

Mom, if you are listening, I would like to take this time to say thank you because somewhere around June of '68, she said yes to my dad and I came out in March of '69. So if you say that, thank you.

As I look into this sea of familiar faces, I am reminded of the shared experiences and sacrifices and the bonds that have brought us together. We have come from different walks of life, but we share a common thread, a deep love for country and an unwavering dedication to veterans.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Absolutely. That's why we are here. All of us.

We are here because we have met challenges that life has thrown at us head on, large and small, but honor, courage, and commitment has brought us through.

Today, I humbly stand here as a testament of the limitless potential of our nation and a product of the American dream. As a kid from New Jersey, I never imagined I would be here to accept such a prestigious position in one of the most prestigious institutions in our country.

You know, when I enlisted in the Navy, I was looking for adventure. And let me tell you, I found it. But you know what else I found? I found the values of honor, duty, and service. It was there that I truly understood the strength that comes from people of different backgrounds united by a common purpose.

Throughout my time in the Navy, I witnessed firsthand the power of teamwork and that unbreakable spirit that binds us together as veterans. We have endured long hours, sleepless nights, the weight of responsibility on our shoulders.

But through it all, we persevered. Those formative years taught me much about camaraderie and Esprit de Corps. It was only natural for me to join the VFW, an organization that means so much to generations of veterans.

Throughout history, our nation has faced countless challenges, both at home and abroad. From the battlefields of World War I and World War II, to the jungles of the Philippines, Vietnam, Panama, to the deserts of Kuwait, Somalia, and Iraq, to the mountains of the Korean peninsula and Afghanistan, we have always answered the call. We have never faltered in the defense of freedom and demonstrated an unwavering commitment to each other.

But our challenges did not end when we redeployed. For many of us, the real challenge began when we hung up our uniforms. Transitioning back to civilian life can be daunting. We faced a new set of battles, against unemployment, homelessness, and the invisible wounds of war.

We've experienced the pain of loss, the sacrifice of separation from our loved ones, and the hardships of readjusting to civilian life. Yet, through it all, we have persevered because we are a band of brothers and sisters who understand the true meaning of loyalty and service to their country.

It is our duty as veterans to meet these challenges boldly, not only for ourselves, but our fellow veterans.

The VFW has always been a beacon of hope and support for veterans. And as Commander-in-Chief, I am committed to continuing the legacy of advancing the mission of the three key pillars of the VFW: Advocacy, assistance, and camaraderie.

Advocacy lies in the heart of our organization. We must continue to be the voice of all veterans, fighting for their rights, benefits, and recognition they so rightly deserve. We will work tirelessly with lawmakers, government officials, and the public to champion the needs of our veterans and their families and their communities.

We must advocate for better mental health -- mental health support and employment opportunities for our returning heroes.

Our organization, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, is the shield that guards the rights and benefits of our active duty troops. It is the shield that guards the rights and benefits of our nation's veterans and families.

The debt doesn't have a price tag, nor do we look for it to be repaid. This is what we stand for. This is who the Veterans of Foreign Wars are. And as one member still standing in our beloved organization, we will never stop doing this. (Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Absolutely. You know that.

Assistance is a sacred duty we owe to our fellow veterans. We must strive to ensure those who seek assistance find a helping hand and a listening ear within our organization so that no veteran is left behind.

Access to quality medical care is not a privilege, it is a fundamental right that our veterans have earned through their service and sacrifice. We must work tirelessly to ensure our V.A. hospitals and clinics are adequately staffed, well-funded, and equipped to provide the highest standard of care to our veterans. (Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We are changing the mindsets of veterans concerning our beloved organization. It is required to make continuing progress so that no one will take away our benefits, no one will take away what is due to the eight percent of Americans that have served the United States in uniform.

We will not be marginalized. We will not become some secondary citizen to some other group. We are veterans who swore an oath to our country. We wrote that check that said, Up to and including our life. And will never be ashamed of that. (Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: That's it.

We will continue to bring brothers and sisters into our ranks and we will always fight for veterans' rights.

There's always a lot of talk in Washington about the national debt. And it's the politicians on the left and right. It's both sides, and even the ones in the middle that speak -- and what do they always talk about? Cutting veterans' benefits that affect the veterans.

Make no mistake, these aren't some bullshit entitlements. These are veterans' benefits that were earned through blood and sweat. (Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: The only national debt I know is the debt to the millions of Americans who served our country and are buried in

cemeteries in the U.S. and in cemeteries from France to the Philippines. This is the national debt that this country owes to veterans.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: As I stand before you as Commander-in-Chief, it is your voice I carry forward. When we fight for benefits on Capitol Hill, it's not for the one million members of the VFW, but the 20 million veterans and active duty personnel.

Camaraderie is the lifeblood of the VFW. To meet the challenges ahead, we must also foster a sense of unity within our organization and the broader veteran community. We must recognize and celebrate the rich diversity that exists amongst us.

We come from different backgrounds, different cultures, walks of life, but we have that shared bond that unites us. We must adopt an environment where veterans can find solace, friendship, and understanding.

Together, we will build stronger bonds, create lasting memories, and ensure that no veteran ever feels alone or forgotten.

The strength of our organization lies in unity, and we will continue to provide a sense of belonging for all who have served fighting in our nation's wars.

Every year, maintaining and gaining our numbers is a battle. I believe that we will get the 102 percent membership. I know everyone hears the whispers and the scuttlebutt, the VFW is a dying organization. Well, that's a bunch of shit.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We are alive and well, and we're just getting started. Last year, we came in at 101 percent. I set the goal to 102 percent in membership to show all the shit house sea lawyers, the bar commanders, in spite of you, we will grow this organization because that's who we are. We have won victories on the battlefields all over the world.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: But, believe me, it will take the same dedication, the same devotion, and the same perseverance. Let it be said one year from now that we have failed.

We need, each of us, to take a hard look within ourselves and determine, do we still have the same heart we had when we joined the organization? Do we have the same motivation that helped us and members throughout the 124-year history reach out to prospective members and invite them to join our ranks?

Just as the early members of the VFW more than 100 years ago looked at those recently returned World War I doughboys as the future of the organization, we, too, must extend a welcoming hand to today's generation of veterans. It is through their involvement that we can infuse fresh perspectives and energy into our fraternity.

But we just can't focus on recruiting alone. We need to focus on

cultivating leadership amongst our existing members. By embracing a leadership role within our organization, we can unlock its full potential, empowering the VFW to make an even greater impact on the lives of all veterans.

Yes. Yes.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We also need to encourage participation in our VFW programs. The VFW has outstanding programs. You know what, I'm preaching to the choir. I would think I'm preaching to the choir for you who are in here. But we're lucky if we get 50 percent at best of posts participating in anything.

This can be attributed to lack of leadership, lack of motivation, whatever. So no matter what level, Post, District, Department, step up, take the lead. You can make the difference in the VFW.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yes. Furthermore, it is vital we continue to promote the values of patriotism and citizenship amongst our youth. We must educate the next generation about the sacrifices made by veterans and instill in them a deep sense of gratitude.

Through programs such as the VFW's Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen, we can inspire young minds to understand the true cost of freedom and encourage them to be active participants in our democracy.

But above all, we must never forget the solemn duty we have to honor the fallen. We will continue to support the Defense POW/MIA accounting agency, continue advocating for their funding so they can give the fullest account of our missing service members.

And we must continue to ensure that the families waiting for their loved ones to come home receive the support they need. To our Gold Star families, please know that we are forever indebted to you.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yes, we are. We are forever indebted to you.

Your loved ones have made the ultimate sacrifice and will never be forgotten. And we will work to preserve their legacies, ensuring they will live on through our collective memory.

Comrades, 2022 was a successful year for the VFW, but our work is far from over. As veterans, we understand that challenges will always be a part of life.

We will work constantly -- the world is constantly evolving and we must be ready to adapt and meet the challenges that lie ahead.

We must continue to advocate the needs of our veterans, ensuring they receive the support and the care they deserve. We must stand up for our active duty service members and families, recognizing the sacrifices they make every day.

And we must continue to be a force of good in our communities, leading by example and showing our fellow citizens what it means to be a veteran and what true patriotism looks like.

We have faced challenges before – we have overcome them with courage and resilience. Today, we stand at a threshold of a new year worth of new challenges, but I have no doubt we will rise to meet them, just as we always have done.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Regardless of your pecking order in this organization, keep this in mind. You don't need a title to lead. You just need to care.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yes.

People would rather follow a leader with a heart than a leader with a title. I put this on the back of my medallion to remind us all what is important. So let us embrace our role as leaders, mentors, and advocates for our fellow veterans.

Together, we will continue to build a stronger, more united community of veterans who meet the challenge with unwavering resolve.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: I'm always in for a clap. I'm always in.

Comrades, today, I stand before you, I see a room filled with individuals who have met their own challenges in their own unique ways. So ask yourself this question. What is the most valuable resource of the Veterans of Foreign Wars?

Is it our thousands of brick-and-mortar posts around the world? Our headquarter buildings in Kansas City and Washington, D.C.? Our long well-known programs? I'm here to tell you, the most valuable resource to the Veterans of Foreign Wars are you, the members.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Yes. You are.

(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We have entrepreneurs. That was a tough one. Entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs. I always say in New Jersey, somebody give it to me.

(Shouting.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: Not at my high school. Maybe he taught it different.

We have entrepreneurs that have built successful businesses, educators who have shaped young minds, and community leaders who have made lasting

impacts. We have advocates who have fought tirelessly for the rights of veterans, and caregivers who provide an unwavering support for those in need.

Without all of you, this organization would be nothing but empty buildings and programs that go unused. You are the most valuable resource in our organization. And nobody, and I mean nobody, will tell me different or tell you different. Each and every one of you has made a difference, and I salute you and I give you an applause.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: But know this. No matter how brilliant a person is, no matter how hardworking they are, no matter how much they love the VFW, that person can only be -- is only one person.

But if we unite, like we have seen in the storied history of our organization, if we face a crisis, a difficulty, or a problem, we face it together. And we are -- we, as the veterans of -- members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars -- I'm getting all tongue-tied up here, man. We got wars, wills. I'm going to drink some water. That might fix it. Look at that.

A drink of water, entrepreneur.
(Laughter.)
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SARMIENTO: We face all these challenges together, we as veterans and members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars will always fight to overcome any issue presented.

Thank you for the honor of serving as your Commander-in-Chief. May God bless all of you. May God bless our servicemen and women around the world. God bless the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and may God always bless the United States of America. Thank you.
(Applause.)

ADJUTANT GENERAL WEST: Comrades, at this time, I move that the proceedings of the Veterans of Foreign Wars 124th National Convention be submitted to the Speaker of the House for printing as a House document in accordance with the Public Law 620 of the 90th Congress, approved October 2nd, 1968, and entitled as Title 44, United States Code, Section 1332.

ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL WALKER: Brian Walker, Assistant Adjutant General, Post 506, Department of Tennessee. I second.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: There is a motion on the floor, properly second, that the proceedings of this convention be submitted. Is there any discussion? Any discussion? Any discussion?

All in favor, say aye.
(Chorus of ayes.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All opposed, nay.

Motion carries.
(Applause.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: At this time, I will entertain a motion to adjourn the convention.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Motion to adjourn.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: We have a motion to adjourn. Do I have a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Second.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: It sounds like the whole crowd just seconded it.

We have a second.

Any discussion? Any discussion? Any discussion?

All in favor, say aye.

(Chorus of ayes.)

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: All opposed nay.

Ayes have it.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you will proceed with the closing ceremonies.

CLOSING CEREMONIES OF THE 124TH NATIONAL CONVENTION

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: CONVENTION Thank you, sir.

Captain of the VFW, National Honor Guard, advance. Retire the colors on your orders.

(Whereupon, the colors are retired at this time.)

(Music playing.)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Comrade National Chaplain, would you lead us in our benediction?

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN HALTER: Thank you, Lord, for watching over this convention and making it the success that it has been.

We pray for your blessing and guidance to each of our new officers, especially our new Commander-in-Chief, Duane Sarmiento, and his staff of newly elected officers. Give them strength and perseverance to meet the never

ending list of challenges that national leadership demands. We know we are better, Lord, for having you to watch over us, and we ask you to continue to watch over us and help us be all we can be for our fellow comrades.

May each person that came to this convention return to their homes safely and without incident. We would also appreciate it, Lord, if the flights were on time, but we ask for safety first.

Lastly, Lord, I personally thank you for the opportunity to serve this great organization at the national level. It has been my blessed honor to pray for and

with my fellow comrades. God bless the VFW. Amen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, cover. Comrade Commander-in-Chief, that completes closing ceremonies of the 124th National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

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

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF BORLAND: This afternoon's Council of Administration meeting will begin exactly one hour from now.

The 124th National Convention is closed.

We are adjourned.

(The proceedings concluded at 10:16 a.m.)

**AMENDMENTS TO THE NATIONAL BYLAWS/MANUAL
OF PROCEDURE AND RITUAL
AT THE 124TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
JULY 22-27, 2023, PHOENIX, AZ**

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO NATIONAL BYLAWS

B-1

Proposed by Department of Pacific Areas

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 101 – Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 101 - Eligibility., National Bylaws, by replacing the language in (3) with the following:

“in Taiwan or in its territorial waters for not less than 30 consecutive days, for a total of 60 days, from 1951 to 1979; or”

Renumber the current language in (3) as (4).

B-2

Proposed by Department of Vermont

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 101 - Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 101 – Eligibility., National Bylaws, by adding the following as (4):

“(4) Foreign Duty Service on Foreign Soil, its Airspace, and Territorial Waters for not less than 30 consecutive days, or a total of 60 non-consecutive days of duty after September 11, 2001.”

B-3

Recommended by National Bylaws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 102 – Applications-Affiliation of New Members.

Amend Sec. 102 – Applications-Affiliation of New Members., National Bylaws, by replacing “**Members-At-Large.**” with the following:

“**A. National Member-at-Large.**”

1. An individual who is eligible for membership who chooses not to join a Post and Department, may become a "National Member-at-Large", for up to two (2) years.
2. To become a National Member-at-Large, the individual must submit the following to the Adjutant General's office:
 - (a) Completed membership application; and
 - (b) Proof of eligibility; and
 - (c) Payment of annual membership dues.
3. Annual dues required for National Membership-at-Large shall be forty-five dollars \$45.00, unless a different amount is established by the National Council of Administration.
4. Annual dues received by the Quartermaster General under this section shall be distributed as follows:
 - (a) National shall retain fifty percent (50%) of the annual membership dues received; and
 - (b) The Quartermaster General shall deliver the remaining fifty percent (50%) to the appropriate Department, as directed by the National Membership Department.
5. Upon the two (2)-year anniversary of becoming a National Member-at-Large; or, upon upgrading to Life Membership; the Adjutant General shall transfer the Member to the Department in which their home address of record is located.

B. Department Member-at-Large

1. An individual who is eligible for membership and chooses not to join a Post but wishes to join a Department (as permitted by these Bylaws), may become a "Department Member-at-Large" on an annual basis.
2. To become a Department Member-at-Large, the individual must submit the following to the State Adjutant for the identified Department:
 - (a) Completed membership application; and
 - (b) Proof of eligibility; and
 - (c) Payment of annual membership dues.
3. Annual dues required for Department Membership-at-Large shall be forty-five dollars \$45.00, \$26.00 of which shall be National Organization dues which shall be transmitted to the Quartermaster General monthly on a consolidated report and \$19.00 of which shall be Department dues, provided the Department Council of Administration may establish some other amount as Department dues."

B-4

Proposed by Department of Pacific Areas

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 416 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 416 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National Bylaws, under (a), by removing “Chaplain”.

B-5

Proposed by Department of Pacific Areas

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 416 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees.

Amend Sec. 416 – Elected and Appointed Officers; Chairmen and Committees., National Bylaws, under (b), by adding “Chaplain” after “Adjutant”.

B-6

Proposed by Department of Illinois

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 421 - Voting.

Amend Sec. 421 – Voting., National Bylaws, in the first sentence of the first paragraph, by removing “except delegates elected by the Posts,”. At the beginning of the second sentence of the first paragraph, add “When a roll call vote is required,”.

B-7

Proposed by Department of Illinois

ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS

Sec. 521 - Voting.

Amend Sec. 521 – Voting., National Bylaws, in the first sentence, by removing “except delegates elected by the Posts,”. At the beginning of the second sentence, add “When a roll call vote is required,”.

B-8

Proposed by Department of Illinois

ARTICLE VI - NATIONAL

Sec. 621 - Voting.

Amend Sec. 621 – Voting., National Bylaws, in the first sentence, by removing “except delegates elected by the Posts,”. At the beginning of the second sentence, add “When a roll call vote is required,”.

B-9

Proposed by Department of Missouri

ARTICLE XI - AUXILIARY

Sec. 1102 - Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 1102 – Eligibility., National Bylaws, in the first paragraph, by adding the following as a second sentence:

“Veterans who served honorably who are not otherwise eligible for Veterans of Foreign Wars membership shall be permitted to join the Auxiliary.”

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE MANUAL OF PROCEDURE

M-1

Recommended by National Bylaws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 101 – Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 101 – Eligibility., Manual of Procedure, under the ELIGIBILITY GUIDE, by adding “Air and Space Expeditionary Service Ribbon”.

M-2

Proposed by Department of Florida

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 101 – Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 101 - Eligibility., Manual of Procedure, by adding the following to the ELIGIBILITY GUIDE: “Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart”.

M-3

Proposed by Department of Vermont

ARTICLE I – MEMBERS

Sec. 101 – Eligibility.

Amend Sec. 101 - Eligibility., Manual of Procedure, by adding the following under the ELIGIBILITY GUIDE before “Hostile Fire or Imminent Danger Pay” or where appropriate:

“Foreign Duty Service on Foreign Soil, its Airspace, and Territorial Waters for not less than 30 consecutive days, or a total of 60 non-consecutive days of duty after September 11, 2001.”

M-4

Recommended by National Bylaws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

ARTICLE IV – DISTRICTS

Sec. 418 – Officers: Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 418 – Officers: Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under (a)(11), by replacing the first sentence of the first paragraph with the following:

“The District Inspector shall ensure that each Post in the District is inspected during the administrative year.”

M-5

Proposed by Department of Georgia

ARTICLE V – DEPARTMENTS

Sec. 518 – Officers: Duties and Obligations.

Amend Sec. 518 – Officers: Duties and Obligations., Manual of Procedure, under (a)(4)f., in the second sentence, by removing “and a hard copy”.

M-6

Recommended by National Bylaws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

ARTICLE VII – MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Sec. 706 – National Home for Children Funds.

Amend Sec. 706 – National Home for Children Funds, Manual of Procedure, by renaming the section as “**National Home Funds**”.

M-7

Recommended by National Bylaws Study Group

Proposed by the Commander-in-Chief

ARTICLE VIII – UNIFORMS, BADGES, ETC.

Sec. 803 – Manufacture and Use of Seals, Emblems, Badges, Insignia and Uniforms.

Amend Sec. 803 – Manufacture and Use of Seals, Emblems, Badges, Insignia and Uniforms, Manual of Procedure, under **Cap.**, by replacing the second sentence with the following:

“The color shall be green, shade 51; Suntan; or other colors as the National Council of Administration may dictate.”

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
AND INTERNAL ORGANIZATION
AT THE 124TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
PHOENIX, ARIZONA**

**Resolution No. 201 (Submitted by Department of Hawaii, Missouri,
and Wisconsin)
CREATE VFW NATIONAL SUBMARINE LIAISON OFFICE**

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) is “a national association of veterans who as soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen served this Nation in wars, campaigns, and expeditions on foreign soil or in hostile waters,” and is committed to “Ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country.”; and

WHEREAS, the mission of the VFW is “To foster camaraderie among United States veterans of overseas conflicts. To serve our veterans, the military and our communities.” And especially “To advocate on behalf of all veterans.”; and

WHEREAS, the VFW’s membership is primarily comprised of Army, Marine, Air Force, and Navy combat veterans, there is less than 2% of that membership who have served in the US Navy’s Submarine Force and have unique needs; and

WHEREAS, these unique needs of Navy Submariners are often overlooked or ignored by VFW leadership, yet, these needs are critically important to those who have served on submarines; and

WHEREAS, these VFW members and veterans will benefit greatly from the strength and corporate voice of the VFW in Congress, the Navy’s command structure at all levels, and the Veterans Administration; and

WHEREAS, in keeping with the mission and vision of the VFW, the VFW must be able to communicate adequately and appropriately with the Submarine Force appropriately to the Submarine Force and its active duty and veteran members; and

WHEREAS, the VFW and its leadership must be educated in the above-stated uniqueness, and in turn, The Submarine veterans must be made aware of the services, advocacy, and support provided by the VFW to all veterans; and

WHEREAS, the Navy’s command would benefit from a partnership with the VFW on behalf of their crews, both enlisted and officer; and

WHEREAS, only a Submariner can fully understand and communicate the complexities, responsibilities, duties, and assignments of the US Submarine Force, i.e., the Silent Service; and

WHEREAS, a liaison is “a person who establishes and maintains communication for mutual understanding and cooperation,” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary); now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, the members of VFW Department of Hawaii, Missouri and Wisconsin request that the VFW National Headquarters establish an office of the National VFW Liaison to the Submarine community to be manned by two VFW Submariners holding the offices of VFW National Liaison to the Submarine Community – East and West Coast. This office will contribute to greater understanding, enhance new member recruitment initiatives within the submarine community, target legislative actions to recognize the unique needs of our submarine veterans and contribute to better care for submarine veterans by the Veterans' Administration. (Rejected)

**Resolution 202 (Submitted by Department of Missouri)
VFW BOYCOTT OF CHINESE MANUFACTURED GOODS**

WHEREAS, the summary of the 2017 National Defense Strategy issued by the U.S. Department of Defense declared "China is a strategic competitor" and further noted: "China is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future"; and

WHEREAS, the July 2022 United Nations Special Rapporteur (Report) on contemporary forms of slavery, states "it is reasonable to conclude that forced labor among Uighur, Kazakh and other ethnic minorities in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing has been occurring in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China." In addition, Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, and Falun Gong followers are all routinely persecuted, harassed, surveilled and targeted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that in response to its expansionist policy and use of slave labor by the CCP, we, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, immediately implement an active boycott of Chinese manufactured goods for both organizational needs and the VFW Store. (Rejected)

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON GENERAL RESOLUTIONS
AT THE 124TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
PHOENIX, ARIZONA**

**Resolution 301 (Submitted by Department of Hawaii, Missouri, Utah, and
Wisconsin)**

**CREATE PATROL INSIGNIA AWARDS FOR THE SS, SSG, SSN, AND SSGN
SUBMARINE CREWS**

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) is “a national association of veterans who as soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen served this Nation in wars, campaigns, and expeditions on foreign soil or in hostile waters,” and is committed to “Ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country.”; and

WHEREAS, the mission of the VFW is “To foster camaraderie among United States veterans of overseas conflicts. To serve our veterans, the military and our communities.” And especially “To advocate on behalf of all veterans.”; and

WHEREAS, the SSBN Deterrent Patrol Insignia was approved and authorized to be issued to members of SSBN, Boomer, submarine crews in 1969 and retroactive to the first deterrent patrol of the USS George Washington SSBN 598 in 1961, and has been issued to all crews of these submarines to the present after completion of an SSBN deterrent patrol; and

WHEREAS, the SSBN Deterrent Patrol Insignia has been referred to by the US Navy as the successor to the World War II era Submarine Combat Patrol Insignia (SCPI) and as an insignia that is a combat insignia or badge; and

WHEREAS the Navy failed to issue an equivalent, appropriate, and consistent combat patrol insignia or award to SS, SSG, SSN, and SSGN crews and opted for the awarding of the Navy Expeditionary Medal (NEM) as a combat award for these crews albeit inconsistently; and

WHEREAS, the SSBN Deterrent Patrol Insignia has been a divisive award within the Submarine Force, diminished Force cohesiveness, and a negative influence on Force morale; and

WHEREAS, the above has extended to the Submarine Force veterans and the VFW and resulted in SSBN crewmembers and veterans receiving recognition for eligibility for membership while many SS, SSG, SSN, and SSGN crewmembers and veterans being excluded from membership even though they have participated in many deep water, extended, sensitive, and extremely hazardous patrols, without being awarded an Expeditionary Medal; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States commence efforts to petition US Navy Submarine Force commands, commanders, and US Navy officials at the Pentagon to design, approve, and authorize patrol insignias for the SS, SSG, SSN, and SSGN crews retroactive to 1947 and holding the

same award rank as the SCPI and SSBN Deterrent Patrol Insignias. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution 302 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)
BUDDY POPPY® DISTRIBUTION ON MILITARY INSTALLATIONS

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) is the oldest Congressionally Chartered Veterans Service Organization in the United States; and

WHEREAS, membership in the VFW is limited to those individuals who have served honorably in a foreign war, insurrection, or expedition and received a campaign or expeditionary medal authorized by the United States Government for such service or received Hostile Fire Pay; and

WHEREAS, the Congressional Charter of the VFW includes the requirement to assist worthy comrades, perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to assist their surviving spouses and orphans; and

WHEREAS, the principal fund-raising activity of the VFW is, and has been for more than one-hundred years, through the distribution and voluntary contributions of the trademarked Buddy Poppy®; and

WHEREAS, all funds received as contributions for Buddy Poppies are, by National By-Law, restricted placement in a Relief Fund, the primary use of which remains the air, assistance, relief, and comfort of needy and disabled veterans or members of the Armed Forces and their dependents and survivors; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense (DoD) has issued an Instruction (to wit: DoD Inst 1344.07 of March 30, 2006, entitled *Personal Commercial Solicitation on DoD Installations*) intended to protect service personnel from predatory investment solicitations by for-profit commercial insurance and banking institutions; and

WHEREAS, a number of installation Judge Advocate General Corps officers have interpreted this Instruction as also applying to such not-for-profit fund-raising activities as Buddy Poppy® distribution – the contribution of funds for which is entirely voluntary; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, engage with DoD to update this 17-year-old Instruction and/or enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to protect and perpetuate access to DoD installations by the VFW for the innocent distribution of Buddy Poppies and associated, non-coercive or predatory, fund-raising activities as a matter of mutual benefit. (Approved)

Resolution 303 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)
NATIONAL FLAG TO HONOR AND REMEMBER THOSE WHO DIED
WHILE SERVING IN THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES

WHEREAS, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States honors the service and sacrifice of all military service members, especially those who have lost their lives in service to the Republic; and

WHEREAS, there is not an officially recognized symbol that serves as a daily reminder to the public of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice; and

WHEREAS, an "Honor and Remember" flag has been created as a daily reminder for the American public to acknowledge those sacrifices defending our freedom; and

WHEREAS, the "Honor and Remember" flag will recognize, not only those killed in action during war but all service members who died in the line of duty and from their wounds and illnesses as a result of their service; and

WHEREAS, this flag will serve as a symbol of national gratitude, for each American life given in defense of liberty and give comfort to the families who lost a loved one during military service; and

WHEREAS, the flag's presence will also serve as a tool to educate the public of those lost in service to the Republic; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, to endorse the Honor and Remember flag as the National flag of remembrance for those who gave the ultimate sacrifice to this nation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that by endorsing the flag that the Veterans of Foreign Wars is demonstrating support for the families who have sacrificed so much for the nation. (Rejected)

Resolution 304 (Submitted by Department of California)
DEPORTED VETERANS

WHEREAS, United States Service members have been, and are currently being deported from the United States after serving in the United States military; and

WHEREAS, the current United States Code provides: that the term "national of the United States" means:

- a. a citizen of the United States, or
- b. a person who, though not a citizen of the United States, owes permanent allegiance to the United States. 8 U.S.C. 1101(a) (22); and

WHEREAS, Federal law requires everyone who enlists or re-enlists in the Armed Forces of the United States to take the Oath of Enlistment. This Oath and the Oath of Citizenship contain this pledge of loyalty: "I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same." Both oaths are performed in front

of the United States Flag and other flags, such as the state flag, military branch flag and is similar to the Oath of Citizenship and of the states; and

WHEREAS, Veterans have served our nation in every war from WWII, Vietnam, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. We strongly believe their oath of enlistment is a permanent oath of allegiance to the United States of America. While mere subjective emotional allegiance to the United States and length of residence in the United States is insufficient to make an individual a national, we believe that raising your right hand, swearing this oath, putting on the uniform in times of both peace and war are in fact a permanent allegiance to the United States and, that the United States owes a permanent allegiance to all Veterans be they U.S. Citizens or Foreign Nationals; and

WHEREAS, when these veterans returned to civilian life without appropriate support for reintegration, psychologically, and economically, some veterans that fell into addictions and criminal activities, were arrested and, due to their legal permanent residence status, were deported regardless of their honorable service; and

WHEREAS, the United States has a duty to protect those who protect and serve, regardless of their personal character. The United States now, and historically, has treated aliens admitted for an indefinite period, whether as lawful permanent residents, refugees, or asylees, as other countries would treat noncitizen "nationals or subjects." It requires these individuals to submit to the draft, to have an allegiance of political loyalty to the United States, subjecting them to the death penalty for betraying that allegiance and, itself treats the individuals when in uniform as American nationals for a variety of purposes, including American jurisdiction in its Status-of-Forces Agreements; and

WHEREAS, exiled veterans who have sponsors for their visa are often denied access to the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program; and

WHEREAS, the removal of veterans, those who served honorably during times of hostility, present a number of problems that the removal of other aliens do not:

a) There is the possible loss of native citizenship rendering the individual stateless,

b) There is the possibility of criminal charges awaiting the alien in their native land for his or her service in the war; and

WHEREAS, the current administration reports, as of February 8, 2023, 65 individuals have returned to the United States under the guise of Humanitarian Parole; and, only 20 individuals have been able to retain permanent residency; and

WHEREAS, these exiled veterans face inherent barriers to accessing Veteran Affairs (VA) healthcare system as they should have earned during military service; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States hereby urges the United States House of Representative and United States Senate to amend the United States Code 8 U.S.C. 1101(a) (22) to clearly state "The

following shall be nationals*, but not citizens of the United States: (1) A person who, by Conscription or enlistment, entered any branch of the United States armed forces and served honorably, and, this shall be retroactive to service members/veterans previously removed from the United States.” (Approved as Amended)

**Resolution 306 (Submitted by Department of Colorado)
OFFER RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN FEDERAL ELECTIONS**

WHEREAS, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) was enacted by Congress in 1986; and

WHEREAS, UOCAVA requires that the states and territories allow members of the United States Uniformed Services and merchant marine, their family members and United States citizens residing outside the United States to register and vote absentee in elections for Federal offices; and

WHEREAS, at least five states (Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas, Nevada and Wyoming) currently allow some form of Ranked Choice Voting in Federal Elections with several other states implementing and/or considering Ranked Choice Voting (i.e., Maine and Colorado); and

WHEREAS, at least ten states require runoff elections when no candidate achieves a majority vote and the occurrence of runoff elections are on the rise. Likewise, votes cast for candidates that drop out after the ballot has been returned are wasted; and

WHEREAS, using Ranked Choice Voting for overseas service members and their families will ensure the votes of these citizens are counted; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to amend the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act to require states and territories to include a Ranked Choice Voting option to be used in Federal elections. (Rejected)

**Resolution 307 (Submitted by Department of Rhode Island)
SUPPORTING ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION FOR APPLICANTS**

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars’ (VFW) mission is to foster camaraderie among United States veterans of overseas conflicts. To serve our veterans, the military and our communities. To advocate on behalf of all veterans.; and

WHEREAS, the VFW’s vision is to ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country; and

WHEREAS, there are two qualifiers for membership in the VFW as set out in our National Bylaws. An individual must meet both in order to become a member. Honorable Service – must have served in the Armed Forces of the United States and either received a discharge of Honorable or General (Under Honorable

Conditions) or be currently serving. Service in a war, campaign or expedition on foreign soil or in hostile waters; and

WHEREAS, service in a war, campaign or expedition on foreign soil or in hostile waters can be proven by any of the following: an authorized campaign medal, receipt of Hostile Fire Pay or Imminent Danger Pay (verified by a military pay statement) and service in Korea for 30 consecutive or 60 non-consecutive days; and

WHEREAS, the 113th Congress (2013-2014) passed H.R. 258 – Stolen Valor Act of 2013, making it a crime for someone to claim they received certain medals to obtain money, property or some other tangible benefit. The law only bars false claims about certain military awards including the Purple Heart, Bronze Star and a few others; and ONLY when someone makes a false claim about them to gain money or some tangible benefit from a crime. Someone falsely claiming military service to brag or impress others is not a crime; and

WHEREAS, investigators at the National Archives have taken steps to make their research resources more available to federal and local law enforcement to deal with what they suspect is an uptick in “stolen valor” cases to obtain benefits or loans during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, results from SheerID’s Stolen Valor Act Military Survey; 92% of those surveyed were aware of the Stolen Valor Act and 96% believe that the punishments for committing Stolen Valor are fair. 8% of those surveyed said they like watching the Stolen Valor videos online, 62% are in support of those who take the time to out suspected violators of the act and 31% believed that it is ok for veterans to out suspected violators but not citizens. 57% also thought that Stolen Valor videos have prompted states to pass stricter Stolen Valor laws. Interestingly enough, more than 15 states have passed their own complimentary Stolen Valor Acts to make the federal law easier to enforce and also to enact stiffer penalties since 2013; and

WHEREAS, combating Stolen Valor remains an ongoing problem and disservice to veterans who served. It is impossible to say exactly how many people falsely claim military service or honors. But the problem is widespread enough that even those within the military sometimes get caught lying about their service. Unlike civilians or veterans, current military members can be punished for lying about their military records; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Rhode Island enthusiastically supports and strongly recommends National provide standardized guidance on how to review, assess and grant eligibility determination of applicants of brothers and sisters of America who want to join the VFW and preserve the rights of veterans and support each other as only those who share in the camaraderie forged by conflict can. (Rejected)

Resolution 309 (Submitted by Department of Pennsylvania)
PURPOSE OF OUR ORGANIZATION

WHEREAS, the 113th Congress unanimously supported the change to the VFW's Congressional Charter that was signed 87 years ago by President Franklin D. Roosevelt when the military was composed almost entirely of men; and

WHEREAS, in 2014 the update consisted of two wording changes – replacing men with veterans and widows with surviving spouses – and was supported by two companion bills, SB2782 and HR 5441. The change was prompted by VFW Resolution 301 that was passed in July by delegates attending the 115th VFW National Convention in St. Louis, MO; and

WHEREAS, “We didn’t change our congressional charter to be politically correct; said VFW National Commander John W. Stroud, “we changed it because being an eligible service member or veteran is what’s important to our great organization, not one’s gender”; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we petition Congress to remove the word “**FRATERNAL**” from our charter. We are no longer a fraternal organization. This is the first line under Purpose – SEC. 230102, page 7. Going forward the Purpose should read: “The purposes of the corporation are patriotic, historical, charitable, and educational and are:

1. to preserve and strengthen comradeship among its members;
2. to assist worthy comrades;
3. to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to assist their surviving spouses and orphans;
4. to maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States, and fidelity to its Constitution and laws;
5. to foster true patriotism;
6. to maintain and extend the institution of American freedom; and
7. to preserve and defend the United States from all enemies.”

(Rejected)

**RESOLUTIONS CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY & FOREIGN
AFFAIRS
AT THE 124TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
PHOENIX, ARIZONA**

Resolution 401 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
PRESERVE THE ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE

WHEREAS, the year 2023 marks the 50th anniversary of America’s All-Volunteer Force which was until only recently engaged in a 20-year war that nobody prior to 9/11 would have thought possible without reinstating the draft. It has done so despite repeated combat tours and significant military recruiting and

retention challenges, and continues to operate in an extremely dangerous and unpredictable world; and

WHEREAS, the troops are concerned. They are concerned that elected and appointed officials don't understand what it's like to serve in an All-Volunteer Force that has been tasked to do so much for so long. They are concerned about rising costs, quality of life programs, their families, and accessing mental health care. Moreover, military leaders are very concerned about burnout in a military that is continually tasked to do more with less human and fiscal resources; and

WHEREAS, worldwide commitments and challenges have increased with continuous military operations against radical forces aligned with terrorist organizations, heightened engagement in Africa and troop buildup in U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility against Chinese expansion, increasing rotations to Eastern Europe to support NATO deterrence of Russia since its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and maintaining a continuous presence of service members in Iraq; and

WHEREAS, substandard military housing, insufficient emphasis on training, personnel shortages, food insecurity, childcare challenges, spouse un- and underemployment, frequent relocations, outdated equipment, the inability to fund new programs, the unprecedented use of Reserve component members without providing traditional benefits, and cuts to morale and welfare programs are the direct result of a military struggling to survive a budget crisis that will only continue to grow the longer Congress is unable to provide a stable, consistent defense budget without threats of being cut. The cumulative impact of lower pay, quality of life shortcomings, and a higher operations tempo have had a direct impact on morale, which in combination with a better civilian economy, has resulted in a dire recruiting and retention problem, thereby threatening the continued existence and viability of the All-Volunteer Force; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we will redouble our efforts to work with Congress and the Administration to preserve the All-Volunteer Force, to end the sequester, and to help bring some permanent financial stability to a military that will continue to operate in a very dangerous and unpredictable world. (Approved)

Resolution 402 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
ELIMINATE SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT IN THE MILITARY

WHEREAS, sexual assault and harassment within the military and at the Military Service Academies are urgent, detrimental, and prevalent issues that impact individual well-being and morale, unit cohesion, recruiting, and retention and require aggressive action and accountability to eliminate; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense (DOD) Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military and Academic Program Year 2021-2022 Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service

Academies were the worst reports on sexual harm in the military and at the academies since reporting began; and

WHEREAS, military sexual assault and harassment affect both men and women, occur on a “continuum of harm,” are enabled by entrenched culture, and are not always stereotypical in nature with women being disproportionately victimized; and

WHEREAS, it is widely held that a far greater number of sexual assault and harassment survivors do not come forward due to embarrassment, lack of trust in command support and accountability, and/or fear of personal and/or professional reprisal, to include real or perceived “red flags” in their military personnel folders; and

WHEREAS, DOD is in the process of implementing new and reformed programs, policies, and processes as a result of the 2021 Independent Review Commission (IRC) on Sexual Assault in the Military but is not estimated to be complete until FY 2030; and

WHEREAS, Congress has passed Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) reforms that will ensure investigation and prosecution of military sexual assault and harassment cases are independent of military chains of command; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we strongly demand DOD become more aggressive in its efforts to reduce sexual assault and harassment, to provide victims with proper and necessary medical and mental health care, as well as assistance with disability claims as may be required, to aggressively and diligently investigate every reported incident and punish attackers, as well as individuals involved in acts of retribution and retaliation, and that Congress perform rigorous oversight of IRC recommendations and the recently passed UCMJ reforms to ensure timely and proper implementation, and identify areas for improvement. (Approved)

Resolution 403 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
ENSURE DOD COMPLIANCE WITH TAP LAW

WHEREAS, transition from military service is a very stressful and time-consuming period for service members and their families, and often presents psychological, financial, and professional challenges in addition to the need to find new housing, healthcare, resources, and programs to support the unique needs of each member and family; and

WHEREAS, Congress has mandated Transition Assistance Program (TAP) pre-separation counseling for all service members to ease the difficult transition from service into civilian life by offering job-search assistance, guidance on education and healthcare programs, and information on other benefits and post-service needs; and

WHEREAS, the DOD is required to abide by TAP law reforms that were included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 and

directed, among other requirements, that all service members attend TAP at least 365 days prior to separation, complete a two-day career track if they are minimally prepared for transition, and be connected to resources in communities in which they plan to reside after service; and

WHEREAS, a December 2022 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report revealed that 70 percent of service members did not attend TAP on time and almost 25 percent of service members who needed to complete a two-day career track did not; and

WHEREAS, VFW surveys of transitioning service members (TSM) indicate findings that align with the GAO's report and show that nearly 34 percent of TSMs either were not or did not know if they were connected to community resources, while our accredited Benefits Delivery at Discharge program representatives hear that TSMs are not consistently getting connected to community resources; and

WHEREAS, in 2014, the DOD issued guidance to installation commanders to accommodate nationally accredited Veterans Service Organizations who provide pre-discharge services like disability claims assistance to TSMs, but local TAP managers do not consistently provide these organizations' VA accredited representatives the opportunity to engage TSMs during scheduled TAP classes leading to inequities; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to conduct oversight of DOD's compliance with the TAP law, afford VA accredited representatives a consistent means to access TSMs during TAP, and require DOD and its partner agencies to continuously improve TAP and maximize access to materials and resources for TSMs, veterans, and their families. (Approved)

Resolution 404 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
KEEP DEFENSE BUDGET RELEVANT

WHEREAS, America's Number #1 priority is to defend itself, its citizens, and its interests, and Congress must provide the Defense Department with sufficient funding to properly train, equip and field a military that can defeat all enemies, as well as protect vital U.S. interests around the globe; and

WHEREAS, the claim the U.S. spends more on defense than the next 8 or 10 countries combined is a false narrative. Except for China and Russia, all the other countries are focused on homeland and/or shared theater defense alliances, whereas the U.S. has a worldwide commitment to project power, reliability, and leadership; and

WHEREAS, defense spending accounts for nearly half of all discretionary spending, which makes DOD a consistent target for lawmakers trying to reduce overall federal spending, which puts America's national security at the risk; and

WHEREAS, Russia's attack on Ukraine's sovereignty, the continuing threats by North Korea and Iran, and China's military expansion, make the world more

dangerous and therefore increases the world's reliance on the United States to lead militarily against those threats; and

WHEREAS, it is crucial that any proposed reduction in funding not jeopardize America's security or break faith with those who serve or have served our nation in uniform. A nation that cherishes its freedom and supports the troops can afford to do both; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we strongly urge Congress to provide the necessary funding equal to not less than 5 percent of GDP for the readiness, training, modernization, healthcare, and quality of life initiatives for the armed forces of today and tomorrow. (Approved)

Resolution 405 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
LINK MILITARY PAY INCREASES TO PRIVATE-SECTOR INCREASES

WHEREAS, military pay raises are linked by law to the increase in private-sector wages, as measured by the Employment Cost Index (ECI). The Administration's military pay raise request, however, can be more or less than the ECI, with Congress having the final approval; and

WHEREAS, Congress erased the double-digit pay gap of the 1990s by directing military pay raises from fiscal years 2000-2006 to be a half-percent above private-sector wage increases, and raises from FY 2007-forward to match the ECI, although more could be authorized; and

WHEREAS, the 4.6 percent military pay raise for FY 2023 was the largest increase in 20 years but was below the ECI, but the Department of Defense — in its continuing campaign to slow the growth of military compensation due to budget constraints — recommended that future pay increases be limited; and

WHEREAS, the 4.6 percent raise in FY 2023 and proposed 5.2 percent raise in FY 2024 are improvements. The FY 2024 5.2 percent pay raise would be the largest pay raise in over 40 years. This average raise in the compensation is a 4.9 percent raise and still 0.2 percent below the ECI of 5.1 percent; and

WHEREAS, changes to military pay and benefits is the top concern of military service members and their families. Continued efforts to slow the growth of military compensation, combined with a better civilian job market, and a sustained intense operational tempo have already impacted recruiting and retention, which jeopardizes the continued existence and viability of the All-Volunteer Force; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense is already facing a shortage in key fields, such as pilots and maintenance personnel, and must develop competitive pay and benefit scales to recruit talent in critical high-tech fields, such as cyber and space; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we call upon Congress to maintain military base pay comparability with private-sector wages by ensuring annual military pay raise percentages match or exceed annual ECI increases. (Approved)

Resolution 406 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
PROVIDE FULL CONCURRENT RECEIPT OF
MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY AND VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION

WHEREAS, military retirement pay and VA disability compensation are fundamentally different benefits earned for two very different reasons; and

WHEREAS, the fiscal year 2004 National Defense Authorization Act allowed for the gradual phase-in of full concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation for service-connected wounds, illnesses or injuries; and

WHEREAS, the 10-year phase-in period ended in 2014, which means military retirees with 20 or more years of service and 50 percent or higher VA disability ratings no longer have their military retirement pay offset by the amount of their VA disability compensation; and

WHEREAS, the law, however, did not provide the same equity to service-connected disabled military retirees with VA ratings of 40 percent or below, or to Chapter 61 retirees who were medically retired with less than 20 years, regardless of VA disability rating; and

WHEREAS, more than 50,000 Chapter 61 retirees receive Combat Related Special Compensation from the Department of Defense, many of whom are Purple Heart recipients; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support legislation that allows for the concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and VA disability compensation without offset and regardless of disability rating percentage. (Approved)

Resolution 407 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF THE TRICARE BENEFIT

WHEREAS, the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) made significant changes to the TRICARE military health benefit program by eliminating Tricare Standard and Extra, creating the new TRICARE Select Plan, adding enrollment fees for individuals joining the service after Jan.1, 2018 and for military retirees starting in January, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the changes mandated by the NDAA were further compounded by a change in costs instituted by the Defense Health Agency (DHA) for both the Select and the Prime plans. The changes included a complete change in the cost-share methodology for the new Tricare Select plan, which changed the beneficiary costs from a percentage of individual-services-used to an averaged, flat-rate co-payment and increased Tricare Prime fees; and

WHEREAS, Congress added additional costs by raising mail order and retail pharmacy fees for all Tricare beneficiaries, including Tricare for Life members. The additional costs included raising the costs of a 90-day mail order supply of generic

medications from a \$0 co-pay to a \$12 per prescription co-pay, adding significant out of pocket costs to beneficiaries on maintenance medications for chronic conditions; and

WHEREAS, military health coverage is expensive, yet so is the personal investment someone makes to voluntarily commit to a military career. Any real or perceived erosion of benefits for career-minded personnel will undermine long-term retention, as well as recruiting of new service members; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we oppose all Tricare fee increases as well as any additional fee increases or attempts to erode the earned benefit of military healthcare. Moreover, DOD should reform its healthcare programs by eliminating institutional inefficiencies before considering fee increases; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress and DOD to ensure timely and equal access across the force, regardless of geographic location, to holistic healthcare services including medical and non-medical mental health counseling, reproductive health services, specialty care, and pharmacies. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution 408 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
AWARDING THE ARMED FORCES EXPEDITIONARY MEDAL
FOR EXPEDITIONARY OPERATIONS IN EASTERN EUROPE

WHEREAS, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (AFEM) was established by Executive Order 10977, dated December 4, 1961 (DA Bulletin. 1, 1962) and Executive Order 11231, July 8, 1965; and

WHEREAS, the medal is authorized for (1) U.S. military operations, (2) U.S. operations in direct support of the United Nations, or (3) U.S. operations of assistance for friendly foreign nations; and

WHEREAS, the AFEM is awarded for services after July 1, 1958, meeting the following qualifications that military personnel must be a bona fide member of a unit and engaged in the operation, have served not less than 30 consecutive days in the area of operations, and be engaged in actual combat, or duty which is equally as hazardous as combat, during the operation with armed opposition, regardless of time in the area; and

WHEREAS, United States military personnel have been assigned to eastern Europe under the operational banners of Operations ATLANTIC RESOLVE and EUROPEAN ASSURE, DETER, and REINFORCE since February 24, 2022 to support NATO's deterrence and defense posture on its eastern flank; and

WHEREAS, since February 24, 2022, the United States has deployed units to the USEUCOM theater and has U.S. forces positioned in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. These are qualifying NATO countries with contiguous borders with Ukraine and are in direct support of NATO and friendly nations; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, supports and encourages Congress and the Secretary of Defense to designate Operations ATLANTIC RESOLVE and EUROPEAN ASSURE, DETER, and REINFORCE since February 24, 2022 in support of NATO's deterrence and defense posture on its eastern flank as U.S. military operations that are eligible for the award of the ARMED FORCES EXPEDITIONARY MEDAL. (Approved)

Resolution 409 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
PROTECT POW/MIA FULL ACCOUNTING MISSION FUNDING

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is deeply committed to achieving the fullest possible accounting of nearly 82,000 missing Americans that include approximately 72,000 from World War II, 7,544 from the Korean War, 1,584 from the Vietnam War, 126 from the Cold War, and 6 post-Vietnam that include Operations Eldorado Canyon (1), Desert Storm (2) and Iraqi Freedom (3); and

WHEREAS, public-private partnerships are increasing the ability to be at more sites and DPAA has strong bipartisan support on Capitol Hill, which has in the past provided additional funding required to support pending recovery operations in North Korea, which have been interrupted since 2005 due to U.S. safety and security concerns; and

WHEREAS, Congress has in recent years acknowledged the importance of the Fullest Possible Accounting mission by increasing DPAA funding above requested amounts; and

WHEREAS, it is critical that DPAA remain adequately funded. Recovering fallen Americans from long-ago battlefields is demanding and often dangerous work for investigation and recovery teams, but it is the most sacred of missions. It is our government's fulfillment of a soldier's pledge to never leave a fallen comrade on the battlefield, which is a promise that spans all generations; and

WHEREAS, additional money enables DPAA to efficiently plan, resource and accomplish its worldwide mission to recover, identify and return to their families all missing American service members from our nation's previous conflicts; and

WHEREAS, Congress has adopted nine continuing resolutions in the last ten-years and caused three shutdowns since 2013, which hinder operational planning and slow recoveries; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we call upon Congress to continue to increase funding levels for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency and all supporting organizations involved in the Fullest possible Accounting Mission; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress must pass advanced appropriations to prevent a slowdown in recoveries and allow for budget carry-over allowing DPAA to plan multi-year operations. (Approved)

Resolution 410 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
CALL FOR MORE UNILATERAL POW/MIA ACTIONS BY VIETNAM

WHEREAS, 2,646 Americans were listed as missing and unaccounted-for at the end of the Vietnam War. As of March 2022, the number of missing is now 1,584 due to a combination of increased U.S. Government emphasis, better research and identification technology, stronger diplomatic ties with host governments, and access to aircraft crash and ground battlefield sites; and

WHEREAS, Vietnam had a comprehensive wartime and post-war process to collect and retain information and remains, and, according to the National League of POW/MIA Families, this unilateral effort enabled the Vietnamese to locate, and return remains to U.S. custody; and

WHEREAS, joint U.S. – Vietnam field operations, first conducted 37-years ago, continue to provide answers to families of unaccounted for American servicemen; and

WHEREAS, Vietnam granted access to their National Archives I and II and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) Library; and

WHEREAS, many of the grieving families may never live to see the return of their missing loved one; and

WHEREAS, Vietnamese museums contain many personal items which belonged to missing U.S. servicemen; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we encourage Vietnam to grant U.S. government analysts access to the PAVN archives where potentially valuable documents which could lead to case resolution may be located; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in this cooperative effort, that we encourage the Vietnamese government to turn over any items of a personal nature from missing American servicemen that are currently in the custody of Vietnamese museums or other locations under their control so they may be returned to their grieving families. (Approved)

Resolution 411 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
RECOGNITION FOR AFGHAN AND IRAQI COMBAT TRANSLATORS

WHEREAS, Afghan and Iraqi wartime allies were bridges to the Afghan and Iraqi people during U.S. operations against terrorism in those countries and mission success was directly dependent on close working relations between local nationals and U.S. agents; and

WHEREAS, our wartime allies often served consecutive tours with several different units to provide continuity and their lives and the lives of their family members were threatened for working with the Americans; and

WHEREAS, our wartime allies saved countless American lives and directly contributed to every level of tactical, operational, and strategic success during the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, Special Immigrant Visa recipients and Priority 2 Refugee Admissions Program recipients go through the strictest vetting and approval process of any category of person coming to the U.S.; and

WHEREAS, this initiative is supported by all post 9/11 former secretaries of defense as well as key national security leaders in the military, Department of State, and the intelligence community; and

WHEREAS, the former chairmen of the 9/11 Commission have stated, “As former chairman and vice chairman of the 9/11 Commission, we encourage Congress to do everything in its power to keep the nation’s promise to Afghan and Iraqi combat translators and to ensure these intrepid partners can achieve the American Dream. Special Immigrant Visas recipients from Afghanistan and Iraq loyally protected our men and women in uniform. Many directly saved American lives. Their future success will help to prevent the continued growth of Islamist terrorism – the third goal identified by the 9/11 Commission. A great nation keeps its promises”; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the President of the United States and the U.S. Congress to recognize the contributions of Afghan and Iraqi Combat Interpreter Immigrants who stood shoulder to shoulder with, assisted and protected U.S. military service members, U.S. diplomats and government agents, non-governmental organizations, and media organizations during U.S. involvement in those countries. (Approved)

Resolution 412 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
SUPPORT THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON TAIWAN

WHEREAS, the Republic of China on Taiwan is a historic democratic ally of the United States, a valuable trading partner, and key link in the Western Pacific defense chain; and

WHEREAS, the Taiwan Relations Act (PL 96-8) codifies the policy of the United States to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character to bolster peace and stability in the cross-strait environment; and

WHEREAS, on January 1, 1979, then-President Carter terminated diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Taiwan, and instead established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China to help maintain peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific. This loss of diplomatic status prevents the President of Taiwan from receiving the same respect and courtesies afforded other Heads of State who visit the U.S.; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Administration and Congress to strictly adhere to the concepts of the Taiwan Relations Act by continuing to approve the sale of state-of-the-art military equipment, weapons, and technology to maintain an adequate defense capability; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call upon the Administration and Congress to support the admission of the Republic of China on Taiwan into the

United Nations, and to provide the President of Taiwan the same respect and privileges due other visiting Heads of State. (Approved)

Resolution 413 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
SUPPORT THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

WHEREAS, the Republic of Korea is a historic democratic ally of the United States, a valuable trading partner, and a key link in the Northeast Asia defense chain. Numerous treaties are in force with the Republic of Korea concerning economic and technical cooperation, education, maritime matters, trade and commerce, and the Mutual Defense Treaty, that was enacted on November 17, 1954; and

WHEREAS, South Korea's immediate neighbor, however, continues to maintain an extremely large and forward-deployed military force capable of launching no-notice offensive operations against South Korea; and

WHEREAS, North Korea maintains the ability to launch nuclear-capable missiles, including a missile capable of reaching the United States, and has conducted six underground nuclear explosions since 2006, and is a known exporter of ballistic missiles and its technology to countries adversarial to the United States, most notably Iran; and

WHEREAS, the continued unpredictability of North Korea makes the presence of U.S. ground and air forces inside South Korea even more critical as a deterrent to aggression; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the U.S. Government to maintain a substantial military presence in the Republic of Korea, and to increase military aid and assistance through modern weaponry and technology to help promote peace and stability in the region. (Approved)

Resolution 414 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
SUPPORT OF NATO DETERRENCE AND SUPPORT TO UKRAINE

WHEREAS, throughout a 45-year Cold War, United States military personnel, who would later become members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW), were instrumental in leading North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) efforts to deter Soviet aggression in Europe, bring about the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, and the disintegration of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and

WHEREAS, in the ensuing thirty-odd years, many former Warsaw Pact countries embraced democracy and flourished under a participatory form of government, becoming suppliers of commodities and technology across the globe, and have become productive members of the European Union (EU), NATO, and numerous additional international organizations aimed at ensuring world and regional peace and economic prosperity; and

WHEREAS, Ukraine has formed a flourishing presidential republic embracing Western tenets, such as open elections and the rule of law; and

WHEREAS, Russia has embarked upon a war in Ukraine of occupation, annexation, and indiscriminate targeting of civilians, the likes of which have not been seen since Adolf Hitler embarked on such power-grabs in the 1930s; and

WHEREAS, Ukrainians are heroically fighting tooth-and-nail to repel the Russian invasion but lack the heavy and precision military equipment, ordnance, and training to do so; and

WHEREAS, worldwide foreign policy experts and Russian leaders themselves have made it evident that Russia intends to expand these efforts to occupy, annex, and subjugate other free European countries that border Russia, such as Moldova, Lithuania, et cetera; and

WHEREAS, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to millions of internally displaced persons and refugees of a scale not seen in Europe since World War II; and

WHEREAS, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and stated expansionist plans bear a direct threat to the freedom of the whole of Europe, NATO, the free world economy, and, thereby, the United States; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support the people and free government of Ukraine in their fight against Russian aggression; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW urges the President and Congress to decidedly exercise our position as leader of the free world to decidedly support Ukrainian people and armed forces with necessary humanitarian and military aid and encourage all of our allies to follow suit. (Approved)

Resolution 415 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
SUPPORT THE STATE OF ISRAEL

WHEREAS, the State of Israel is a historic, democratic ally of the United States of America, and a key link in the defense of democratic principles in the Middle East; and

WHEREAS, Israel has been a beacon of stability and the foundation of Middle Eastern regional security for the past 60 years, despite the repeated targeting by hostile actors wishing to infringe upon its sovereignty; and

WHEREAS, peace between Israelis and Palestinians remains of strategic interest to the United States and other partners within the region; and

WHEREAS, Israel has been one of our partners in the ongoing fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS); now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the United States Government to continue to support the State of Israel both diplomatically and militarily and continue to work with them to ensure and promote regional stability in the Middle East, and elsewhere. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution 416 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
SUPPORT THE AWARDING OF THE VIETNAM SERVICE MEDAL
FOR THOSE INVOLVED IN THE S.S. MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT

WHEREAS, on May 12, 1975, 12 days after the fall of Saigon, the U.S. container ship SS Mayaguez was seized by Khmer Rouge soldiers off the island of Poulo Wai, Cambodia as the Mayaguez was enroute from Hong Kong to Sattahip, Thailand; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Navy deployed the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea (CV-43), destroyer escort USS Harold E. Holt (FF-1074), and guided missile destroyer USS Henry B. Wilson (DDG-7) to SS Mayaguez last known position; and

WHEREAS, an alert order was sent to 1st Battalion 4th Marines, the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, the 21st Special Operations Squadron, 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron, and the 3rd Tactical Fighter Squadron.; and

WHEREAS, then-U.S. President Gerald Ford under recommendation from his National Security Council ordered U.S. military forces to conduct a rescue mission to recapture the SS Mayaguez and her crew; and

WHEREAS, the rescue mission resulted in the deaths of 38 American military members and 50 wounded. Additionally, three Marines were captured by the Khmer Rouge and were executed days later; and

WHEREAS, those killed in action are memorialized on the Vietnam Wall at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C.; and

WHEREAS, even though the SS Mayaguez incident did not occur in Vietnam, the incident is commonly referred to as the "last battle of the Vietnam War;" and

WHEREAS, the military personnel who participated in the rescue operation were not eligible for the Vietnam Service Medal but were authorized instead for the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, petition the United States Congress and the Department of Defense to consider awarding the Vietnam Service Medal for those involved in the Mayaguez incident. (Rejected)

Resolution 417 (Submitted by Pacific Areas)
Bring Back United States NAVY Recruiting in the Philippines

WHEREAS, the United States Navy stopped recruiting Filipino citizens in the Philippines in 1992 after the United States-Republic of the Philippines Military bases agreement was rejected, the US Navy closed its recruiting station in Subic Bay, Philippines; and

WHEREAS, the program allows Filipino Citizens who are not legal US residents to join the US Navy directly from the Philippines. The Navy ended the

program that recruited Filipinos in 1992 because the base agreement with the Philippines ended; and

WHEREAS, bringing back the US Navy Recruiting in the Philippines would enhance recruiting of much needed personnel with the US Navy and to which the Philippines will provide recruits who are the best and brightest that the Philippines can offer; and

WHEREAS, the US and Philippines have a long-standing Mutual Defense Treaty and recruiting of Filipinos to join the United States Navy in the Philippines will greatly assist in the security and preparedness and would both benefit both countries; and

WHEREAS, generations of Filipinos have served in the Navy since the end of the Spanish-American War, World War 1, World War II, Korean Conflict, Persian Gulf War Operation Enduring Freedom and when the Philippines became a U.S. colony Filipino sailors have fought in every conflict involving the U.S. armed forces since 1900 and have served the United States with great courage and honor. Several Filipinos earned distinguished awards to include the US Congressional Gold Medal and the highest of them all the Medal of Honor; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, supports bringing back the recruitment of Filipino Citizens by the United States Navy in the Philippines, after enactment of appropriate legislation. (Approved as Amended)

**Resolution 418 (Submitted by Department of Alaska)
HONORING THE OATHS OF U.S. SERVICE MEMBERS**

WHEREAS, Congress signed the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force three days after 9/11, leaving the geographical scope undefined, no time frame, and no clear conditions our military to achieve victory; and

WHEREAS, the conflicts engaged in under the 2001 AUMF have spread across 19 countries, cost an estimated \$8 trillion, killed over a million people worldwide, and taken a psychological, physical, and spiritual toll on our veterans without demonstrable benefit to national defense; and

WHEREAS, a disproportionate flow of resources is going to military and intelligence solutions along with a more general sidelining of diplomacy amid a continuing "militarization of foreign policy"; and

WHEREAS, addressing the root causes of violent conflict overseas through development and diplomacy helps protect Americans and helps reduce the need to send our service members into harm's way; and

WHEREAS, James Madison wrote to Thomas Jefferson in 1798 "The Constitution supposes, what the History of all Governments demonstrates that the Executive is the branch of power most interested in war... It has accordingly with studied care, vested the question of war in the Legislature"; and

WHEREAS, Congress has mostly abdicated their Article I responsibilities to authorize and oversee military actions by extensive, potentially permanent delegations of congressional war powers to the Executive; and

WHEREAS, S.J.Res.10 - A joint resolution to repeal the authorizations for use of military force against Iraq, and for other purposes was introduced in the senate on 03/03/2021; and

WHEREAS, the National Executive Committee of the Veterans of Foreign Wars addressing the "Forever War" in regular meeting assembled on XXXXXX XX-XX, 20XX, that the VFW urges a renewal of a proper constitutional balance to American foreign policy decision-making by encouraging Congress to repeal and replace outdated Authorizations for Use of Military Force; now; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, the Veterans of Foreign Wars call upon Congress to re-establish constitutional balance to American foreign policy decision-making, to honor their imperative obligation to debate and officially declare wars before sending American troops into harm's way; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars advocate for the passing of any bill that immediately repeals outdated Authorizations for Use of Military Force. (Rejected)

Resolution 419 (Submitted by Department of Iowa)
Honduras

WHEREAS, the vision of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) of the United States is to "Ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country;" and

WHEREAS, the VFW believes all military members and veterans who serve or have served in hostile environments should be appropriately recognized; and

WHEREAS, the United States (U.S.) military maintained a presence in Honduras throughout and beyond the 1980s providing training to and conducting military exercises with the host nation military; and

WHEREAS, the buildup and presence of U.S. troops served as a deterrent to Nicaraguan aggression in the region and also a means of building support for democratic values via civil action in Honduran communities; and

WHEREAS, U.S. troops were equipped with live ammunition and assisted the Honduran military in training and combat support capacities; and

WHEREAS, U.S. troops reported experiencing hostile fire and imminent danger; and

WHEREAS, at least one U.S. service member received a Purple Heart because of terrorist activity; and

WHEREAS, U.S. troops lost their lives while conducting various duties due to terrorist activity and other hazardous circumstances; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we strongly urge Congress to issue an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, or

similar recognition of having served in an area of hostility, to all U.S. troops who served in Honduras from 1981 to 1992. (Approved)

Resolution 420 (Submitted by Department of New Jersey)
RECOGNITION OF ADDING 74 SAILORS ON THE
VIETNAM MEMORIAL WALL

WHEREAS, on June 3, 2023, marks the 54th anniversary of the collision between the Australian Aircraft Carrier HMAS Melbourne and the US Destroyer USS Frank E. Evans DD754 in the South China Sea. In this collision the Evans was cut in half and 74 Sailors were killed. Seventy-three Sailors went down with the bow of the ship and one-Sailor was recovered at Sea; and

WHEREAS, the USS Evans was in support of American troops in Vietnam on different orders from the years 1966 until the night of the collision. Although they left Vietnam after their 5 May 1969 operation to re-arm at Subic Bay Philippines. While at Subic Bay, the USS Evans was ordered to participate in a multinational operation called SEA SPIRIT; and

WHEREAS, Operation SEA SPIRIT was conducted off the coast of Vietnam as defined as the outer edge of Market Time. This area disqualified these 74 Sailors from being enshrined on the Vietnam Memorial Wall. Although exceptions to the geographic limit rule have been made for other personnel killed as part of the Vietnam conflict but not in Vietnam itself; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Congress and DOD to reconsider and make exceptions to have these 74 Sailors be enshrined on the Vietnam Memorial Wall with their brothers and sisters. (Rejected)

Resolution 421 (Submitted by Department of Nevada)
EXPAND THE DATES OF ELIGIBILITY FOR THE ARMED FORCES EXPEDITIONARY
MEDAL

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense recognized service of the United States Armed Forces personnel in the Republic of Vietnam from 1 July 1958 to 3 July 1965, by awarding personnel the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; and

WHEREAS, Executive Order 11231 establishes the Vietnam Service Medal as recognition of service in the Republic or contiguous waters from 3 July 1965 to 28 March 1973; and

WHEREAS, service in the Republic of Vietnam during Operation Frequent Wind during 29 to 30 April 1975 was recognized by awarding eligible personnel the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; and

WHEREAS, Armed Forces personnel originally receiving the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for service in the Republic of Vietnam during either from 1 July 1958 to 3 July 1965 or 29 to 30 April 1975 are now qualified to receive the Vietnam Service Medal in lieu of the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal; and

WHEREAS, after the Paris Peace Accords were signed 27 January 1973 and the last combat troops were withdrawn from the Republic of Vietnam on 29 March 1973 there were many members of the United States Armed Forces remaining in Thailand and on ships in the Vietnam coastal waters in support of the South Vietnamese Army from 29 March 1973 until Operation Frequent Wind thus placing United States personnel in harm's way, but not recognized by a campaign or service; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, petition Congress to direct the Secretary of Defense to authorize the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for those that served in Thailand and on the ships in the coastal waters of Vietnam from 29 March 1973 to 30 April 1975 in support of the Vietnamese Army. (Rejected)

**RESOLUTION CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS SERVICE
AT THE 124TH NATIONAL CONVENTION
PHOENIX, ARIZONA**

**Resolution 601 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
ADEQUATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BUDGET**

WHEREAS, there are more than 18 million living veterans; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs anticipates that enrollment in the Veterans Health Administration will grow to nearly 10 million veterans and more than 7.2 million of those veterans will be seen by VA for health care; and

WHEREAS, the passage of favorable legislation, such as the PACT Act, more veterans will seek to use VA for numerous other benefit programs including education programs, recipients of disability compensation, and insurance policies; and

WHEREAS, the complexity of conditions that veterans which receive VA health for care will add demands to the system for years to come; and

WHEREAS, even though appropriations for VA continues to increase, proposals to return to previous funding levels will create a disparity that is detrimental to the services VA is obligated to provide; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Congress of the United States to authorize appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs which fully fund and maintain the integrity and enhancement of veteran entitlement programs and health care system. (Approved)

**Resolution 602 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
VA Pharmaceutical CO-PAYMENTS**

WHEREAS, veterans, other than those with a service-connected disability rating of 50 percent or greater, those who are receiving medications for their service-connected conditions or those whose incomes fall below the nonservice-

connected pension threshold, must pay a co-payment for each 30-day supply of medications obtained through the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS, there have been repeated proposals to change VA pharmaceutical co-payments, placing an undue hardship on many veterans; and

WHEREAS, the increase in costs of the benefit would likely place an undue burden on veterans, limit access to earned benefits, and serve to inequitably balance the federal budget on the backs of veterans; and

WHEREAS, pharmaceuticals are part of the VA's standard health benefits package and must be provided to all eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, VA is required by current law to charge veterans for life saving preventive medicines which are cost-free under private sector insurance and other public health care options; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we oppose increases in Department of Veterans Affairs pharmaceutical co-payments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress must exempt preventive medicines from VA pharmaceutical co-payment requirements. (Approved)

Resolution 603 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
VA MEDICARE AND TRICARE REIMBURSEMENT

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States views it as essential that the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system provide qualifying veterans with timely and accessible care; and

WHEREAS, VA collects third party payment for treatment, but current law prevents VA from collecting from the Medicare Trust Fund and TRICARE in certain circumstances; and

WHEREAS, a large number of VA's patients are eligible for Medicare and TRICARE; and

WHEREAS, VA medical care collections are used to supplement the appropriations VA receives from Congress to deliver efficient and effective health care at a lower cost than private sector health care providers; and

WHEREAS, with the increased demand on its health care system, it is now absolutely essential that VA be authorized to collect federal dollars to supplement its annual appropriations to ensure adequate funding for the Veterans Health Administration; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support enactment into law of legislation authorizing Department of Veterans Affairs to receive reimbursement for the cost of non-service connected care that is provided to veterans who are enrolled in Medicare or TRICARE. (Approved)

Resolution 604 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
NURSING HOME ELIGIBILITY

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States has called upon Congress to enact legislation to regulate and expand eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs health care and provide all veterans with mandated access to the full continuum of VA health care services which include nursing home care; and

WHEREAS, current VA regulations extend VA eligibility for nursing home care to those veterans who are service-connected at 70 percent or above or those seeking nursing home care for a service-connected disability; and

WHEREAS, the demand for VA nursing home care is increasing as the veteran population continues to age; and

WHEREAS, VA nursing home care units are VA hospital-based and provide an intensive and extensive level of nursing home care supported by the clinical specialties and other services within the host hospital; and

WHEREAS, VA nursing home care is considered the “safety net” for VA outpatient services such as residential care, respite care, hospital-based home care, adult day health care, homemaker/home health aid services and other extended care programs; and

WHEREAS, VA, through their own statements, recognizes the difference in eligibility for nursing home care and inpatient hospital care as inconsistent with the principles of sound medical practice, which support continuity of care for veterans; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to establish a standard Department of Veterans Affairs nursing home entitlement for all veterans enrolled in the VA health care system.
(Approved)

Resolution 605 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY HEALTH CARE

WHEREAS, since 2019, more than 41,000 service members have sustained Traumatic Brain Injury including those who served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, veterans with blast injuries, blunt trauma, motor vehicle accidents, and falls are at risk for TBI which often goes unrecognized; and

WHEREAS, even patients with mild TBI may have long-term health consequences; and

WHEREAS, veterans with severe TBI require a lifetime of intensive services to care for their injuries, yet many Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities are neither properly staffed nor equipped to provide the necessary screening and comprehensive health care services veterans suffering from TBI require; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to provide sufficient funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that appropriate screening, diagnostic services, treatment and life-long case management services are available to every veteran suffering from conditions associated with service-connected head trauma to include, but not limited to Traumatic Brain Injuries; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to improve research pertaining to screening methods, diagnostic tools, and treatment of conditions associated with TBIs caused by blast injuries, blunt traumas, motor vehicle accidents, falls and other related injuries to ensure veterans who have experienced a TBI receive effective health care. (Approved)

**Resolution 606 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
PTSD AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE**

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has indicated that treating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and providing Mental Health Care among returning war veterans is one of its highest priorities, and the VA operates a nationwide network of nearly 200 specialized PTSD outpatient treatment programs; and

WHEREAS, the early and accurate screening, diagnosis and treatment for PTSD, depression, substance use, and other mental health disorders, yields optimal patient outcomes, and statistics have shown that these conditions, left untreated or poorly treated, can lead to increases in suicide attempts or death by suicide among a host of other negative consequences; and

WHEREAS, studies conducted by VA show that social determinants of health, like financial stability, access to housing, and pathways to a quality career serve as protective factors against suicide. Each time a veteran uses a VBA economic opportunity program or benefit is an opportunity to provide resources and treatment; and

WHEREAS, the National Center for PTSD found an average of 23 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD; and

WHEREAS, available research has not sufficiently evaluated the clinical effectiveness of treatment programs for veterans diagnosed with and/or suffering from the effects of traumatic brain injuries, PTSD, or other mental health conditions, and adequate research into the brain's response to internal and external influences that could result in mental illness has yet to be undertaken; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we strongly urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to continue to adequately staff VA mental health treatment and research programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to dedicate adequate resources to address the alarming rate at which Veterans die by suicide to include

moving the Office of Suicide Prevention from Veterans Health Administration to the enterprise level of the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to assess what specific treatments or practices are the most effective in helping our veterans cope with their PTSD. (Approved)

Resolution 607 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
VA HEALTH CARE FOR WOMEN VETERANS

WHEREAS, the total number of women veterans continues to grow, as does the number of women utilizing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits; and

WHEREAS, VA reports that as of FY 2019 only 25 percent of women veterans utilize VA health care facilities; and

WHEREAS, VA currently has two Women's Health Primary Care Providers (WH-PCP) at all of the VA's health care systems. In addition, there are WH-PCPs in 90 percent of the community-based outpatient clinics; and

WHEREAS, women veterans have reported that VA staff continue to confuse them for spouses or caregivers and even challenge their veteran status; and

WHEREAS, women veterans also reported concerns regarding the gender specific competencies of VA health care professionals; and

WHEREAS, VA reported in FY 2019 that more than 80 percent of enrolled women veterans are assigned to a Designated Women's Health Provider (DWHP), who have experience and training in women's health care; and

WHEREAS, we acknowledge that the VA has improved the care and services it provides women veterans; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge VA to continue to improve the staffing, equipping, monitoring and enhancing health care services available to women veterans at all VA medical facilities and expand its designated women's health program to mental health care to ensure access to mental health care providers who understand women-specific mental health conditions; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to improve outreach to women veterans, allow women to choose the gender of their VA health care providers and properly train VA's workforce to treat women veterans with the respect and dignity they have earned and deserve. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution 608 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
EXPAND VA CAREGIVER BENEFITS

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program provides a monthly stipend, respite care, mental and

medical health care, and necessary training and certifications for caregivers of veterans who were severely injured on or after September 11, 2001; and

WHEREAS, the VA Comprehensive Assistance Program has begun to expand for the caregivers of veterans of other eras, but excludes veterans who require home caregiver services as a result of serious illness; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States believes severely wounded, injured, and ill veterans of all conflicts have made incredible sacrifices, and all family members who care for them are equally deserving of our recognition and support; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Defense provides support to family caregivers of members of the armed forces who are catastrophically disabled through its Special Compensation for Assistance with Activities of Daily Living program, which includes disability caused by illnesses in its eligibility criteria; and

WHEREAS, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) through *Beaudette v. McDonough* has granted veterans appellate rights to challenge VA Caregiver Program decisions, but VA has yet to establish a framework for caregiver appeals; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to provide the accurate resources to VA for the expansion of the Department of Veterans Affairs Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program to veterans of all eras; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge VA to establish regulations clarifying caregiver appeal procedures allowing VA to adjudicate caregiver appeals to address the growing backlog of veterans in need of caregiver benefits; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to fully align the VA's Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program with the Department of Defense Special Compensation for Assistance with Activities of Daily Living program by including in its eligibility criteria veterans who require caregiver services as a result of serious illnesses incurred in the line of duty. (Approved)

Resolution 609 (Submitted by commander-in-Chief)
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY CARE OPTIONS

WHEREAS, members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States report being satisfied with the health care they receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs and believe the VA health care system must be improved to ensure all veterans have timely access to high quality care; and

WHEREAS, the VFW has consistently worked with Congress and VA to improve the health care VA provides our nation's veterans through community care programs to ensure veterans have a seamless experience; and

WHEREAS, the veteran population is a shifting demographic with evolving health care needs, which necessitates that VA identify new and innovative ways to deliver timely access to high quality, comprehensive, and veteran-centric health care; and

WHEREAS, VA is now allowed to charge veterans copayments for service-connected care they receive from networked urgent care clinics in the community; and

WHEREAS, the networks of VA community care programs, to include dependent care delivered through CHAMPVA, are limited by factors that influence the willingness of private sector providers to participate in these programs; now, therefore.

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress must provide Department of Veterans Affairs with the oversight, appropriations and assets necessary to properly implement the VA MISSION Act as intended by Congress; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA comply with federal prompt payment requirements and incentivize private sector health care providers to participate in its community care programs, while ensuring veterans and eligible dependents are not held financially liable for services furnished through such programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA must remain the guarantor and coordinator of care for enrolled veterans and that the VFW remains opposed to privatizing VA or eroding VA's ability to provide direct care to veterans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW opposes any out-of-pocket costs for care coordinated by VA for service-connected disabilities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress and VA must furnish and conduct proper outreach to ensure veterans are fully aware of their health care options.
(Approved)

**Resolution 610 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
FOREIGN MEDICAL CLAIM PROGRAM (FMP)**

WHEREAS, veterans living or traveling overseas are forced to seek reimbursable medical care for service connected disabilities; and

WHEREAS, veterans seeking treatment for service-connected disabilities must pay the cost of the care and mail a paper-based claim to VA for reimbursement or request the service provider submit a paper-based claim on their behalf and communications with FMP managers is nearly nonexistent; and

WHEREAS, the reimbursement process takes six months to a year for resolution with VA issuing a US Treasury check and mailing it to the foreign address of the veteran or service provider if they reside overseas; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge VA to revise their woefully inadequate paper-based system and utilize Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), to allow veterans and service providers to file claims electronically directly to VA; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge VHA to provide adequate staffing for the FMP to provide timely adjudication of the claims; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to revise the FMPs banking system to align with the Veterans Benefits

Administration's banking system, providing electronic funds transfer of reimbursements to veterans and service providers, eliminating the antiquated process of mailing US Treasury checks. (Approved)

**Resolution 611 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION (EHRM)**

WHEREAS, VA and DoD agreed upon an integrated electronic health record (EHR) system, providing a seamless transition of health records for Service Members and veterans from DoD to VA; and

WHEREAS, DoD is nearly two-thirds completed and the United States Coast Guard is fully completed with their new electronic health record system; and

WHEREAS, VA's progress has been slow with frequent leadership changes overseeing the project with failures in change management at all levels and multiple delays of the platform deployment; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge VA to provide competent command and control from VHA leadership and to enforce standardization of the electronic health record (EHR) integration across VHA facilities and continued partnership and collaboration with VSO stakeholders; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to adopt best practices from DoD to work with the vendor and VHA facilities to implement the EHR on schedule. (Approved)

**Resolution 612 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
EXTEND SERVICE CONNECTION PRESUMPTION
TO BLAST SURVIVORS**

WHEREAS, the Global War on Terrorism has exposed more than 330,000 service members to diagnosable blast injuries, with thousands more going undiagnosed and untreated; and

WHEREAS, the nature of the conflict these service members face is frequently guerrilla-style combat where the enemy is widely known to use improvised explosive devices and indirect fire; and

WHEREAS, much of the attention has been focused on the apparent physical wounds, there are many unseen effects of blast trauma, which could include brain injuries, long-term hearing and balance issues, chronic pain, air embolisms, and injuries mistaken for personality disorders; and

WHEREAS, some effects associated with blast injuries may not become manifest immediately allowing the service member to return to the field, only to have their ability to fulfill their duty dramatically affected by the long-term effects of the blast; and

WHEREAS, many injuries are difficult to diagnose and service members can suffer from these disabilities for many years after the blast; and

WHEREAS, a large number of veterans have been identified as having been diagnosed at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers with conditions possibly related to blast exposures since the start of the Global War on Terrorism; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to approve a presumption of service connection for conditions associated with blast exposure. (Approved)

**Resolution 613 (Submitted by (Commander-in-Chief)
TINNITUS AND HEARING LOSS PRESUMPTIVE COMPENSABLE SERVICE
CONNECTION**

WHEREAS, veterans of the armed services who served in combat or in a position (e.g., member of a gun crew on board Navy or Coast Guard ships) or certain occupational specialties have a high incidence rate of hearing loss or tinnitus as a direct result of acoustic trauma; and

WHEREAS, veterans, from earlier, were not afforded a comprehensive audiological examination upon entrance and discharge from the military services, but instead were subject to highly inaccurate test methods; and

WHEREAS, in recent years the second leading disability granted service connection by Department of Veterans Affairs was for hearing loss or tinnitus; and

WHEREAS, the VA has the authority to grant service connection for disabilities associated with combat-related diseases or injuries even if medically undocumented at the time of service; and

WHEREAS, in 2005 the Institutes of Medicine (IOM) (now referred to as the National Academy of Sciences) released a study that showed that nearly all service members are exposed to acoustic trauma at some point during their military service and that many experience hearing loss and/or tinnitus as a result, often years after service. However, "after the fact, hearing loss or tinnitus incurred as a result of military service cannot be distinguished with certainty from subsequent noise-induced hearing loss..." Given these findings, reasonable doubt must be resolved in favor of veterans who suffered acoustic trauma in service; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, we urge Congress and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to grant service connection on a presumptive basis for any veteran diagnosed after discharge with hearing loss or tinnitus when the evidence shows that the veteran participated in combat or worked in a position or occupational specialty likely to cause acoustic trauma.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to amend the Schedule for Rating Disabilities to provide a minimum compensable evaluation for any service connected hearing loss for which a hearing aid is medically indicated. (Approved)

Resolution 614 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
VA CLAIMS WORKLOAD

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made significant progress in reducing the backlog of claims for compensation, pension, education benefits and appeals, yet submissions and appeals continues to grow; and

WHEREAS, Congress has provided increased funding for staffing at VA and improved its oversight. Yet, the attrition rate and quality of new hires and retirement of journeymen claims processors continues to challenge VA's ability to train and maintain a technically proficient workforce; and

WHEREAS, VA has attempted to increase workload production by implementing arbitrary timeliness goals that rarely account for the complexity of claims; and

WHEREAS, VA continues to order redundant and often unnecessary examinations when the evidence of record is sufficient to make a determination, or claimants submit adequate medical records and doctors opinions; and

WHEREAS, after dozens of Congressional hearings, numerous studies, changes of VA leadership, altered workflow, amended work processes, erratic IT development, as well as fruitless pilot programs and experimental initiatives, it is clear that there are no easy, simple or quick solutions that lead to the speedy reduction of the backlog; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress require Department of Veterans Affairs to accept private medical evidence and opinions in lieu of VA examinations whenever they are sufficient for rating purposes; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we continue to advise that Congress exercise its oversight authority and provide the vital resources necessary to sustain a sufficient workforce capable of effectively managing the workload and provide quality and timely service to those claiming benefits or appealing decisions from VA; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the VA should revisit their production goals to reduce error rates; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress bolsters its oversight and funding of VA technology initiatives to ensure that they are constructive, relevant and effective in streamlining claims processing and improving quality of entitlement decisions. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution 615 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
TOXIC EXPOSURES

WHEREAS, the PACT Act has acknowledged that veterans who have been exposed to toxic substances suffer from an array of conditions and diseases, and should not continue to have to undergo a burdensome claims process; and

WHEREAS, for decades VA was reluctant to establish a clear procedure for establishing additional presumptive conditions related to toxic exposures in service. VA has created a process with the National Academies to add presumptive conditions based on association with toxic exposures; and

WHEREAS, veterans of current and past conflicts were exposed to numerous environmental hazards, including open air burn pits, the anti-malaria drug mefloquine, radioactive substances, herbicides and other hazards; and

WHEREAS, the United States military has conducted testing, monitoring, and clean-up operations related to various chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons resulting in exposure; and

WHEREAS, veterans and family members stationed at Camp Lejeune who consumed contaminated water and now suffer from associated conditions and have recently benefited from the passage of the PACT Act and while VA acknowledged this fact. There are differences in what conditions are compensable and those which only receive reimbursement for medical care. Additionally, the requirement to be stationed on the base for 30 days is arbitrary and ignores thousands who graduated from training in less time; and

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to invest adequate resources to study, diagnose, and treat conditions and illnesses associated with toxic exposures; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs to grant a presumption of service connection for all conditions and illnesses that are deemed by scientific evidence to be at least as likely as not associated with or caused by exposure to a toxic substance or environmental hazard and not solely on the basis of a definitive causal link or scientific certainty; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Department of Defense to disclose known and potential toxic exposures during all military operations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress ensures that the Department of Defense expedites declassification efforts related to exposure events and that the Department of Veterans Affairs extends presumptive service connection to veterans suffering from conditions or illnesses found to be associated with exposure to toxic substances. (Approved)

Resolution 616 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
DIGITAL CLAIMS PROCESS

WHEREAS, advancements in technology have created an expectation among many Americans to conduct business in real time in a secure, digital space; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs now processes nearly all its workload in a digital environment; this includes claims for compensation, pension, survivor benefits and appeals, but still fails to offer timely access to this digital environment to veterans' representatives in the benefits process; and

WHEREAS, VA has committed to developing tools, such as the Automated Development Support (ADS) Tool, that allows adjudicators to process claims more efficiently using artificial intelligence. Proper training and implementation of these tools and the adjudicator's assessment are vital to ensure quality benefit decisions; and

WHEREAS, VA has created new self-service tools for veterans to file claim actions, but has failed to similarly invest in secure resources that would allow VSOs to provide quality claims assistance to veterans in real time, relying instead on its antiquated Personal Identity Verification (PIV) credentialing process, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) has unsuccessfully tried to engage with VA to assist in developing cutting-edge digital tools for VA-accredited representatives to provide high quality assistance anytime, anywhere; and

WHEREAS, in the interim, VSOs have been forced to either contract with third-party vendors or develop internal ad-hoc solutions at substantial cost to the VSOs and without proper insight or oversight from VA; and

WHEREAS, VSOs have had to request VA's Office of General Counsel intervention in executing the same principal functions in a digital environment which VSOs previously performed with paper claims; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Department of Veterans Affairs to update regulations to authorize VSOs the same advocacy rights in the digital environment as were allowed in the paper-based claims process and honor proof of digital transmission to VA as the effective date; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VFW supports the use of Automated Decision Support in assisting RVSRs to accurately adjudicate claims for benefits, we encourage the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to continue to work with all VA-accredited entities to develop real-time, secure access to tools that allow advocates to provide comprehensive assistance to clients in real time.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars urges VA to integrate their current antiquated claims management systems into one modern data management system. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution 617 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
VA LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs has established life insurance designed to support veterans whom might otherwise be uninsurable due to service-connected disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has expanded the VA life insurance program making it more competitive with the private sector and opening enrollment to all service-connected veterans without a time-limit to apply; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress and Department of Veterans Affairs to continue to ensure

that VA life insurance rates are competitive with private insurance company rates; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to pass legislation to index for inflation the maximum coverage rate of the VA Life Insurance program. (Approved)

Resolution 618 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
DOMICILIARY PROGRAMS AND TEMPORARY TOTAL RATINGS

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs provides free medical treatment for service connected disabilities; and

WHEREAS, VA grants temporary total ratings for veterans hospitalized in excess of 21 days due to service connected disabilities; and

WHEREAS, veterans are not able to work while participating in VA domiciliary and day programs; and

WHEREAS, VA has mischaracterized the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims decision *Mangham v. Shinseki* and now no longer considers domiciliary and day programs as “hospital care” for temporary 100 percent disability ratings; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress restore eligibility for temporary 100 percent ratings to include medical treatment provided by all domiciliary and day programs provided the program is treating a service-connected disability. (Approved)

Resolution 619 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
PROTECTING VA ACCREDITATION

WHEREAS, VA has established regulations ensuring claimants are able to obtain assistance from accredited representatives to assist in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims for VA benefits; and

WHEREAS, VA accredits national organizations, attorneys, and claim agents to assist claimants file for VA benefits once they have completed training approved by VA’s Office of General Counsel. Accredited attorneys and claim agents may only charge fees that have been deemed reasonable by VA and these fees may only be applied at specific steps within the claims process; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars provide representation to VA beneficiaries free of charge; and

WHEREAS, there is a prevalence of non-accredited companies and individuals preying on VA beneficiaries by charging exorbitant fees in violation of federal statutes and regulations; and

WHEREAS, these non-accredited companies have lobbied congress attempting to pass legislation that will preclude these companies from following established fee guidelines at the detriment of VA beneficiaries; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to pass legislation protecting VA beneficiaries from predatory companies, organizations, agencies and individuals attempting to bypass the VA accreditation process; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge federal law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute companies, organizations, agencies and individuals that prey on our nation's veterans and their dependents by charging exorbitant fees under the guise of providing claims assistance. (Approved as Amended)

Resolution 620 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
APPEALS MODERNIZATION AND LEGACY REMANDS

WHEREAS, VA beneficiaries had to wait years to have VA review unfavorable benefits decisions under the legacy appeals process. VA implemented the Appeals Modernization Act (AMA) of 2019 designed to streamline the VA appeals process by creating different avenues claimants may use when disagree with benefit decisions; and

WHEREAS, the Appeals Modernization Act intended to reduce the appeals backlog by prohibiting claimants from continuously submitting additional evidence throughout the appeal. Claimants may still submit additional evidence if the claimant submits a supplemental claim or if the claimant provides the evidence at the time the appeal is filed; and

WHEREAS, VA has a duty to assist claimants by obtaining federal records in conjunction with claims and by providing examinations to evaluate the severity of the condition and obtain a nexus linking the claimed condition to the Veterans service when necessary; and

WHEREAS, VA is still addressing the diminishing legacy appeals backlog due to the continuous cycle of remanded claims which need additional development that was not performed when the claim was first processed and BVA is now experiencing an increased inventory in AMA appeals and still has not provided a viable appeals management system; and

WHEREAS, VA adjudicators regularly assign later effective dates negatively impacting veterans despite claims being continuously pursued within the framework of AMA; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs enforces proper development of VA claims by obtaining all pertinent records when claims are initially processed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States that we urge that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs enforces policies mandating that exams are requested with accurate information and eliminating biases caused by improper phrasing on exam order requests; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States that we urge that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs enforces policies

authorizing the assignment of earlier effective dates when claims are continuously pursued without the veteran submitting an additional appeal for the effective date. (Approved)

Resolution 621 (Submitted by (Commander-in-Chief))
VSO INVOLVEMENT WITH VA SCHEDULE FOR RATING DISABILITIES

WHEREAS, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs' primary strategic goal is to consistently communicate with stakeholders to assess and maximize performance, evaluate needs and build long-term relationships and trust; and

WHEREAS, proposing changes which negatively affect veterans without collaborating with Veteran Service Organizations erodes trust between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the veterans entrusted to their care; and

WHEREAS, changes to the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities must undergo a concurrence process requiring review by over a dozen offices prior to publishing change proposals in the Federal Register; and

WHEREAS, VA must provide the public with a 60-day period to provide comments on proposed changes after which the proposed changes must undergo an additional concurrence process requiring review by over a dozen offices prior to publishing a final rule; and

WHEREAS, during the most recent proposed VASRD changes VA did not collaborate with VSO stakeholders on changes prior to drafting and publishing proposed changes; and

WHEREAS, VA received more than 2.5 thousand comments highlighting concerns of proposed changes of the rating schedule for a single body system which VA must review and address prior to publishing a final rule; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to collaborate with VSO stakeholders prior to proposing any regulation or policy changes which impact our nation's veterans. (Approved)

Resolution 622 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
REVIEW OF VA DECISIONS

WHEREAS, prior to April 2020, Veterans Service Organization representatives (VSOs) accredited by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had the opportunity to review proposed VA rating decisions to ensure that all claimed conditions have been addressed and properly adjudicated prior to VA finalizing its decision and sending notification to the veteran; and

WHEREAS, there is currently no mechanism for VSOs to address development errors nor rating decision errors prior to notification of a rating decision. VSOs must file appeals on behalf of claimants to rectify clearly erroneous decisions which VSOs previously had the ability to correct with VA within days of the erroneous decision being identified; and

WHEREAS, despite VA changing the appeals process attempting to reduce the amount of time appellants must wait to have their appeals adjudicated, the appeals backlog continues to grow; and

BE IT RESOLVED, that Congress passes legislation granting representatives accredited by the Department of Veterans Affairs the ability to address development and rating errors prior to decisions being finalized, thus ensuring that accurate benefits decisions are made in a timely fashion. (Approved)

Resolution 623 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
IMPROVE BENEFITS FOR SURVIVORS

WHEREAS, Dependents Indemnity Compensation (DIC) provide to dependents of fallen servicemembers and veterans who succumb to service-connected conditions has not had any significant increases since 1993, and

WEREAS, the DIC rate is paid at forty-three percent of one hundred percent permanent and total disability, while other federal survivor programs are paid at fifty-five percent; and

WHEREAS, the Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance Program provides educational support to eligible dependents (spouse or children) of a service member who died on active duty or a veteran who died or is permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability; and

WHEREAS, DEA benefits increase annually, they fail to increase at the same rate as tuition; and

WHEREAS, Congress recently increased the monthly allowance for DEA while also decreasing the amount of months to utilize the benefit; and

WHEREAS, nothing can replace the enormity of the loss and sacrifice of military survivors, increasing benefits that align with other federal programs will provide them the opportunity to build a meaningful and productive future for themselves and their children; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to increase Survivors and Dependents benefits on par with comparable federal survivor programs; and to reflect the rising costs of living and education expenses, with future increases indexed to reflect the average cost of living increase by the Department of Social Security and tuition costs as reported by the Department of Education. (Approved)

Resolution 624 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
VETERAN HOUSING AND FOOD SECURITY PRIORITIES

WHEREAS, homelessness among veterans has significantly decreased due to coordinated efforts across multiple agencies of government and the ambitious goal of the Department of Veterans Affairs to eliminate homelessness among veterans; and

WHEREAS, a growing number of female veterans experience homelessness, many of whom have dependents in their care; and

WHEREAS, local and state homeless veteran agencies and programs are federally funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs Grant and Per Diem program and the Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration program; and

WHEREAS, programs such as VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families and the joint Housing and Urban Development and VA's Supportive Housing program are showing signs of success in reducing homelessness; and

WHEREAS, research has found that among 18- to 64-year-olds, veterans are 7.4 percent more likely to live in a food-insecure household than nonveterans, while veterans also use food assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at lower rates than civilians; and

WHEREAS, the VA acknowledges its obligation to maintain comprehensive assistance to veterans who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to the best of its capabilities; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the President and Congress to continue to address veterans' homelessness by increasing the availability of affordable housing, expanding educational and employment opportunities and training and providing gender-specific services; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Department of Veterans Affairs should periodically adjust Grant and Per Diem program rates for inflation to ensure sufficient operation of homeless veteran assistance programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA compensation and non-service connected pension should not be considered countable income by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Department of Agriculture in determining program eligibility; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Department of Veterans Affairs should annually adjust grant and per diem program rates for inflation, based on separate instances for food and housing, with the latter adjusted for local variations in housing cost based on the Variable Housing Allowance Tables used by the Department of Defense to ensure sufficient operation of homeless veteran assistance programs. (Approved)

**Resolution 625 (Submitted by (Commander-in-Chief)
ENSURE VETERAN SUCCESS IN EDUCATION**

WHEREAS, our nation has consistently supported the future success of our warfighters through robust veterans' education benefits, historically molding generations of proven leaders; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States has worked to secure and preserve quality education benefits for all generations of veterans; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs enrolled nearly one million veterans across all G.I. Bill programs in the past academic year; and

WHEREAS, despite significant improvements to consumer resources for student veterans and increasing GI Bill rates by 2.8%, there is inconsistent access to quality consumer information and financial hardships that continue to drive perceptions in Washington that student-veterans are not succeeding in higher education; and

WHEREAS, many combat veterans do not fully qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit; and

WHEREAS, certain schools and programs seek to circumvent benefit guidelines in order to reap significant financial benefit; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to ensure proper oversight of Department of Veterans Affairs educational benefit programs by developing quality metrics with which to demonstrate student veteran success in higher education, and close financial loopholes through which certain academic programs can exploit GI Bill reimbursement models; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress ensure veterans receive equitable access to benefits like housing payments and quality pre-enrollment educational information to ensure veterans are academically and financially prepared to succeed in higher education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to increase book stipends and cost of living adjustments to give student veterans the proper resources and tools to be successful in their pursuit of higher education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we work to extend full GI Bill benefits for all combat veterans and preserve quality GI Bill benefits for all current conflict veterans and future conflict veterans to ensure they have access to quality education assistance programs. (Approved)

Resolution 626 (Submitted by (Commander-in-Chief))
VOCATIONAL READINESS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

WHEREAS, the period of eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Readiness and Employment benefits is 12 years from the date of separation from the military or the date the veteran was first notified by VA of a service-connected disability rating; and

WHEREAS, many veterans do not understand their eligibility to VR&E services and the benefits of the program until later in life when they become so disabled that their disabilities create an employment barrier; and

WHEREAS, VR&E lacks quality performance measures that measure readiness based on the long-term effects of disability and the likelihood that a disability may require further rehabilitation; and

WHEREAS, VR&E can take more than 90 days from enrollment to the start of services; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to change the eligibility delimiting date for Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Readiness and Employment program by eliminating the 12-year-delimiting date for eligibility to Chapter 31 benefits and allow all veterans with employment impediments or problems with independent living to qualify for VR&E services for life; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the VA must restructure performance measures to emphasize long-term readiness versus the current short-term indicators of success. Furthermore, VR&E should continually follow up with veterans considered to be rehabilitated to ensure that the rehabilitation and employment placement plans have been successful and if unsuccessful, to ensure the reasons and bases are clearly communicated to the veteran; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA streamlines eligibility and entitlement to VR&E programs to provide more timely intervention and assistance to all disabled veterans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA must provide better information about VR&E during the Transition Assistance Program Class for separating service members. (Approved)

Resolution 627 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
SUPPORT VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars recognizes that it is in the best interest of our nation to have a strong and viable veterans employment and training system; and

WHEREAS, Congress has recognized that veterans of all eras, especially recently separated service members and veterans with service connected disabilities find it difficult to obtain meaningful employment and careers; and

WHEREAS, while there are certain employment and educational programs in place for veterans such programs must have a proactive, long-term career focus; and

WHEREAS, programs designed to encourage federal employment of veterans, assist veterans in finding employment in their communities, and encourage federal contractors to hire veterans demand reasonable funding and responsible oversight to ensure success; and

WHEREAS, state agencies who receive federal funding are not held to the same veteran hiring standards as the federal government; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support viable and effective veterans employment and training systems, such as the Jobs for Veterans State Grant program and other Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to improve and enforce federal veteran-hiring mandates for contractors who do business with the federal government as outlined in Title 38 USC 4212; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that federal veteran hiring initiatives and programs must be held accountable for the effectiveness of the services provided and funding should be adjusted to reflect abilities in creating long-term meaningful careers for veterans, and state agencies that receive federal funding must be held to the same standards and report to Congress on the success of veteran hiring initiatives. (Approved)

Resolution 628 (Submitted by (Commander-in-Chief))
VETERAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

WHEREAS, government reports consistently indicate that many federal agencies fail to reach their three-percent contracting goal for disabled veterans; and

WHEREAS, many veterans and disabled veterans lack access to the necessary capital to invest in small business opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the federal government has failed to deliver adequate tools to veterans, offering the opportunity to fulfill the three-percent federal contracting mandate; and

WHEREAS, the Small Business Administration remains underfunded and understaffed to fulfill its mission of establishing and maintaining robust veterans' programs; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that Congress expand entrepreneurial education and networking programs for veterans via veterans small business centers and other entrepreneurship programs funded through the Small Business Administration; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress expand veteran's and disabled veteran's access to capital by expanding direct loan programs through the Small Business Administration; but such programs should never come at the expense of other earned veterans' benefits; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress hold Department of Veterans Affairs accountable for its duty to properly verify veteran entrepreneurs to help achieve the federal government's three-percent veterans contracting goal. (Approved)

Resolution 629 (Submitted by Commander-in-Chief)
UNDERSERVED VETERANS

WHEREAS, our nation has become more diverse, so too do our military and veterans population and understanding a veteran's gender, race, ethnicity, and orientation can help identify high risk concerns; and

WHEREAS, women, LGBTQ+, racial, and ethnic minority veterans face barriers and challenges across different life domains and access to VA benefits; and

WHEREAS, VA does not have sufficient data to fully understand the barriers these underserved veterans face; now therefore;

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge VA to improve data collection and better analyze results to identify challenges and disparities in benefits of underserved veterans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge VA to implement favorable changes to the benefit of underserved veterans based on findings of fact and not anecdotal or arbitrary statistics. (Approved)

**Resolution 630 (Submitted by Department of New Hampshire)
FORT MCCLELLAN, ALABAMA, TOXIC EXPOSURE**

WHEREAS, Fort McClellan was a training site for the use of military grade toxic substances. The base is now closed and designated a Superfund Site; and

WHEREAS, the VA position is *"There are currently no adverse health conditions associated with service at Fort McClellan"* even though it acknowledges that there were exposures to Radioactive Compounds, Chemical Warfare Agents and Airborne Polychlorinated Biphenyls. VA further states that *"Although exposures to high levels of these compounds have been shown to cause a variety of adverse health effects in humans and laboratory animals, there is no evidence of exposures of this magnitude having occurred at Fort McClellan";* and

WHEREAS, these statements appear on the VA website because of claims made by veterans who served at Fort McClellan and are suffering from illnesses that can only be the result of toxic exposure; and

WHEREAS, these affected veterans have the burden of proving their illnesses were caused by service at Fort McClellan; and

WHEREAS, Congress alone has the power to include these illnesses in the list of Presumed Conditions as was done for the Agent Orange exposures of the Vietnam Veterans and the Burn Pit exposures of the Gulf War Veterans; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., that we urge Congress to support legislation *"That the veterans who served at Fort McClellan who are suffering illnesses caused by a toxic exposure; that these illnesses be added to the list of VA's Presumed Conditions."* (Rejected)

**Resolution 631 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)
IMPROVING VA MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOCUS**

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) have similar missions – the former, "[T]o fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our nation's

military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors,” and the latter “to assist worthy comrades and to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to assist their surviving spouses and orphans,” and

WHEREAS, veteran death by suicide remains significantly higher than that of the non-veteran population; and

WHEREAS, in the years since the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) published the *National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide 2018 – 2028*, other strategic plans such as those issued by the White House and Department of Defense (DoD) further prioritize the prevention of servicemember and veteran suicide; and

WHEREAS, the VA *National Strategy* not only predates the aforementioned strategies and the 9-8-8 National Suicide and Crisis Hotline but was issued in a pre-COVID environment where performance expectations, offices, and assets may have since ceased to exist; and

WHEREAS, many telephone numbers, computer hot-links, and websites cited as veteran suicide prevention tools in the VA *National Strategy* have been found many to be non-operational; and

WHEREAS, the VA Office of the Inspector General issuances have cited mental health failures at numerous VA medical locations, some issuances not even referencing the VA *National Strategy* as essential criteria, but asserting that Veterans Health Administration (VHA) policy requires “all VHA policy [to be] recertified or rescinded on a 5-year cycle; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the VFW urges the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to expeditiously review and reissue the *National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide 2018 - 2028* to ensure currency and functionality, and further emphasize consistency and symbiosis with other National and DoD strategies focused on reducing suicide among those who wear or have worn our country’s uniform.
(Rejected)

Resolution 632 (Submitted by Department of Virginia)
EXPAND PACT ACT PRESUMPTIONS TO INCLUDE
CANCERS AMONG MISSILEERS

WHEREAS, in cooperation with the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and other Veterans Service Organizations, the Congress passed and the President signed, the *Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022*, (P. L. 117-168) otherwise known as the *Honoring our PACT Act of 2022* (hereinafter referred to simply as *PACT Act*); and

WHEREAS, Section 505 of the *PACT Act* calls for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct an open-ended, broad-ranging study on the incidence of cancer in veterans; and

WHEREAS, initial studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that toxic exposure in the course of their duties have led to increased incidence of several

cancers, including cervical, thyroid, Hodgkin's Lymphoma, and Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, at rates above those of the normal population and other military occupational specialties; and

WHEREAS, the Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine was tasked in 2023 with conducting a study of specific cancers of concern in those currently or formerly serving in missile community career fields, and specifically suspected clusters of Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma at intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) bases; and

WHEREAS, such a study must, of necessity, have a cross-Departmental element with the VA's study, as well as a cross-service focus to encompass both veterans and active-duty personnel, including those who have transitioned from the U. S. Air Force to the U. S. Space Force; and

WHEREAS, the *PACT Act* already recognizes Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma as a presumptive illness related to certain toxic exposure; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the VFW urges VA to review toxic exposures and associated medical conditions for those currently or formerly serving in missile community career fields and at intercontinental ballistic missile bases as part of the *PACT Act* presumptive framework. (Approved as Amended)

**Resolution 633 (Submitted by (Department of Virginia))
JUSTICE FOR ALS VETERANS**

WHEREAS, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, is a fatal neurodegenerative disease that destroys the nerve cells that control voluntary muscle function, eventually impacting the ability to move, speak and breathe; and

WHEREAS, numerous international institutes have been unable to determine causation or cure for ALS in more than a century of research, but have concluded that the incidence of ALS impacts veterans, especially deployed veterans, at nearly twice the rate that it impacts the general populations; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has acknowledged this disproportionate affliction in the veteran population to the effect that it has established presumptive causation between ALS diagnosis and military service of as short as 90 days duration; and

WHEREAS, under Title 38, U. S. C., Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is available to the survivors of veterans who die due to service-related disabilities; and

WHEREAS, also under Title 38, a monthly increase of DIC is available to those survivors who were married to veterans for eight (8) years prior to their death, if the VA had rated said veteran was disabled for a full eight (8) years prior to their death; and

WHEREAS, since its discovery in 1869, the prognosis for those stricken with ALS today has largely remained the same – death within an average of only two to five years; and

WHEREAS, the survival prognosis of this aggressive, presumptive service-connected disease is insufficient to meet the eight-year rule; and

WHEREAS, legislation introduced in the 117th Congress (specifically, H.R. 5607 and S. 3483) failed to make it out of respective House and Senate Committees; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we call upon the VA to carve out an exception to the eight-year disability rule to allow survivors of veterans who die from ALS to receive the increased monthly DIC payment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we call upon Congress to renew efforts to legislate and fund such action as a matter of extreme urgency. (Approved)

**Resolution 634 (Submitted by Department of Illinois)
TINNITUS & HEARING LOSS PRESUMPTIVE SERVICE-CONNECTION**

WHEREAS, many veterans, whether or not they served in combat or worked in certain occupational specialties, have higher than average incidences of hearing loss or tinnitus as a result of their time in service; and

WHEREAS, in recent years, the second highest service-connected disability granted by the VA has been for hearing loss and tinnitus; and

WHEREAS, various studies indicate that the majority of servicemembers are exposed to some form of auditory trauma, including high-level repetitive noise, during their time in service leading to some level of hearing loss and/or tinnitus and given these findings, reasonable doubt must be resolved in favor of veterans who suffered hearing loss and/or tinnitus as a result of their service in the military; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress and the VA to grant service-connection on a presumptive basis for any veteran diagnosed after discharge with hearing loss and/or tinnitus when there is evidence that the veteran participated in combat operations; worked in a position or occupational specialty likely to have damaged the veteran's hearing; or was exposed to any form of auditory trauma. (Rejected)

**Resolution 635 (Submitted by Department of Illinois)
INCREASE VETERANS' BURIAL BENEFITS**

WHEREAS, the VA pays a higher level of burial benefits upon the death of a veteran who dies from a service-connected illness or disability and lesser burial benefits upon the death of a wartime veteran who dies from a non-service-connected illness or disability; and

WHEREAS, the current VA burial expense payment for a service-related death is up to \$2,000 for those occurring after September 11, 2001, or up to \$1,500 for deaths prior to September 11, 2001. For non-service-related deaths VA will pay up to \$749 toward burial and funeral expenses for deaths on or after

October 1, 2016 if hospitalized by VA at time of death, or \$300 if not hospitalized by VA at time of death. Due to the dramatic increase in private sector funeral expenses, this benefit has been seriously eroded over the years; and

WHEREAS, while these benefits were never intended to cover the full costs of burial, they now pay for only a small fraction of what they covered in 1973 when the federal government first started paying burial benefits; and

WHEREAS, the VA should provide the resources needed to meet increasing private- sector costs of burial; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we believe there is still a serious deficit between the original value of the plot allowance benefit and its current value. Congress should increase the plot allowance for all eligible veterans and expand the eligibility for the plot allowance for all veterans who might be eligible for burial in a national cemetery, not just those who served during wartime; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United, that we urge Congress and the Administration to provide the resources required to meet the critical and sensitive nature of the National Cemetery Administration's mission thereby fulfilling the nation's commitment to all veterans who have served their country so honorably and faithfully. (Rejected)

**Resolution 636 (Submitted by Department of Illinois)
EXPAND VETERAN TREATMENT COURTS**

WHEREAS, 2023 marks the twenty-second straight year of America at war, and there are now more than 21 million U.S. veterans including nearly two million from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan; and

WHEREAS, the United States military instills a sense of honor, duty, leadership, commitment and respect, evident in the millions of veterans who have returned home to their communities as productive citizens, strengthened by their military experience; and

WHEREAS, an estimated twenty percent of veterans has symptoms of a mental disorder or cognitive impairment, and about 1 in 10 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan seen in the VA healthcare system have a substance use disorder and there is a well- established link between substance abuse and combat-related mental illness and an unprecedented number of veterans nationwide are appearing in the courts to face charges stemming directly from these issues; and

WHEREAS, Drug Courts evolved out of the necessity for a solution-based approach to an influx of drug abusing offenders before the courts; and the Drug Court model and the Mental Health Court model are the nation's most successful, cost effective, and scientifically validated tool to deal with substance abuse and mental health issues in the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, Veterans Treatment Courts are hybrid Drug Courts and Mental Health Courts and have evolved out of the growing need for a treatment court model designed specifically for justice-involved veterans to maximize efficiency and

economize resources while making use of the distinct military culture consistent among veterans; and

WHEREAS, Veterans Treatment Courts build upon this camaraderie by allowing participants to go through the treatment court process with people who are similarly situated and have common past experiences; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we advocate for the continued use and expansion of Veteran Treatment Courts across the country. (Approved)

**Resolution 637 Submitted by Department of Illinois)
CONTINUE FIGHTING TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS**

WHEREAS, the streets of many American cities continue to be inhabited by veterans who lack adequate food and housing; and

WHEREAS, veteran homelessness has decreased over the last few years thanks to multi-agency efforts at the federal level; and

WHEREAS, a growing number of female veterans, many with dependent children, are joining the ranks of homeless veterans; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States wants to ensure that the issue of veteran homelessness remains a priority for both the Administration and Congress; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we encourage Congress to increase the availability of affordable housing; expand education/training programs; and provide employment opportunities until all veterans are properly housed and gainfully employed. (Approved)

**Resolution 638 (Submitted by Department of Illinois)
SUPPORTING WOMEN VETERANS**

WHEREAS, women veterans remain the fastest growing population in the veteran community; and

WHEREAS, more women veterans are using VA health care services than ever before; and

WHEREAS, women veterans are reporting military sexual trauma at very high levels; and

WHEREAS, women veterans require specialized health care providers with expertise in women's health; and

WHEREAS, many VA medical centers still don't offer specialized treatments such as mammography, maternity care, and gynecology; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, urges Congress to support and increase the availability of high quality gender-specific services at the VA; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, urges the VA to ensure that every VA facility has a zero tolerance policy towards sexual harassment for employees and patients. (Approved)

**Resolution 639 (Submitted by Department of Illinois)
MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA (MST)**

WHEREAS, the continued prevalence of military sexual assault continues to grow and has been the subject of numerous military reports, Congressional hearings, documentaries and media stories. Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is a heinous crime which is a disgrace to all of those who have worn the uniform of the Armed Services; and

WHEREAS, DoD and VA have made progress towards developing and implementing a policy that creates a tangible, visible deterrent to perpetrators through consistent prosecutions or other severely negative consequences to one's military careers, both departments must commit to improving their Integrated Mental Health Strategy; and

WHEREAS, the effects of untreated MST can be devastating to the overall health of veterans and in the successful transitioning back into their families and communities; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States that we call on DoD to continue to enhance its MST awareness programs, and calls on VA to continually improve its MST treatment programs and to disseminate evidence-based clinical practice guidelines to clinicians who care for veterans who have suffered from MST; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States that we call upon Congress to continue its oversight and hearings related to military sexual trauma care and benefits with the goal of improving VA and DoD collaboration and improving policies and practices for military sexual trauma care and disability compensation. (Approved)

**Resolution 640 (Submitted by Department of Colorado)
Protect the Homes of Surviving Spouses**

WHEREAS, The Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act was signed into law on August 10, 2022; and

WHEREAS, as of April 28, 2023, veterans and survivors have filed more than 500,000 toxic exposure-related benefits claims under the PACT Act; and

WHEREAS, due to the addition of new presumptive conditions covered by the PACT Act, it is only logical that more veterans will be awarded a service-connected disability rating; and

WHEREAS, due to their toxic exposure, many of these veterans are among the sickest among us, so, in addition to an increase in awards there will eventually

be an increase in the number of surviving spouses eligible for Dependent and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits; and

WHEREAS, in 2023, compensation for 100% service connection for the veteran and a spouse equals \$3,823.89, but the DIC rate is only \$1,562.74; and

WHEREAS, the surviving spouse, in addition to suffering the loss of their veteran spouse, and faced with a decline in compensation by nearly 60%, should never be in fear of becoming housing insecure; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to establish a grant program to assist surviving spouses who become eligible for DIC benefits to remain in their homes; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this grant program be named The Sergeant. Sam Wybenga Grant Program. (Approved)

Resolution 641 (Submitted by Department of Hew Jersey & Department of Pennsylvania)
GREEN STAR SERVICE FLAG

WHEREAS, families of Veterans lost to suicide receive little or no federal recognition or assistance in healing from the trauma of losing their Veteran; and

WHEREAS, these families suffer alongside their Veteran struggling with mental health issues, possibly for years, before most find their Veteran after completion of the suicide; and

WHEREAS, Veteran and Service member suicide can easily be linked to service-related circumstances; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we petition Congress to enact legislation that would federally recognize the families of Veterans lost to suicide as "Green Star" family members by approving the "Green Star Service Flag" currently proposed as H.R. 3076 ; To amend title 36, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a flag for next of kin of veterans who die by suicide. (Rejected)

Resolution 642 (Submitted by Department of Colorado)
FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID

WHEREAS, prospective and current college students need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) form to apply for federal student aid such as federal grants, work-study funds and loans; and

WHEREAS, dependent student must report their parent's information in addition to their own on the FAFSA® form; and

WHEREAS, the FAFSA® requires parents to disclose any untaxed income to include veteran noneducation benefits such as Disability, Death Pension or Dependency & Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and/or VA Educational Work-Study allowances; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Education utilizes this Untaxed Income to calculate the parent's Expected Family Contribution; and

WHEREAS, any increase in the parent's Expected Family Contribution reduces the amount of aid awarded to the dependent student, thereby financially harming the dependent student; and

WHEREAS, the veteran and/or surviving spouse parent was awarded these benefits for injury or death related to their service, NOT to pay for the education of their dependent children; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the Department of Education to remove any questions related to a parent's Untaxed Income related to veteran benefits from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. (Approved)

COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL BY-LAWS, MANUAL OF PROCEDURE AND RITUAL

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(Room 120A Phoenix Convention Center, Phoenix, Arizona)

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California	Dawn Napier	9561
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Kentucky	James Toebbe	3186
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Maryland	Reynaldo Regis	5471
Maryland	R Brian Sturgis	5118
Maryland	Thomas Williams	467
Massachusetts	Patrick Logue	8819
Massachusetts	Douglas Wood	6539
Michigan	Kevin Conklin	6248
Michigan	Matthew David	423
Michigan	John Griffith	4093
Minnesota	Curtis Hermanson	4452
Minnesota	Dale Hoogeveen	1791
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New Jersey	Juan Class	3525
New Jersey	Richard Dipalma	5579
New Jersey	Kara Kauffman	5579
New Jersey	Joshua Moline	5579
New Jersey	Carey Pritchett	5579
New York	Robert Barnhart	686
New York	Thomas Howard	982
New York	Peter Pennelle	8645
New York	John Wenig	8645
North Carolina	Thomas Person	6018
North Dakota	Corey Moen	12169
Ohio	John Wiley	3035
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Oklahoma	Jeremy Owen	8798
Oregon	George Carroll	3973
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Pacific Areas	Kevin Mitchell	9555
Pennsylvania	James Brown	5958
Pennsylvania	Thomas Hanzes	7599
South Carolina	Edwin Tufts	3433
South Dakota	Darold Couch	3442
Tennessee	Robert Hunt	5066
Tennessee	Brian Walker	5066
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Texas	Daniel West	3413
Virginia	Todd Taylor	3103
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Washington	Joshua Schreck	1263
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Wisconsin	Kerry McAllen	7591
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(Room 120CB Phoenix Convention Center, Phoenix, Arizona)

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Colorado	Kristen Luevanos	1
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Kentucky	Margaret Riggs	3769
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Maine	Christopher Soucy	8835
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Maryland	Patrick Pierson	3285
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Michigan	Clint Ward	423
Mississippi	Danny Williams	3685
Missouri	Jessie Jones	2657
Missouri	Tommy McLerran	8828
Missouri	Randle Tolliver	6660
Nebraska	John Baum	8221
Nebraska	Rex Gallino	5138
Nebraska	Charles Roberts	3755
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Nevada	Gerald Peterson	12101
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New Jersey	Dennis Sampson	6063
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New Mexico	Paul Golden	5890
New York	Barbara Bishop	8645
New York	Thomas Rabb	6472
New York	Marcello Rotunda	53
North Carolina	Dana Ross	6018
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North Dakota	Lucas Moran	7564
North Dakota	William Tuff	7564
Ohio	Ray Schafer	9571
Oklahoma	Andrea Melcher	9126
Oregon	Floyd Leach	12141
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Pacific Areas	Shawn Watson	2917
Pennsylvania	Jessica King	8430
Pennsylvania	Richard Kinf	8430
Pennsylvania	Larry Reece	5752
Pennsylvania	Wrayburn Reinsmith	6168
Rhode Island	Joseph Janeiro	6342
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South Dakota	Donald Dahlin	2975
South Dakota	Daniel Klimisch	791
South Dakota	Barbara McKean	3298
Tennessee	Kinmerly King	10904
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Texas	Daniel West	3413
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Washington	Donald Wischmann	2100
Washington	Keith Wooldridge	7392
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Wisconsin	Carla McAndrew	5276
Wyoming	James Pedersen	2673

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Arizona	Nedra Sealey	9972
Arizona	Susan Warner	549
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California	Livier Lazaro	7420
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Connecticut	Joseph Beal	10201
Connecticut	Kenneth Hartline	1265
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Europe	George Gilgore	10614
Europe	Charles Steiner	605
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Florida	Ronald Mills	4256
Georgia	Cindra Otto	4583
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Hawaii	Randy Grant	3292
Idaho	Troy Junier	4000
Idaho	Gary Whitworth	4000
Illinois	Matthew Claussen	2868
Illinois	Kyna Simpson	311
Indiana	Russell Pryor	261
Iowa	Paul Arnold	941
Iowa	Barbara Kula	2537
Kansas	Lee Hursey	3115
Kentucky	Carl Kaelin	1170
Kentucky	David Wilson	6291
Louisiana	Frederico Arens	5951
Louisiana	Aaron Lawrence	3615
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Maine	Kenneth Smart	3108
Maryland	Denise Perry	6054
Maryland	Christine Sandoval	160
Massachusetts	Craig DeOld	1018

Massachusetts	Robert Santiago	1018
Michigan	David Martin	2144
Michigan	David Prohaska	4434
Minnesota	Edward Elvon	246
Minnesota	Duane Hermanson	4452
Mississippi	John Floyd	9573
Missouri	Deborah Halter	3500
Missouri	Donald Hentges	1003
Montana	Mchael Pryor	276
Nebraska	Joshua Lively	9675
Nebraska	James Whitaker	9675
Nevada	Donald Pettyjohn	12093
New Hampshire	Jorg Dreusicke	10722
New Jersey	Filipe Manuel Oliveira	3117
New Jersey	James Wisor	2290
New Mexico	John Archuleta	5890
New Mexico	Lenwood Hampton	6917
New Mexico	Gary Logsdon	2951
New York	James Brooks	600
New York	Michael Burke	686
New York	Danny Williams	5296
New York	Daniel Kell	53
North Carolina	Stephen Amos	5352
North Carolina	Perry Saunders	6018
Ohio	Iris Foster-DeNieuwe	3764
Ohio	Andrew Leidigh	1067
Oklahoma	Heidi Teeter	4465
Oklahoma	Gordon Wheeler	9969
Oregon	Gregory Arnold	1324
Oregon	Cheryl Campos	4015
Oregon	John Duggan	7847
Pacific Areas	John Farrell	11575
Pacific Areas	David Gley	8180
Pennsylvania	Fredrick Hechler	9639
Pennsylvania	Amy MacKenzie	3376
Pennsylvania	Dwayne MacKenzie	3376
Pennsylvania	Roger Miller	2493
Pennsylvania	Megan Regan	1568
Rhode Island	Walter Fricke	8955
Rhode Island	Dora Vasquez-Hellner	8955
South Carolina	Mary Azbell	9539
South Carolina	Ginger Graham	6740
South Dakota	Cynthia Christensen	2750
South Dakota	Jerry Seiner	7319
Tennessee	Vicki Patterson	5772
Texas	Billy Guthrie	1475
Texas	Kathleen Jackson	3904
Texas	James Nier	8919
Texas	Daniel West	3413
Utah	Danny Zaharias	409
Vermont	Cindy Brown	771
Vermont	Charles Magnant	778
Virginia	Christopher Birch	9760
Virginia	Sheri Moore	3103
Virginia	John Smart	1503
Washington	Holly Pierce	5564
Washington	Billy Wright	1854
West Virginia	Erica Covington	3522
West Virginia	William White	3466

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Wisconsin	Nicholas Webster	7232
Wyoming	Michael Alverson	3511
Wyoming	Rodney Birkle	3558

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Arizona	Graciela Mariscal	2066
Arizona	Jose Oliveras	9972
Arizona	Michael Pearson	2135
Arkansas	Linda Johnson	4451
California	Daniel Jennings	3173
California	Deborah Johnson	10859
California	Andrew Miller	8254
California	Rebecca Robison	10859
Colorado	Joshua Caverzagie	4061
Colorado	James Sheridan	2788
Connecticut	Stanley Borusiewicz	1946
Connecticut	David Greene	10004
Connecticut	John Kennedy	10201
Connecticut	Mario Richards	1265
Delaware	Kent Bacon	8801
Europe	Stanley Allgood	10312
Europe	Lee Wolverton	27
Georgia	Jason Nichols	7720
Hawaii	Faamanu Teofilo	3830
Idaho	Tammy Clement	4000
Illinois	Nancy O'Connell	4226
Illinois	Joshua Seed	755
Indiana	Kenneth Lange	10003
Indiana	Vincent Misuraca	1114
Iowa	Jake Beaver	3519
Iowa	Bradley Whitmore	9127
Kansas	David Babin	11499
Kansas	Hans Hull	56
Kentucky	Jonathan Allen	11139
Kentucky	Robert Daugherty	1298
Louisiana	James Bourque	9822
Louisiana	Robert Lovergne	3750
Maine	Jim Manter	3335
Maine	Jared Sawyer	6859
Maryland	Robert Jackson	341
Massachusetts	Russell Jobe	6538

Massachusetts	Patrick Johnson	2547
Michigan	Garrett Dickey	2144
Minnesota	Thomas Hanson	1639
Minnesota	Mary Thompson	8144
Mississippi	Steven Organ	5395
Missouri	Scott Huffman	5993
Montana	Fred Hamilton	276
Nebraska	Gary Niedbalski	2280
Nevada	Gilbert Hernandez	2350
Nevada	Daniel Walker	3396
New Jersey	Timothy Holland	10117
New Jersey	William Young	370
New Mexico	James Haddox	5890
New Mexico	Darrell Melon	10124
New York	Harold Leavor	9487
New York	Harold Patchen	420
New York	Marlene Roll	7967
North Carolina	Wendy Silvera	9133
Ohio	Gerald Constable	3283
Oklahoma	Deric Duncan	4938
Oregon	Anthony Barber	12140
Oregon	Ashley Taylor	4362
Pacific Areas	Patrick Higgins	8180
Pennsylvania	Russell Canevari	5544
Pennsylvania	Richard Cassey	7155
Pennsylvania	Ruth Fairchild	315
Pennsylvania	Craig Fisher	5956
Rhode Island	Eric Dukat	152
Rhode Island	Joe Patrick	916
South Dakota	Dwight Griffee	2730
South Dakota	Rick Williamson	3164
Tennessee	James Haney	5146
Texas	Daniel West	3413
Texas	Jeremy Williams	4709
Utah	Darryl Root	8376
Vermont	Michael Choquette	792
Virginia	Jeffrey Dombroff	9835
Virginia	Jill Lynch	3219
Virginia	Harold Roesch	3219
Washington	Mary Croford	3386
Washington	Brittany Dymond	1585
West Virginia	Thomas Anderson	4442
West Virginia	John Creager	3522
West Virginia	Ronie Wheeler	9926
Wisconsin	Tyrone Letto	1163
Wisconsin	Mauel Salas	1391
Wyoming	James Rish	11453

NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS

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 Vice Chairman: Keith Harman, Past Commander-in-Chief, Ohio

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 Vice Chairman: Benjamin Dales
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 NLS Staff Advisor: Meggan Thomas

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 NLS Staff Advisor: Kristina Keenan

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SUBCOMMITTEE III – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY/OTHER

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 NLS Staff Advisor: Patrick Murray

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Department	Name	Post No.
Alabama	Doreen Kiewel	3128
Alaska	Brett Spencer	1685
Arizona	Cynthia Archuleta	9972
Arizona	Kenneth Deist	7401
Arizona	Bradley Hazell	1677
Arizona	Josh Philipps	7061
Arizona	Frank White	7968
Arkansas	Dustin Matthews	9095
Arkansas	Adam Strange	1322
California	Christopher Ingraham	1924
California	Arthur Napiwocki	1614
California	Mark Steinberg	1525
Colorado	Mathew Cummings	6624
Colorado	ToddVanSant	9644
Connecticut	Domenic Guiliano	5095
Delaware	David Hilliard	475
Delaware	Timothy McDorman	4961
Delaware	John Mitchell	7234
Europe	Kristina Keenan	605
Europe	Bobby White	8862
Georgia	Belinda Boldoe	12180
Georgia	Charles Howe	660
Hawaii	Maria Togia	3391
Idaho	Rockey Davis	10043
Illinois	Derek Giffin	2868
Illinois	Gary Holmes	342
Illinois	Christopher Maynor	7190
Indiana	Judy King	2695
Indiana	Shawn Ransford	10003
Iowa	Michael Braman	3519
Iowa	Benjamin Dales	12208
Iowa	James Kerner	9127
Kansas	Vance Hill	7253

Kansas	Todd Schroeder	3115
Louisiana	Welma Jackson	3766
Maine	James Ewing	1605
Maine	Cornelius Ware	887
Maryland	Steven Roth	5246
Maryland	Joseph Thornton	9619
Massachusetts	Delray Dorsey	2498
Massachusetts	Joseph Feeley	1822
Massachusetts	Michael Figlioli	2017
Massachusetts	Tyler Russell	523
Michigan	Sean Kelly	2233
Michigan	Barry Walter	4005
Minnesota	Jon Gohn	6208
Minnesota	James Tuorila	428
Mississippi	Terry Tolar	4877
Missouri	Dennis Flynn	2866
Missouri	Royce Kelb	5925
Montana	Daniel Arnold	10010
Montana	Arthur Widhalm	3107
Nebraska	Scott Bates	1077
Nebraska	Larry Gerit	2704
Nebraska	Matthew Starkey	4755
Nevada	Denise Estes	10053
New Hampshire	John Barrett	1631
New Hampshire	Dennis Manning	1698
New Jersey	Robert Weiss	133
New Jersey	Yvonne Zirrith	262
New Mexico	Mark Bowman	3274
New Mexico	Rusty Coffey	5890
New Mexico	Brian Sartori	5890
New York	Eugene Ratigliano	420
New York	Thomas Todaro	53
North Carolina	Bridget Lightner	7775
North Dakota	James Prentice	762
Ohio	Eric Drake	2595
Ohio	Michael Milam	6069
Ohio	Timothy Zvoncheck	3345
Oklahoma	James Dockemeyer	1317
Oklahoma	Patrick Eagan	577
Oregon	David Lowe	180
Oregon	Rodney Wymore	3973
Pacific Areas	John Dibble	2485
Pennsylvania	Chales Beattie	1810
Pennsylvania	Roger Decker	1718
Pennsylvania	John Getz	3376
Pennsylvania	Michael McLane	7069
Pennsylvania	William Roland	914
Rhode Island	Justyn Charon	272
Rhode Island	Patrick Murray	152
South Carolina	Wilton Fowler	9273
South Carolina	John Johnson	8738
South Dakota	David Huntimer	4726
Tennessee	Hannah Blurton	4780
Tennessee	Reginald Sims	6496
Texas	Jorg Kitchen	4820
Texas	Daniel West	3413
Utah	Harley Boyles	1481
Utah	Darrell Moyer	12061
Utah	Kenneth Warnshuis	8307

Vermont	Joseph LaPerle	792
Virginia	Laurie Clay	8545
Virginia	Ryan Gallucci	3150
Virginia	Gregg Orto	7589
Virginia	Thomas Troy	5412
Virginia	Kenneth Wiseman	1503
Washington	Charles Bond	7392
Washington	Daniel Bujok	2669
West Virginia	Mark Harry	9796
West Virginia	Todd Kingsbury	896
West Virginia	David Sisler	578
Wisconsin	Randy Engness	2204
Wisconsin	Mitchell Woytych	1393

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Vice Chairman: John Hamilton, Past Commander-in-Chief, Florida

Department	Name	Post No.
Missouri	Quentin Carroll	7356
Missouri	Johnathan Duncan	8100
Missouri	Zach Schwenk	5606